AN IMMANENT CRITIQUE OF THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

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Abstract:

The present article develops an immanent critique of the attention economy as a power apparatus. In particular, it contends that what Foucault (2009) defined as the passage from disciplinary societies to societies of security entails a transformation of the main function of human attention: whereas in disciplinary societies attention (or the gaze) was aimed at imposing continuous surveillance on each individual, societies of security conceive the gaze of each subject as a source of data which allows constructing a new object of power, i.e., the population. To illustrate this, the present article focuses on the specific case of the attention economy and the notions of 'dataveillance' and 'Big Data'.

Keywords:

immanent critique, Foucault, attention economy, gaze, power.

Resumen:

El presente artículo desarrolla una crítica inmanente del concepto 'economía de la atención' en tanto dispositivo de poder. Más específicamente, este artículo intenta demostrar que aquello que Michel Foucault (2009) definió como un cambio en el paradigma del poder (desde una sociedad disciplinar a una sociedad de seguridad) implica una transformación de la principal función de la atención humana: mientras en las sociedades disciplinares la atención (o la mirada) estaba destinada a la imposición de una vigilancia permanente sobre cada individuo, las así llamadas sociedades de seguridad definen la atención de cada sujeto como una fuente de información (data) que permite construir un nuevo objeto de poder, a saber, la población. Para ilustrar este argumento, el presente artículo se concentra en el caso particular de la 'economía de la atención' y en las nociones de 'dataveillance' y 'big data'.

Palabras claves:

crítica inmanente, Foucault, economía de la atención, mirada, poder.

A. INTRODUCTION

The present article develops an immanent critique of the attention economy as a power apparatus. In particular, it contends that what Foucault (2009) defined as the passage from disciplinary societies to societies of security entails a transformation of the main function of human attention: whereas in disciplinary societies attention (or the gaze) was aimed at imposing continuous surveillance on each individual, societies of security conceive the gaze of each subject as a source of data which allows constructing a new object of power, i.e., the population. To illustrate this, the present article focuses on the specific case of the attention economy and the notions of 'dataveillance' and 'Big Data'. In doing so, this paper attempts a twofold objective. On the one hand, it suggests that the current debate on the attention economy and the specific notions of 'dataveillance' and 'Big Data' can benefit from the conceptual framework introduced by Foucault in his course *Security, Territory and Population*. On the other hand, it assumes that Foucault's own security hypotheses can be further developed when examined through the analysis of a contemporary phenomenon such as the attention economy. Furthermore, I argue that an immanent approach represents the most adequate methodology for such an enterprise.

The notion of immanent critique has to be understood as a specific form of critique that does not rely on any external standpoint when examining its object. Rather, an immanent critique focuses on the contradictions that are internal to its object of analysis. In the case of the attention economy, an immanent critique can neither be a normative assessment of the benefits or disadvantages of digital technologies for contemporary society, nor a historicist account of the transformations of our modes of perception. An immanent critique of the attention economy must unravel the internal contradictions that the concept itself presupposes. It is important to note that the insistence on such a methodology is given by the object itself. In a context in which every human activity becomes a potential source of surplus value, the capital/labour struggle begins to take place in what Hardt and Negri (1999: 82) have called a "non-place of exploitation". In this non-place, the "measure of labour-value, grounded on the independence of use-value" becomes ineffectual and the relation between living labour and capital becomes one of immediate, naked command (Hardt and Negri 1999: 83). To develop a critique adequate to this context, Hardt and Negri argue, one must

> refuse the temptation to go a simple path that is presented to us: the path of reintroducing the Marxian figures of use-value and pretending to renovate them in the context of the new situation. How do the philosophers and politicians who situate themselves in this perspective proceed? They reconstruct a fictional use-value that they nostalgically oppose to the growing processes of globalization; in other words, they oppose to globalization a humanistic resistance. In reality, in their discourse, they

> bring to light again all the values of modernity, and use-value is configured in terms of identity. (Even when use-value is not invoked explicitly, it ends up being inserted surreptitiously). (Hardt and Negri 1999: 83-4).

What Hardt and Negri denounce as the main flaw of contemporary Marxist critiques of capitalism is the lack of an immanent methodology, i.e. a methodology that avoids the temptation to smuggle in an external, ahistorical perspective which in turn would reintroduce a humanistic framework. In the critical literature on the attention economy and the new forms of digital labour, this flaw has become a recurring trait. Authors such as Jhally and Livant (1986) and Beller (2006) presuppose in one way or another that human attention possesses a use-value that is alienated by capital. The problem with this way of proceeding is not only its lack of historical specifity, but the fact that it necessarily leads to a normative critique of the attention economy. The main limitation of a normative project is that it requires an external standpoint (labour, freedom, individuality, use-value, etc.) from where to undertake such a critique.

