

Editorial

Esthetics of the Biopolitics: audiovisual, politics and new technologies

By Ilana Feldman, André Brasil, Cezar Migliorin and Leonardo Mecchi.

In 1974, during a speech in Rio de Janeiro¹ and soon afterwards in the book *História da Sexualidade – A Vontade de Saber*, also from 74, Michel Foucault presents for the first time the concept of Biopolitics: it is about an extension of the subject, when the Power starts to invest less in the person than in the population. According to Foucault, in the second half of the XVIII century, the Power would have surpassed the limits of the personal corpus to intervene in a series of process that regulates life as a whole: the proliferation, the birth and the mortality, the health and the longevity. Differing from the individualizing disciplinary strategies, the new biopolitics practices direct themselves to the human as a body-species. It refers to *the process of the biologics becoming statal* that takes place in XIX century. Foucault summarizes this way the new form of biopower: “The new technology that is installed is addressed to the multiplicity of the humankind, not in the way that they are only bodies, but in the way that it forms, on the contrary, a global mass, affected by group processes which are of the life itself, that are process as birthday, death, the production, the illness, etc.”²

These days, the concept gets new ramifications, considering, mainly, the one, by the social corpus, of the entrepreneurial techniques of (self) management, the development of communication and information technologies, and the images and sound production and circulation devices. On one hand, the administrating and regulating strategies of the populations’ life are maintained and intensified, what is legitimated by the rhetoric of the risk, the instability and the insecurity, in a historic moment when it regards less of creating the order than managing the disorder, as Agamben would say. On the other hand, we see a moving process from biopolitics institutional strategies to the universe of the advanced capitalism and, mainly, of the show, here understood not as a set of images but as “a social relation between people, mediated by images”, as postulates Guy Debord³.

¹ FOUCAULT, M. “La naissance de la médecine sociale”. In: *Dits et Écrits II*, 1976-1988. Paris: Gallimard, 2001.

² FOUCAULT, M. “17 March, 1976 class”. In: *Society must be defended*. London: Penguin UK, 2003

³ DEBORD, G. *Society of the spectacle*. Cambridge, MA: Mit Press, 1994.

We were preparing this Editorial, when, during a Philosophy Congress, we heard a participant's complaints of the dissemination of the biopolitics concept. "Soon, even President Lula will be speaking about biopolitics", he says. Because, we, related to communication, cinema, and audiovisual, were certainly enhancing the concept. And if someone is resented it is because in this resentment lies two persistent prejudices: one, well known by us, of social issue, and the other, theoretical-conceptual. Common to both, the presupposition that some ideas are – and must be – domain of a few privileged: language must be shared, and, in this sharing, some ideas have got their circulation limited, as though they were the guarantee for them to overspread and get banalized. Since now, we would say that the first ramification of the connection between aesthetics and biopolitics refers to the circulation and operation ways of this concept, that is, the own way that it occupies (or does not occupy) some spaces, operating socially by means of several practices and technologies, even so the audiovisuals.

Before it proposes itself as resistance, this publication begins, therefore, with an insistence. It refers of the insistence of the ramifications of a concept which, by our point of view, makes a critical potent operator of the current moment. Opposite to a restricted, excluding posture, we believe it to be necessary to persist in the vitality of the concept, just in the moment of its expansion, just in the moment of its passage from the experts to the public domain. Fighting for the concept is to preserve its precision, its nuances, its critical power. It is to protect it, not against the expansion, but the doctrinaire usage, on one hand, and the indiscriminated usage, on the other hand. Following the theoretical-methodological tracks proposed by Michel Foucault, we could thus say that the level in which we would like to act "is not the one of the political theory, though, before, of the mechanism level, of the techniques, and the power techniques."⁴

As a matter of fact, in this "Soon, even President Lula will be speaking about biopolitics", we can see aspects of "A long time", that is, the persistence of an old dichotomy that, still in the origin of the Esthetics, separated the cult man, of good taste, from the not cult man, ordinary one. A dichotomy which has, deeply, always legitimated the vocation or the title of those who are included in the field where the ideas and concepts are included. But, whether this dichotomy persists in some knowledge domain, it is fading away, or at least, it is re-configured in the largest field of contemporaneous capitalism. On one hand, the dissolution of this frontier could make turn innocuous the discriminatory and elite judgments innocent. On the other hand, it demands us to renew our critical perspectives, since it is there, in this de-limit, where the post-industrial capitalism is developed – said immaterial, cognitive, semi-optical, esthetical and, why not, biopolitical.

