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SURVEILLED AND SURVEILLANT SUBJECTS IN THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL¹

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ABSTRACT

In our civilization, images are experiencing a mutation from which a use of precise *jouissance* in *parlêtres* is being developed. Two treatments of *jouissance* are revealed: on the one hand, the relation to the surveillance that rules and disciplines bodies and, on the other, an unprecedented use of the imaginary register. The voluntary servitude expressed in the omnivoyeur eye of the epoch and the empire of images direct us toward a spectacle effect, just like toward a movement where the superegoic imperative urges us to act without restraint.

KEYWORDS

Surveillance | Image | Imaginary | Body

INTRODUCTION

The two signifiers proposed by the title of our research, surveillance and control, are somehow present in the different ways in which civilization has governed *jouissance* in every epoch; however, they adopt particular modes in our current times. As we know, Lacan defines discourse as a social bond, a wordless structure that allows us to treat that which escapes signifying articulation, *jouissance*, ineliminable as such in every social bond. The treatment this *jouissance* is given in each of the discourses contributes to its particularity. Our epoch promotes a recovery of *jouissance* without loss (discourse of the capitalist); this treatment causes some aversion (Fanjwaks, 2015) to words and has effects on subjectivity and, as such, on the forms the social bond takes.

The empire of images names a use of *jouissance* that is being witnessed by our civilization. Surveillance and our simultaneous position as both surveilled and surveillant subjects is one of the faces of this empire. Being always on the go, so pervasive in almost every aspect of our lives, is powerfully manifested in the way we are constantly bombarded by images. These preliminary considerations make it possible to state that the 21st century's society of control does not have the same characteristics and does not serve the same purposes as, for example, the panopticon that M. Foucault developed last century. Therefore, elucidating those differences is a first step to approach the analysis of the way in which it takes control in the age of technology.

The complacency that *parlêtres* show in the face of the empire of images and its effects is one of the other facets that is evidenced in our present-day society of control. Voluntary servitude, a concept formulated in the 16th century, actualizes the tendency to submission (Miller, 2015) that characterizes our times.

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Finally, the effects of the current use of images on the body raise the question about the clinical perspective. Ours is an epoch that swings between the ideal of absolute transparency and the right to privacy; the opacity of *jouissance* is increasingly blurred and returns as body phenomena that are not necessarily articulated to the unconscious, and about which we hear in our practice. M. Bassols' article in *Mediodicho 40* is eloquent in that regard. In addition, *parlêtres* begin to make an unprecedented use of the imaginary register, just as Lacan developed it in his late teaching, which opens a path to new symptomatic arrangements that should be explored and formalized. In order to address the issue, three questions are asked. The first one consists in situating *What differences do we find between our present-day society of control and other moments in civilization in which surveillance has taken the place of social control?* The second question addresses the following: *What satisfaction does that imaginary machinery cause in the parlêtre which makes it possible for it to be viable and multiply?* The third question seeks to analyze *What subjective consequences of that omnivoyeur gaze do we find in clinical practice?*

SURVEILLED AND SURVEILLANT SUBJECTS IN THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL

An unprecedented mutation is taking place in the history of humankind. It changes our relation with the world, with our body, even with our being. That mutation does not occur secretly but in front of our eyes. However, we cannot see it with precision and in all its breadth. It is neither an evolution, nor a revolution, nor an accident; it is neither a dark threat nor a conspiracy; it has not been deliberated by a conscience, nor is it caused by a dark power. (...) It causes itself. We have entered another world. The 21st century has just set off and the revelation is made that a new modernity, a new civilization, has been born.
(Wajcman, 2011, p. 13)

Last century, M. Foucault (Foucault, 2012) developed the objectives of the panopticon toward the domestication of bodies with a view to control and usefulness. He also stated that the age of disciplines promoted the organization of that which is multiple, an order-building experience; each body situated in a space and in a discipline was a useful body. The invisible eye of the panopticon in which everyone could be watched at any time had disciplinary effects on subjects. That is not the function screens serve today. On the contrary, they are multiplied to infinity in an endless and aimless bombardment of images. Today each one of us is both surveilled and surveillant, docile to be looked at, located, bombarded by images at all times, but at the same time looking and showing incessantly. In the previous conversation we had with the members of the EBP and NEL groups, we situated a precision to bear in mind regarding the differences between today's and last century's society of control. We should distinguish between the disciplinary effects of the panopticon's invisible eye and the spectacle effects of today's omnivoyeur eye.