According to Marx, "capital itself is the moving contradiction in that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth" (1973: 706). This constitutes the internal limit of capitalism: it puts forth an enormous technological and scientific revolution that aims at reducing the amount of labour time necessary for the production of each commodity to a minimum while, at the same time, it uses labour time as the universal measure to preserve a given social order based on value and on the capacity of capital to command human activity. The attention economy must be understood as a consequence of this contradiction under post-industrial conditions of production: on the one hand, the attention economy is the result of an enormous technical revolution that employs information technologies in an effort to orchestrate the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities; on the other hand, the attention economy subsumes this unleashed social productivity under the logic of surplus value, expanding the exploitation of human activity beyond the factory and hence reproducing the dominant power relations at an even larger scale. The present article attempts to unveil how this contradiction manifests itself by focusing on the specific problem of power. This demands overcoming any concept of society based on a transhistorical definition of the individual (e.g. a fully formed subject that uses or is used by digital technologies). Instead, I will examine the attention economy as a response to the historical transformation of the dominant diagram of power through which society is organized.

In his 1978 course at the *College de France*, Foucault suggests that it may be possible that a new dominant economy of power has taken over disciplinary societies. He uses the term 'security' in order to define this apparently new economy of power.

In the first lesson, Foucault states that the main question he will be pursuing in that year's course is "can we say that the general economy of power in our societies is becoming a domain of security?" (2009: 25). According to Foucault, there are three main characteristics that differentiate this new economy of power from the disciplinary one: i) population replaces individual body as the object of power; ii) more flexible processes of normalisation replace the rigid imposition of the norm characteristic of disciplinary institutions; and iii) governmentality replaces the Panopticon as the general logic of power.

It could be argued that as part of this general transformation in the economy of power, a more specific shift occurred in the role played by attention. In the Panopticon, attention (or the gaze) is conceived as a power mechanism through which the subject internalises the norm and hence becomes individuated; in societies of security, as it will be exemplified in the case of the attention economy, the subject's attention becomes both the source and object of a new knowledge, i.e. the statistical data about a population, with its tendencies, patterns and curves of normality.

B. DISCIPLINARY SOCIETIES, THE PANOPTICON AND THE GAZE

In a central section from *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault claims that disciplines are a technology of power with a very concrete goal: "assuring the ordering of human multiplicities" (1995: 218). In other words, disciplines constitute a specific logic of power that may be employed whenever one deals "with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed" (Foucault 1995: 205). In historical terms, modern disciplinary technologies emerge as the result of a "well-known historical conjuncture", that between the large accumulation of men and the growth in the apparatus of production during the eighteenth century (Foucault 1995: 218). For Foucault, "the development of the disciplinary methods corresponded to these two processes, or rather, no doubt, to the new need to adjust their correlation" (1995: 218). When analysing how this adjustment is carried out, Foucault focuses precisely on how disciplinary technologies manage the relationship between the mass and the individual.

The growth of a floating population and of the apparatuses of production, and the conjunction between them, brought forth an increase in the productive power of society. However, it also generated the problem of organizing these emerging masses in order to extract their productive force while decreasing the counter-productive elements characteristic of a large accumulation of men (agitations, riots, revolts, etc.). For Foucault, disciplines aim at reducing "the inefficiency of mass phenomena", i.e. reducing what, in a multiplicity, "makes it much less manageable than a unity" (1995: 219). At the same time, disciplines must "increase the effect of utility proper to the

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multiplicities, so that each is made more useful than the simple sum of its elements" (Foucault 1995: 220). In short, "disciplines are the ensemble of minute technical inventions that made it possible to increase the useful size of multiplicities by decreasing the inconveniences of the power which, in order to make them useful, must control them" (1995: 220). And he adds that "discipline is the unitary technique by which the body is reduced as a 'political' force at the least cost and maximised as a useful force" (Foucault 1995: 221).

To achieve this organisation of the mass, disciplinary technologies operate through an inversion of the individualising pyramid, or axis of sovereign power (Foucault 1995: 192). In sovereign societies, Foucault argues, individualisation is "ascending", which means that "individualisation is greatest where sovereignty is exercised and in the higher echelons of power. The more one possesses power or privilege, the more one is marked as an individual, by rituals, written accounts or visual reproductions" (Foucault 1995: 192). In disciplinary societies, on the contrary, individualisation is "descending": "as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, those on whom it is exercised tend to be more strongly individualised" (Foucault 1995: 193). In this respect, and unlike the traditional Marxist critique, Foucault conceives the modern individual not as a mere ideological phenomenon, but as a very concrete and real mechanism of power. The individual, Foucault writes, is not just "the fictitious atom of an ideological representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called discipline" (1995: 194). The individual, for Foucault, is not an irreducible unit to which power is applied. The modern individual is an effect of disciplinary power, which allows "bodies, gestures, discourses, and desires to be identified and constituted as something individual" (Foucault 2003: 30). In other words, Foucault claims, the individual is not "power's opposite number" but "one of power's first effects" (Foucault 2003: 30).