⁴ FOUCAULT, M. "17 March, 1976 class". In: *Society must be defended*. London: Penguin UK, 2003

As we shall see here, the contemporaneous capitalism is made up, exactly, of two processes which move the esthetical experience and the ordinary life to the center of its investments. On one hand, the esthetical dimension of the experience is not anymore art domain, restrictedly, and comes to be part of the *modus operandi* of the money circulation and production strategies. On the other hand, the ordinary life, translated into “ways of life”, becomes the source of inventiveness which feeds the communication technologies, the self-management techniques, and the publicity and marketing strategies, be it on the production field, be it on the consumerism field. Setting life and creation, free stimulate them – or more, boost them up – the experience: functions of a power which are confused with the capitalism itself. Here, it goes on echoing the Foucault’s formula, according to which “the power is performed acted on free people, and while they are free. (...) where the determinations are saturated there is no power relation”.⁵

A renewed criticism, attentive to this process, should be occupied by two hypotheses: the first would take us to think of the Foucaultian concept of *biopolitics* in its esthetical dimension. Hence, since the beginning, biopolitics could be thought as a reconfiguration of the sensitive, that is, as a reorganization of the form as the power invest our sensitive experience: the space, the time, the circulation and reproduction of the bodies and the populations, the ways we are seen and we see the others, summing up, the way we live, in its dimension of production, and management of life.

In this work, we don’t need to go and search – as Giorgio Agamben – to the extreme formulation of biopolitics, case of the national-socialism (it is known as, for the scientists linked to the Nazism, as Verschuer, politics should aim “to frame the life of a people”⁶). It is enough to see as, in the biopolitics field, in its contemporaneous version, our little gestures, our symbolical or geographical movement, our consumerism wishes, group and individuals, and our demands for freedom and pleasure are modulated by informational and communicational devices of all kinds, being these too modulators of the dynamics of the money and of the discourses more intimately linked to it. It is about, before all, less framing than modulating our sensitive experience and the way life goes, stands, occupies, symbolical and geographical spaces, escapes from the dominations or demands to be reactivated by them.

The second hypothesis derives from this assumption: it is about thinking the biopolitics, today, coming from the life itself comes to be invested by the powers, which do not restrict more – or only – to the orders of the National States. On the field of the cognitive capitalism, biopolitics goes back more and more intensively, to the life in its plasticity, in its power of invention, and its capacity of differentiating from itself, that is,

⁵ FOUCAULT, M. “Le sujet et le pouvoir”. In: *Dits et Écrits II*, 1976-1988. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2001. p.1059

⁶ AGAMBEN, G. *Homo Sacer*. Stanford: Stanford University, 2004.

to the esthetical dimension of the experience. We would fit well, thus, to ask: what revindicates to the esthetical experience? What revindicates to life, be it as a way of resistance to the powers that takes hold of it as granted, as ignored by them? What is the possibility of the criticism, in a moment when the esthetical experience and the ways of single life are just those which guarantee the continuity and rotation of the capitalism in its cognitive version, immaterial?

The ordinary life, before viewed by the objective, disciplinary techniques become strategy target, apparently contradictory, of subjectivation: if, on one hand, it keeps on being regulated, watched and monitored by means of control techniques and technologies more and more sophisticated, from geoprocessing to biogenetics, passing through the watching and identification devices, on the other hand, it requires to be freed, tuned up, being advisable to become creative and of good performance, because from there the capitalism takes its invention and profitability force. On one hand, hence, the objective procedures which aim the totalization, as the control and regulation of the group and individual life (or “dividual”, as Deleuze would say). On the other hand, the individualization techniques or “self technologies” (according to Foucault), by means of which life gets subjective, gets virtual, speculate, differentiate and imagines.

On both the contemporaneous biopolitics, the image production – be them of scientific character, either tailored to the art Universe, or to entertainment – it makes life migrates to the information dimension and the information to the life dimension. Images reinforce and offer this way a new nuance to the esthetical dimension of the contemporaneous biopolitics: at last, by their means, the sensitive is divided, split up and shared. By their means, also, the ordinary life invention power becomes invention power, and profitability source for the capitalism itself.

The publications *Estéticas da biopolítica: audiovisual, política e novas tecnologias* comes from a paradox, without concerning about denying or resolving it: how to think about the affirmation strategies, emancipation and resistance in the moment when the same strategies are the ones which sustain the capitalism in its immaterial, cognitive, warlike, speculative and spectacular way? How to defend the life potentials in a moment when life, in its potency, feeds the forces which regulate it, control it and throw it away?