In today's omnivoyeur eye, we find the voracious eye, as Lacan situates it in Seminar 11 (Lacan, 1964) [1973]), which pushes us to look more and more, but in addition to a *jouissance* of showing. Looking at the image of the other, his or her life and intimacy, as well as exhibiting own's own, implies going toward the society of the spectacle. Its effects are not disciplinary, but rather a reinforcement of the drive.

The omnivoyeur eye is that of surveillance, but in a certain symptomatic sense, surveillance is configured as an attempt to see more, to catch that which still cannot be seen, an illusion of absolute transparency which technology produces and which does not know the opacity of the real. A difference which stands out in our epoch is that the effect of shame—which Lacan situates in Seminar 11—is not verified, or at least not in the same sense as it was last century. What persists is the effect of strangeness, an effect of uneasiness which Lacan and Freud taught us to

distinguish in the face of the *unheimlich*, that is, in the face of that which shows the opacity of the most intimate *jouissance*. As Heidegger says when writing about Hölderlin's poetry, "In this strangeness he proclaims his unflinching nearness" (Heidegger, 1994, p. 175).

We hear about this uneasiness in different ways in our clinical practice: the subject who feels foreign in front of the wall of images, for example, or the strangeness in front of his or her own images exhibited in social media networks.

The push to omnivoyeurism, together with a certain position of voluntary servitude, provides the framework for the surveillance of our society of control.

SURVEILLANCE AS A PUSH TO LEGAL ACTION

Another answer to the question about how the machinery of surveillance works in the empire of images can be found in the effect of reinforcement of the superego, which the epoch fosters and which further clarifies the reasons for the emergence of the society of control.

Normative inflation (the increasing number of regulations to legislate everything), the attempt to prevent that which might escape the law by means of protocols that could spot future criminals, for example, and the push to resort to legal action in matters of social bonds, thus becomes the reverse of the imperative to *jouir* which the discourse itself fosters.

Several years ago, in our community we created a research space called *Bringing suffering under control* where we look into the reasons for and the consequences of a society which tries to control bodies from birth, while pushing to an ever-increasing satisfaction of *jouissance* at the same time. In this research, we situate the Push to Legal Action—an effect of the fall of authority figures in the social Other—as a social symptom. This push also explains the promotion of rights as a mark of this epoch which somehow articulates the right to *jouir* with normativization. The purpose is for everybody's right to *jouissance* to be guaranteed by law.

The society of control is then another name for the social symptom which is an effect of the decline of the regulation of *jouissance* in civilization.

VOLUNTARY SERVITUDE

"Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves?" (La Boétie, 2006, p. 22). The *parlêtres* of our epoch are fascinated by screens and demand surveillance. The signifier *security* is inscribed as an S1.

Étienne La Boétie, a 16th-century French writer and politician, mentioned by Miller in chapter 16 of *Ultimísimo Lacan (The Latest Lacan, Miller, 2013)*, wrote the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* at the age of 18. This text was against absolutism and La Boétie asked the above quoted question there.

He thus locates the necessary complacency that should exist on the side of the subject for control to become effective. We ask ourselves: what form does this complacency take in our times? In *The Lyric Illusion (2015)*, a text published after the attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine office in Paris, Jacques-Alain Miller eloquently describes the voluntary servitude of our times:

(...) Yes, we want to be watched, listened to, tracked, if life is at stake. The great flight to voluntary servitude. Did I say voluntary? Desired, claimed, required. On the horizon, the Leviathan, *Pax et Princeps*. (...) [E]ven the Republicans regarded "submission to absolute rule" as a lesser evil. (...) [T]he tendency today, contrary to appearances, is not resistance, but submission. (Miller, 2015)

Miller highlights the paradox of the answer of subjects in an epoch without the Other, submission. How can we understand this paradox?

In our democratic societies, the hypermodern subject's relation with leadership takes the form of a cooperation in the name of security. Leadership is not produced under the assertive form, but under the form of advice, even need. Subjects who obey incessantly and demonstrate for more police protection demand more surveillance cameras. In the 2013 Conference of the Lacanian Orientation School (EOL), Eric Laurent related this cooperative obedience with the illusion of a politics without master-signifiers which leads to the superegoization of the world, the dream of a politics that is sustained on S2, that is, without impositions.