For the articulation between the mass and the individual that Foucault lays down in *Discipline and Punish*, attention (in the form of the gaze of surveillance) occupies a crucial place. The gaze is one of the distinctive elements of the Panopticon, responsible for the descending nature of disciplinary individualisation, and hence for the constitution of a productive mass. It is well known that Foucault adopts Bentham's architectural idea, the Panopticon, in order to develop his own reading of disciplinary societies. According to Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon is "the architectural figure of this composition [disciplinary power]" (1995: 200). As such, it exemplifies the ideal functioning of disciplinary institutions. Furthermore, Foucault suggests that in a disciplinary society, the Panopticon becomes the generalised "political anatomy" of power, spreading throughout the entire society in the form of disciplinary institutions: barracks, schools, hospitals, prisons, factories, etc. (1995: 208-9).

In Foucault's reading of Bentham's Panopticon, the gaze plays a specific, and crucial, function. The Panopticon, Foucault writes, is a machine that dissociates the "see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (1995: 202). By doing so, the Panopticon "automatizes and disindividualizes power" which means that "it does not matter who applies power nor to whom it is applied: discipline is a machine that understands power in terms of distributions of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes" (Foucault 1995: 202). The major effect of the Panopticon is "to induce the inmate in a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1995: 201).

This permanent visibility is an essential device for the process of individualisation carried out by the Panopticon. This is how Foucault explains its functioning:

> He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporeal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance. (1995: 202-3)

Similarly, in a conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot in 1977, Foucault explains that the gaze plays a central role for the efficiency of the Panopticon. In disciplinary power, he says, "there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault 1980: 155). In disciplinary societies, the gaze makes it possible to internalise a power relation in the body of an individual. An individual is that entity who has become individuated, who has internalised a power relation and is therefore amenable to being held responsible for his own activity. By doing so, disciplinary power aims at both organising the activity of each element within a multiplicity to increase their productivity as well as reducing the inconveniences proper to the masses.

At the same time, Foucault identifies a second function of the gaze within disciplinary societies. For Foucault, the Panopticon operates as a laboratory: it allows examining the behaviour of the inmates, comparing the effects of different corrective techniques, punishments, drugs, etc. As Foucault puts it,

> The Panopticon is a privileged place for experiments on men, and for analysing with complete certainty the transformations that may be obtained

> from them […] The Panopticon functions as a laboratory of power. Thanks
> to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to
> penetrate into men's behaviour; knowledge follows the advances of power,
> discovering new objects of knowledge over all the surfaces on which power
> is exercised. (1995: 204)

Observation becomes a source of new knowledge about the functioning of power and its effects on a given body. Concurrently, this new knowledge allows perfecting the functioning of power, extending its reach and intensity. Foucault calls this the "double process" between power and knowledge: "an epistemological 'thaw' through a refinement of power relations; a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge" (1995: 224). Foucault points out the fact that the emergence of a whole new range of "human sciences" took place only thanks to the accumulation of knowledge made possible by the disciplinary apparatus (1995: 226). These new fields of study, in turn, made it possible to correct the application of disciplinary techniques, hence the twofold articulation between power and knowledge.

These are the two central roles of the gaze within the Panopticon: individuation through the internalisation of power relations, and examination for perfecting the exercise of power. The overall effect of these two functions is the enforcement of continuous processes of normalisation of subjectivity, which is permanently evaluated regarding its deviance from the norm. In short, in a disciplinary society, the gaze is a power mechanism that produces an internalisation of the norm in each individual and an accumulation of knowledge that perfects the exercise of power. Observation is a mechanism through which power is both exercised and improved. In order to achieve this, Bentham's Panopticon provides a model that dissociates seeing from being seen, constructing a dissymmetric relation between those who exercise and accumulate power and those on whom power is applied. The overall consequence of this is the automatisation of power by means of the normalisation of individuals.

Jonathan Crary, however, suggests that in spite of analysing the role of the gaze in Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault systematically neglects the role of the observer himself as an object of disciplinary power (1991: 18). For this reason, Crary proposes a genealogy of the concrete mechanisms that have formed the modern observer (1991) and subsequently a genealogy of what he calls modern attention (2001). It is useful to look briefly at Crary's central hypotheses as a way to bridge Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon and the examination of the attention economy as a power apparatus specific to societies of security.

C. JONATHAN CRARY'S GENEALOGY OF MODERN ATTENTION

Jonathan Crary has extensively looked at the relationship between disciplinary societies and modern attention. In his book *Techniques of the Observer* (1991) he attempts a genealogy of how the observer becomes, since the eighteenth century, a new object of investigation, and how this responds to the broader epistemological changes analysed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (mainly, the birth of modern human sciences).