Since the beginning, the publication editors defend an open edition, which is processual, “risky”, and that it may be more the starting than the end of a path – characteristic, besides, supported among editors an collaborators of Cinética magazine. Thus, the above provocation offered us try-outs of diverse interests and nuances, multiple perspectives, what makes this endeavor something more diffuse and plural. The idea which always has guided us is the one that this processability inherent to the project could help us to find interlocutors in several knowledge fields and in several regions of the country, besides Latin America, allowing us to view the way as the biopolitics concept shows up in its specific researches.

Some Essays go through a more theoretical-conceptual pathway, others make the concept operate confronting with specific experiences in the audiovisual, political, scientific, esthetical experience, cyber activism, pornography, new watching technologies, communication, image digitalization field, and also life management. Besides, beyond the 18 critical try-outs regarding many aspects of biopolitics, our proposal contemplates even: two artistic interventions made especially for this publication, coming from a first conceptual provocation; a curatorship, specialized in the contemporaneous audiovisual production, of available works on the internet which has a correspondence with the privileged issues in this debate; an interview, about the theme “body politics”, with a Brazilian prestige film writer; and an online forum, so that the debate can take place, the share of ideas (amidst readers, editors and collaborators) and the processual dimension of the thought.

On the make-of of all these diversity, they are kept that the conviction that the concept of biopolitics maintains its analysis force of the contemporaneous experience and, even more, that its dissemination is not synonymous of getting banal. Whether these are texts, images and ideas about the possible biopolitics esthetics, we believe that there is an esthetical discussion inherent and co-extensive to the way the ideas circulation happens, to the way they are preserved and reconfigured the spaces of the production and the dissemination. This is the esthetic that is on the make-of of the politics: the sensitive ways which permit the emergency of the thought.

This project is made up of the following interventions:

Critical Essays

Young with ideas on head and camera on hand: Biopolitics and immaterial work in the audiovisual production – by Alexandre Barbalho

Video knapping: speaker of the dissensus – by André Brasil

About the biopolitics: from Foucault to XXI century – by André Duarte

The documentary and the banned from de advanced capitalism of consumerism – by César Guimarães

Dissensus equality: Democracy and biopolitics in the contemporaneous documentary – Cezar Migliorin

El rostro de la Medusa y el cuerno de la abundancia: Exuberancia y copiosidad del cuerpo pornográfico – by Christian Ferrer

On the life road : the transa-amazonic of Paula Sampaio – by Ernani Chaves

Esthetics of the flagrancy : control and pleasure at the contemporaneous watching devices – by Fernanda Bruno

Reality Show : a biopolitics device – by Ilana Feldman

La producción audiovisual como producción de castigo-simbólico en el capitalismo – by Jorge Dávila

Phenotypical racism and the second skin esthetics – by José Jorge de Carvalho
Magum iter pauperis, or the mimetical pilgrim – by Luis Felipe Guimarães Soares
Biopolitics and control society: Notes about the subject criticism between Foucault and Deleuze – by Miguel Ângelo
The face digitalization: From transplant to PhotoShop – by Paula Sibilia
Contemporaneous mutations – by Peter Pál Pelbart
Angel spectrums and image politics – by Raul Antelo
Average images between art and science: Relations and exchanges – by Rosana Monteiro
Images or mirrors? The cyber activist of Greenpeace – by Samira Feldman Marzochi

Audiovisual Essays

With the intention of provoking not only the theoretical thought regarding the biopolitics theme, but also the audiovisual thought, we invited Brazilian artists to make new works to the project. We chose to invite professionals who work at the intersection of the media and languages – the photography, the cinema, the video, the installation - , whose works are, of a somewhat explicit way, crossed by the biopolitics issues.

Notes of a Stage – by Roberto Bellini
Der Integrationkurs – by Marcellvs L.
Brutally the Surfaces – by Cezar Migliorin

Interviews

Interviews with the film makers regarding the theme “body politics”, exploiting, as a starting conceptual point, the relation amidst body, biopolitics and cinema language coming from the esthetical view intrinsic to the makers.

Politics of the Body – by Karim Aïnouz

Indications

Films, images, sites, texts. Other views of the concept of biopolitics.

Images and Biopolitics: online vídeos curatorship – by Eduardo Jesus
Biopolitics of the Brain: on Susan Aldworth – by Francisco Ortega
‘Heartbeat Detector’: the management of life between nazism and neoliberalism – by Ilana Feldman

Forum

Open space to the theoretical and critical discussion amidst editors, debaters, collaborators and readers.

Who we are

Curriculum summarized of all the 24 members of the project.