THE EFFECTS OF SUBJECTIVITY

As we said earlier, some of the effects of the bombardment of images are verified in certain reinforcement of the satisfaction of the drive, in the uneasiness in the face of that which is incessantly close to the opacity of each subject's *jouissance*, and also in the push, which witnesses the sovereign presence of the superego and its consequences.

In addition, we can see the effects of the empire of images on childhood. Surveilling the child was—or still is in some cases—part of a false reassurance to be safe, a reassurance of immortality, according to Freud. The difference we find today—since, as we said, bodies have always been surveilled—is that there is a surveillance of the images of the bodies, a surveillance through screens. It is not the contact of the bodies, their nearness, the exchange, the questions, but their images, as well as being captured by a surveillance of oneself in the images. What happens is that there is no opposition to the aspiration to be seen when there is no symbolic order. That is why, rather than overestimating virtues by forgetting defects, as Freud stated in relation to the child he called *His majesty the Baby*, today's push wants something more: to erase defects. In that sense, we are unsure whether it is about narcissism or, in any case, that it should be suggested as the only interpretation, but zero volition and zero defect appear, as Eric Laurent (2013) teaches us. Zero defect is the wild face of an attempt to control childhood evidenced in the symptoms of the children who come to our practice. The other face of this control crisis is the child alone in the face of the difficulty he or she has in appropriating his or her body, expressing the fear it causes. The empire of images and its consequent aversion to language (Fanjwaks, 2015) is also verified in body phenomena which are not necessarily articulated to the unconscious and result in an unprecedented use of the imaginary by *parlêtres*. This leads us to consider the difference between image and imaginary and to situate an enabling function of the image which opens a very prolific research path.

“The imaginary as it gives us fundamental coordinates to live in this world (...) We get out of the tangle with the image” (Laurent, 2012).

THE PROMOTION OF THE IMAGINARY AS AN EFFECT OF THE SILENCE OF THE REAL

Regarding the imaginary, we situate a first difference between the abundance of images which, having lost their articulation with the symbolic, produces the encounter with a piece of the real to which anxiety responds—a real which is no longer subjected to the symbolic and lets the imaginary result in its chaos—and another perspective of the imaginary which situates it as the rim of the real.

In Chapter 15 of *Ultimísimo Lacan (The Latest Lacan)*, Miller (2013), entitled *The real does not speak*, Miller uses signifiers which make it possible to feel the opacity we have to deal with in the analytic experience: “all psychoanalysis occurs in the dark,” (Miller, 2013, p. 234) he says and

adds: “the real is mute, as well as the knowledge it includes” (Miller, 2013, p. 242). One does not look for this mute real; it is of the order of the encounter and this locates the promotion of the category of contingency in the *parlêtre*'s clinical experience.

This opacity also involves the politics of the cure and the transmission of the clinical practice.

We are in some kind of turning point regarding the consequences of Lacan's late and latest teachings, in which we stumble upon the difficulty of formalization, of transmission, and even of orientation in a certain sense, in a clinical practice which we are already doing, but which we still have not conceptualized enough.

THE RETURN TO THE IMAGINARY

In the same text, Miller locates the return to the imaginary as one of the consequences of this mute real; he interprets that Lacan does a promotion of the imaginary (Miller, 2013) under the form of the promotion of the body.

Miller states that “*jouissance*, contingency, and the body combine in a promotion of the imaginary” (Miller, 2013, p. 246).

Two operations take place in the analytic experience: the imaginarization of the symbolic and the imaginarization of the real. The former strives to get the real to speak, not without resorting to the semblant. However, the hardest challenge is bridging the gap between the imaginary and the real, via the imaginarization of the real. “In the silence of the real, and while one should always be suspicious of the symbolic which tells lies, only the resort to the imaginary is left, that is, to the body, that is, to the weft” (Miller, 2013, p. 259).

The fabric, then, involves a materiality and an image that circumscribe the interstices between the threads; the fabric is with the body and also with the word; it is a weft that catches something. The perspective of the fabric makes it possible to clearly grasp the difference between the imaginarization of the real and the bombardment of images whose empire marks our epoch.

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