Crary's book begins with the assumption that the way in which we see and pay attention is the result of a "historical construction" (1991: 1). Because of this, Crary argues, it is possible to trace a history, a genealogy to be precise, of modern attention. This history, which begins in the eighteenth century and consolidates throughout the following century, entails a radical modernisation of the observer (Crary 1991: 9). In other words, the formation of the modern observer is immanent to the general process of modernisation experienced by western societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Crary 1991: 10). Crary's main hypothesis is that

> a reorganisation of the observer occurs in the nineteenth century before the appearance of photography. What takes place from around 1810 to 1840 is an uprooting of vision from the stable and fixed relations incarnated in the camera obscura […] what occurs is a new valuation of visual experience: it is given an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability, abstracted from any founding site or referent. (1991: 14)

For Crary, the formation of the modern observer is an important element of the emerging disciplinary subject. In Crary's words, the observer is "one effect of the construction of a new kind of subject or individual in the nineteenth century" (1991: 14). In this regard, Foucault's analysis of disciplinary societies is essential for Crary's genealogy of modern attention. As Crary puts it, the work of Michel Foucault is crucial for "its delineation of processes and institutions that rationalised and modernised the subject, in the context of social and economic transformations" (1991: 14-15). Nevertheless, Crary notes that despite of the significance of Foucault's work, his analysis of disciplinary society limits the task of observing to those who exercise power (mainly the anonymous guard placed in the observation tower of the Panopticon, but also the doctor, teacher, inspector, watchman, etc.), neglecting the analysis of "the new forms by which vision itself became a kind of discipline or mode of work" (1991: 18). For Crary, the reason why Foucault avoided any analysis of the observer himself as an emerging object of power may reside in his clear rejection of the ideological critique of society based on representational notions such as spectacle, false consciousness, etc. (1991: 18). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes that

> Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstractions of

exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralisation of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism. (1995: 217)

According to Crary's interpretation, in this passage Foucault is covertly referring to Guy Debord's concept of society of spectacle (1991: 18). Moreover, Crary contends that this passage may explain Foucault's resistance to engage in the analysis of attention as a new mechanism of power and to examine the concrete *techniques of the observer* that throughout the nineteenth century helped to give form to the disciplinary subject. For Crary, however, the analysis of these processes is an essential element for the understanding of modern, disciplinary societies. Modern modes of seeing, he explains, are constructed in the nineteenth century through techniques "for the management of attention" which imposed "homogeneity, anti-nomadic procedures that fixed and isolated the observer" (1991: 18). This process "coincides with the collapse of classical models of vision and their stable space of representations. Instead, observation is increasingly a question of equivalent sensations and stimuli that have no reference to a spatial location" (1991: 24).

What is significant in Crary's account is how the modern observer articulates the mass/individual dyad that characterises disciplinary power. For Crary, modern attention is a mechanism capable of individuating perception within a multiplicity of representations that have become loosened from the fixed, classical models of vision. Attention then becomes an important disciplinary mechanism not only from the perspective of the Panopticon, but also from the perspective of the observer who is taught how to 'pay attention' and hence fix his vision within a mass or multiplicity of fluid representations. In this sense, Crary broadens Foucault's examination of how the Panopticon relies on the gaze in order to individualise subjects within a multiplicity of men into the individualising role of modern attention itself.

This development of Foucault's theory into the work of paying attention becomes clearer in Crary's second book, *Suspensions of Perception* (2001). Crary states that he is interested in

how Western modernity since the nineteenth century has demanded that individuals define and shape themselves in terms of a capacity for 'paying attention', that is, for a disengagement from a broader field of attraction,

whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli. That our lives are so thoroughly a patchwork of such disconnected states is not a 'natural' condition but rather the product of a dense and powerful remaking of human subjectivity in the West over the last 150 years. Nor is it insignificant now at the end of the twentieth century that one of the ways an immense social crisis of subjective dis-integration is metaphorically diagnosed is as a deficiency of 'attention'. (2001: 1)

Crary develops his work on the modern observer by focusing on the specific concept of attention, analysing the apparently contradictory movement that defines modern perception, i.e. that between a progressive acceleration of visual stimuli and the constitution of a disciplinary attentiveness. In other words, he argues that modern distraction has to be understood "through its reciprocal relation to the rise of attentive norms and practices" (2001, p. 1). This implies analysing the seemingly paradoxical intersection "between an imperative of a concentrated attentiveness within the disciplinary organization of labour, education, and mass consumption and an ideal of sustained attentiveness as a constitutive element of a creative and free subjectivity" (Crary 2001: 1-2). However, just as Foucault's concept of discipline questions the opposition between mass and individual, so Crary's analysis reveals that attention and mass distraction are two poles of the same process of the modernisation of the observer. Crary takes the particular example of cinema in order to present the concept of "attentive mass audience" (2001: 52). Briefly, Crary argues that cinema is capable of simultaneously offering mass distraction while individualising each spectator through a disciplined attentiveness. This is important because it points out how attention itself becomes an apparatus of both individualisation and normalisation whose main function is to organise vision within a multiplicity of mass produced visual objects.

Yet, in neither of the two books referred above does Crary acknowledge the dissolution of disciplinary societies identified by both Foucault (2009) and Deleuze (1995), nor the consequences of this dissolution for the relationship between attention and power. Put differently, in his genealogy of modern attention, Crary never challenges the mass/individual dyad that lies at the heart of disciplinary institutions. As it has been mentioned in the introduction, one of the central characteristics of the dissolution of disciplinary power is the progressive weakening of this dyad and its gradual replacement with a new object of power, namely, the population (Foucault 2009: 94). The attention economy has to be examined as a power apparatus specific to societies of security. This entails moving beyond the mass/individual dyad characteristic of disciplines and posing the problem from the standpoint of the specific logic of security.

D. FROM DISCIPLINE TO SECURITY

In the opening lines of his essay *Postscript on Control Societies*, Deleuze claims that Foucault has not only "thoroughly analysed the ideal behind sites of confinement" and the general characteristics of disciplinary societies, but also identified "how short-lived this model was" (1995: 177). Despite the fact that Deleuze does not specify where Foucault identifies the dissolution of disciplinary societies and the passage towards a new general economy of power, it could be argued that Foucault does so in the two courses he held in 1978 and 1979 at the *College de France*.1 In these lessons, Foucault investigates to what degree we have moved away from disciplinary societies into a new economy of power that he refers to with the term 'security' (Foucault 2009: 25). It is important to note that the fact that we are entering a new economy of power does not necessarily entail that disciplinary institutions disappear, but that they become subsumed under a new dominant logic of power. As Foucault puts it, "there is not a succession of law, then discipline, then security" (2009: 25). Instead, security subsumes disciplinary and legal institutions under a new logic of power. Security, Foucault says, "is a way of making the old armatures of law and discipline function in addition to the specific mechanisms of security" (2009: 25). The analysis of the main characteristics of this new logic of power is an important step for the purposes of examining the attention economy as a power apparatus. This is due mainly to the fact that it sets the conceptual framework from where to analyse the shift in the role of attention from a disciplinary regime to one of security.

In the first four lessons of the 1978 course, Foucault identifies the central characteristics of the logic of security by means of comparing it with the logic of disciplinary power. This comparison can be summed up in the way these two different logics attempt to exercise their power: disciplines try to control everything, down to the smallest detail, whereas the apparatus of security "lets things happen"; while the former defines an ideal behaviour and tries to enforce it, the latter relies on a given behaviour and attempts to identify patterns in order to reach an ideal stage of equilibrium (2009: 68). In these lessons, Foucault presents three characteristics of the apparatus of security that are worth mentioning. Namely, the passage from normation to normalisation, the centrality of population as the new body on which power is exercised, and the shift from disciplinary techniques to what Foucault calls governmentality.

Regarding the concept of normalisation, Foucault compares the primacy of the norm in disciplinary societies with the processes of normalisation proper of security.

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[1] These courses have been published in English under the titles *Security, Territory, Population* (2009), and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), respectively.

Foucault says that although it is "hardly disputable" that discipline normalises, it is essential to "be clear about the specificity of disciplinary normalisation" (2009: 84). Disciplines, he continues, operate by breaking down a specific action (e.g. the "loading of one's rifle") and by subsequently establishing the ideal set of operations to perform this action. Disciplinary mechanisms define a model, a norm that aims at the optimal organisation of activity and based on this norm it then separates the normal from the abnormal. As Foucault puts it,

> Disciplinary normalisation consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result, and the operation of disciplinary normalisation consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm, and the abnormal that which is incapable of conforming to the norm. In other words, it is not the normal and the abnormal that is fundamental and primary in disciplinary normalisation, it is the norm. (2009: 85)

Given this primacy of the norm, Foucault claims that to be precise, disciplines should not be considered mechanisms of normalisation, but 'normation' (2009: 85). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes:

> the power of the Norm appears through the disciplines […] Like surveillance and with it, normalisation becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age […] In a sense, the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity; but it individualises by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another […] The norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shadings of individual differences. (1995: 184)

In societies of security, instead,

> we have a plotting of the normal and the abnormal, of different curves of normality, and the operation of normalisation consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality and in acting to the bring the most unfavourable in line with the more favourable […] The norm is an interplay of differential normalities. (2009: 91)

To this, Foucault adds that "the operation of normalisation consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality" (2009: 91). Security apparatuses do not aim at producing a homogeneous control of the individual; rather, they focus on discovering the "level of the necessary and sufficient action of those who govern" (2009: 93). In short, the passage from a regime of normation to one of normalisation implies the dissolution of the individual as the central mechanism for the organisation of multiplicities. In security apparatuses, the norm is not the given

ideal that must be enforced; rather, multiplicities are analysed in order to identify patterns and curves of normality that define the degree to which those who enforce power must intervene or not to achieve the correct steering of the multiplicities. For Foucault, in this new logic of power, "the relation between the individual and the collective, between the totality of the social body and its elementary fragments, is made to function in a completely different way; it will function differently in what we call population" (2009: 94). In this regard, the concept of population substitutes that of the individual body as the object on which power is enforced, while governmentality emerges as the privileged logic of power for this new object.

Although the term is extremely old, Foucault suggests that there is a modern use of the concept of population which represents the passage from a disciplinary to a security economy of power. In its modern use, Foucault identifies three characteristics of population as the new object of power. Firstly, it appears as a "natural" phenomenon (in contradistinction with the sovereign's legalistic voluntarism). In this regard, the task of those who exercise power is not to attempt to change this nature, but to make it calculable, predictable, subject to norms (Foucault 2009: 100). Secondly, this "natural" character unveils an internal relation between desire and population. In other words, a population is a conglomerate of individual desires, which express individual interests, and the sum of individual desires creates a general interest of the population (2009: 101). Hence, the management of populations does no longer refer to how to "say no", how to repress desire, and the "legitimacy" to do so. Instead, Foucault suggests, the problem is "how to say yes to this desire" (2009: 102). Thirdly, the "naturalness of the population" reveals that underneath the apparently chaotic nature of the population as a sum of individual interests there are identifiable, regular patterns. The management of the population requires the identification of these curves of normality in order to turn them predictable and to eventually design strategies for channelling them in a specific direction, i.e., profit. Foucault sums up the concept of population as follows:

> The population is not, then, a collection of juridical subjects in an individual or collective relationship with a sovereign will. It is a set of elements in which we can note constants and regularities even in accidents, in which we can identify the universal of desire regularly producing the benefit of all, and with regard to which we can identify a number of modifiable variables on which it depends. (2009: 104)

On closer inspection, Foucault adds that this new object of power, population, raises the problem of the art of governing these emerging multiplicities. Put differently, when faced with the task of managing a population, neither sovereign nor disciplinary techniques seem adequate enough. Instead, a new art of government ("governmentality") is required. While disciplinary techniques were the privileged power mechanism for articulating a productive relation between the mass and the

individual, governmentality appears as the most suitable logic of power for the correct management of populations.

In general terms, the art of government consists in introducing the method of political economy into the management of the state (Foucault 1991: 92). In its original meaning, the term economy, from the Greek *oikonomia*, referred to the "law of the household", that is, the "meticulous attention of the father towards his family" in order to correctly manage "individuals goods and wealth within the family" (1991: 92). For Foucault, to govern a state is "to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods" (1991: 92). From this perspective, political economy appears as a modern form of knowledge that conceives society as a large "household" and politics as the correct management of its wealth. For Foucault, "the new science called political economy arises out of the perception of new networks of continuous and multiple relations between population, territory and wealth" (1991: 101). In this sense,

> it was through the development of the science of government that the notion of economy came to be recentred on to that different plane of reality which we characterise today as the 'economic', and it was also through this science that it became possible to identify problems specific to the population; but conversely we can say that it was thanks to the perception of the specific problems of the population, and thanks to the isolation of that area of reality that we call the economy, that the problem of government finally came to be thought, reflected and calculated outside of the juridical framework of sovereignty. (1991: 99)

Furthermore, Foucault suggests that the art of government should be understood using the metaphor of the ship.[2] Foucault writes,

> What does it mean to govern a ship? It means clearly to take charge of the sailors, but also of the boat and its cargo; to take care of a ship means also to reckon with winds, rocks and storms; and it consists in that activity of establishing a relation between the sailors who are to be taken care of and the ship which is to be taken care of, and the cargo which is to be brought safely to port, and all those eventualities like winds, rocks, storms and so on; this is what characterises the government of a ship. (1991: 93-4)

The art of government can be understood as the art of facilitating the right

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[2] Foucault notes that the metaphor of the ship is the metaphor "inevitable invoked in [most] treatises on government" (1991: 93). This comes as no surprise since the verb "to govern" comes precisely from the Greek "to navigate" and more precisely, "to steer a ship".

disposition of things, "arranged so as to lead to a convenient end" (Foucault 1991: 94). Therefore, the central task of governmentality is to define the best disposition for things for a given purpose. In Foucault's words, the art of government "is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics – to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved" (1991: 95). Foucault sums up the concept of governmentality as

> the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security. (1991: 102)

In these lectures, Foucault identifies the central characteristics of societies of security which at the same time account for a weakening of disciplines and a more general shift in the dominant economy of power. The next section turns to the attention economy in order to argue that in societies of security the role of attention has shifted from disciplinary normation towards more flexible processes of normalisation aimed at the governmentality of the population as a new object of power.

E. THE ATTENTION ECONOMY, DATAVEILLANCE, AND BIG DATA

Before examining the attention economy through the prism of Foucault's notion of security it is useful to briefly define what is understood by attention economy and the concepts of dataveillance and Big Data. The attention economy is a concept forged within the field of political economy in order to explain the growing value of attention in a world rich in information (Simon 1971). The fact that information is acquiring such a crucial role for the productive process implies that the attention necessary to process this information increasingly becomes a scarce resource. Moreover, with the spread of mass media and digital technologies, attention itself becomes a source of information that is fed back directly into the productive process, easing the communication link between the spheres of consumption and production, and hence accelerating the extraction and realisation of surplus value. Despite being used mainly by economists and authors of the managerial and entrepreneurial world, the notion of attention economy has also become an important object of critical analysis in recent years (Beller 1994 and 2006; Marazzi 2008; Crogan and Kinsley 2012). The spread of the internet and global mass media has motivated a large number of critical responses that try to show how the attention economy becomes a new form of exploitation that projects the alienation of labour beyond factory walls and onto the entire society (e.g.:

Terranova 2004, Andrejevic 2009).

As part of this critical response, some authors have used Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon in order to show how information technologies become a new instrument of mass surveillance (Poster 1990; Gandy 1993; Lyon 1994). For these authors, information technologies make it possible to turn personal data into a new source of surveillance, or dataveillance (Clark 1987), hence becoming a superpanopticon (Poster 1990) and turning our society into a proper surveillance society (Lyon 1994). With the rapid development of information technologies and the internet, the idea of dataveillance has become more and more significant. One example of this is the emergence and rapid popularization of the notion of Big Data (Degli Esposito 2014: 213). As Gartner (2013) puts it, Big Data is "high-volume, high-velocity, and high-variety information assets that demand cost-effective, innovative forms of information processing for enhanced insight and decision making". Volume, velocity, and variety have been said to constitute the three basic characteristics of Big Data:

> (a) the remarkable volume of transactional data generated by e-commerce and the willingness of companies to retain this information; (b) the speed of data creation produced by the interaction between organizations and costumers; and (c) the opportunity to integrate and manage a wider variety of information, with different formats and structures. (Degli Esposti 2014: 209)

It could be argued, however, that the critical responses to dataveillance and Big Data that approach information technologies from the perspective of surveillance and the Panopticon fail to acknowledge Foucault's own hypothesis regarding the historical limits of disciplinary societies. Put differently, a critical analysis of the attention economy limited to the disciplinary framework of surveillance fails to identify the specific characteristics of contemporary mutations in the dominant economy of power, hence rendering its critique obsolete. This article contends that Foucault's own response to the historical limits of disciplinary society provides an initial ground to develop a more adequate critique of the attention economy. At the same time, an analysis of the attention economy may exemplify and thus clarify some of the conceptual tools developed by Foucault in his 1978 and 1979 lessons.

F. THE ATTENTION ECONOMY AS AN APPARATUS OF SECURITY

As presented above, Crary (1991; 2001) examines the formations of the modern observer and the modern mode of paying attention as important mechanisms of disciplinary society whose aim is to supplement the disciplinary function of the gaze

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within panoptic formations of power. At the same time, a series of authors (Poster 1990; Gandy 1993; Lyon 1994) have deployed Foucault's interpretation of the Panopticon in order to develop a critique of information technologies and societies of surveillance. The limit of these analyses, however, is that they fail to see the specificity of the economy of power behind the attention economy. Crary, for example, sees attention as a mechanism of individuation that aims at fixing the subject within a world determined by a multiplicity of perceptions. In doing so, Crary's analysis is unable to overcome the mass/individual dyad that defines disciplinary societies. This impossibility marks the historical limits of the disciplinary framework for the examination of a contemporary phenomenon such as the attention economy. In this regard, it can be said that Foucault's lessons on security offer an initial, but highly important, attempt to overcome the disciplinary understanding of society. Hence, it is possible to analyse the attention economy following the shift from one economy of power to the other.

In the first place, Foucault identifies the passage from normation to normalisation as a key characteristic of societies of security. This passage allows understanding the shift from attention as a mechanism of individuation to attention as a source of data for the analysis of curves of normality of a given population. Crary's analysis of modern attention focuses on the mechanisms through which the observer is taught to "cancel or exclude from consciousness" a significant part of our immediate perception in order to pay attention (2001: 1); that is, our perception is disciplined to disengage "from a broader field of attraction, whether visual or auditory, for the sake of isolating or focusing on a reduced number of stimuli" (2001: 1). Accordingly, early critiques of dataveillance focus on the ideas of privacy and personal data, reinforcing the opposition between the individual and the mass. These examples respond to a general understanding of the processes of normation proper of disciplinary societies (processes that first define a norm which in turn shapes the individual subject). On the contrary, the logic of security does not aim at the construction of this norm, but at the identification of the curves of normality, patterns and regularities within and already given field of multiplicities. The case of Big Data illustrates this shift. From the perspective of Big Data, the main goal is not to normalise a specific form of paying attention, not even a specific behaviour. Instead, Big Data conceives the attention of each user as a "sign of intention" of his or her individual interests and desires. Through extensive data processing, this information is then used to identify patterns of consumer behaviours, preferences, tendencies, etc. From the perspective of political economy, attention "is the substance of focus. It registers your interests by indicating choice for certain things and choice against other things […] The establishment of value in the attention economy is a dual register of what one pays attention to and what one chooses to ignore" (Goldstein 2005). This means that the attention economy

presupposes an already defined individual who pays attention to certain things he or she has an inclination towards. In this regard, the attention economy does not aim at the normalisation of attention, but uses it a mechanism for the harvesting of large amounts of data. As Lanham (2005) shows, the internet has become a privileged territory for the valorisation of the attention economy precisely because of its capacity to record, share and analyse these patterns of attention. At the same time, however, the subject who pays attention no longer appears as the central object on which power is applied. Instead, the individual user becomes a mere cog in the construction of a larger object, i.e., the population. In other words, the dominant logic behind the attention economy is not the normation of attention – as Stiegler (2012) claims – but turning attention into a new source of knowledge about the patterns of a specific multiplicity.

This leads to Foucault's second hypothesis according to which the individual body is replaced by the population as the main object of power. Antonio Negri suggests that the passage from discipline to security is represented today "by the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism" (2008: 71). Furthermore, Negri contends that in this new context, power "passes more through television that through the discipline of the factory" (2008: 71). This entails that the transition from discipline (as anatomo-politics exercised over the individual body) becomes "a technology of power exercised over populations" (Negri 2008: 72). For Foucault, the modern use of the concept of population creates the illusion that there exists a "naturalness" that can be discovered through the analysis of individual interests and desires. In this respect, in the attention economy, attention becomes one of the privileged mechanisms for accessing these interests and desires, to identify patterns in them and hence render them calculable. Furthermore, Foucault argues that the concept of population poses a new demand for power. It no longer functions by repressing and correcting these desires so they fit a given norm. Instead, power must learn how to encourage these desires and interests while at the same time predicting their movement and knowing when and how to intervene.

Thirdly, Foucault examines the art of government as the principal characteristic of this new economy of power. In general terms, governmentality refers to the introduction of the economy into the realm of power. This is an essential characteristic for the understanding of the attention economy from the perspective of Foucault's analysis of the apparatuses of security. The central function of attention within this new logic of power is neither the symbolic representation of the sovereign nor the disciplinary normalisation of perception, but the economic organisation of a population. It has been stressed that the attention economy is a concept initially forged in the field of political economy as a way of explaining the valorisation of attention in strictly economic terms. In this respect, it works as a power apparatus because it turns attention into a specific device for the economic analysis of the desires and interests of

a given population. In brief, the aim of the attention economy as a specific power apparatus is not to repress a given set of differences nor to normalise them under a given norm, but to dispose them in a certain way so as to achieve the most effective economic result. Tyler Reigeluth (2014) introduces the notion of "algorithmic governmentality" in order to define the way in which dataveillance and Big Data become key technologies for a new economy of power. According to Reigeluth,

> Algorithmic governmentality moves us away from classical statistical populations towards the populations of relationships that inhabit an individual, a behaviour, an imminent deed. These relationships are reduced to computable units capable of being plugged into the algorithm's syntax. The individual's singularity is thus reduced to a particular syntaxical arrangement of traces that can be represented and modulated accordingly. This is not to say that the individual can be equated to an algorithm, but that thinking, representing, intervening and governing algorithmically produces certain effects and transformations on what it means to be a 'subject'. (Reigeluth 2014: 253)

Reigeluth's notion of algorithmic governmentality is a good example of how the attention economy can be addressed from the standpoint of Foucault's security hypothesis. Rather than employing digital technologies for the surveillance of individuals in order to enforce a given norm, digital technologies are deployed in accordance both to a new object of power (the population) and to a new political rationality (governmentality). From this perspective, it can be argued that in the attention economy the individual/mass dyad proper of disciplinary societies weakens, while populations and techniques of governmentality emerge as the key concepts of a new logic of power. Acknowledging this passage from one economy of power to another entails important theoretical consequences for understanding how digital technologies are currently being used as apparatuses of control. At the same time, this understanding is essential for correctly positioning the current debate regarding 'dataveillance' and 'Big Data' within a post-disciplinary framework more suitable for the current economic, social and political context.

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