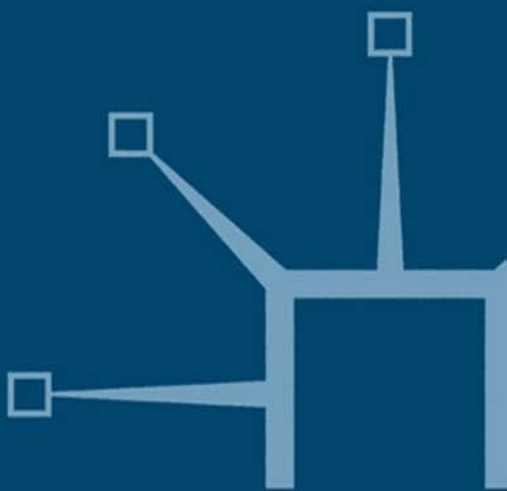


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Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research

Andrea Mubi Brighenti



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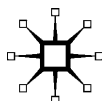
THE WALL AND THE CITY (edited)

TERRITORI MIGRANTI [MIGRANT TERRITORIES: Space and Control of Global
Mobility]

Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research

Andrea Mubi Brighenti
University of Trento, Italy

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1

Visuality and Visibility

First steps into the looking experience

Looking at someone who looks back at you is, in a sense, the beginning of all society. But, what if what you think is the face of a fellow human being looking back in fact turns out to be just a full-sized photograph on an advertising billboard in the street, or the head of a mannequin in a shop window? More radically, what if the 'look' that is thus misguided is actually that of a CCTV camera equipped with facial recognition software or, to give an unexpected twist to our example, the flashing yellow eyes on the wings of a beautifully coloured butterfly?

Here we begin to see some of the complications in our social-theoretical understanding of the phenomena of vision. An actor-network theorist, for instance, would simply comment that our puzzlement is a typically humanist one: we are just incapable of accepting some entities as being entitled to perceive. There is an anthropological asymmetry here between looking and being looked at, and once the asymmetry is corrected, including all types of things on the 'looking' side, everything is fixed and will be fine. A neuroscientist working on visual cognitive processes will not be happy with this solution, though. She would point out that looking is a most complex physiological and cognitive process. Consequently, before someone or something is included on the 'looking' side, a number of conditions must be met. In the first place, the existence of one's perceptual system must be proved. Perhaps at this point, security systems developers would stand up and nominate their products as artificially intelligent 'looking' systems. Cognitive capacities will be presented by them as pivotal for the ability to look, regardless of the organic (neurophysiological) or inorganic (robotic) type of perceiving system. On the basis of this argument, a small class of highly

technological inorganic artefacts – and only that small class – should be included among the perceiving entities.

Fewer people, however, will be likely to speak in favour of the dummy's or the butterfly's eyes. One should conclude that no real stare has taken place in those cases, and that the impression of being looked at is to be dismissed as a mistake. For many, the point is that the faked eye will not react to the stare. However, what if those who are looked at 'fakedly' react as if they were really being looked at? After all, in many cases a faked eye can elicit a real reaction. Correspondingly, behind many fakes there is a real plan, and what is a wrong perception on one side may be a right one on the other. Artifice, Deleuze used to say, is an integral part of nature – as faked eyes in natural mimetism remind us. Therefore, there is no possible opposition between natural and artificial. To this we should add that the artifice can be regarded as a sufficient proof that a properly social phenomenon is going on. At this point, we are immediately led back to the original question raised by Georg Simmel and the other classical sociologists, namely: what is a society? More precisely, in our case: how is this looking relationship – artificial or not – linked to social interaction and social intercourse at large?

Even when we confine ourselves to the ontologically and epistemologically more reassuring human family, as classically defined and defended by humanist thinkers, the questions concerning looking and being looked at are no less complex. Humanists, who are eager to establish the distinction and the asymmetry between entities who are entitled to perceive and those who are not, will have to answer the question: where do people with impaired visual abilities – of which there are many different sorts – or even straightforwardly blind, fall in this distinction? Is the distinction to be characterised as a matter of different kinds of beings, or actually a matter of degrees within a shared kind? Besides, we also know that there are many ways of, and strategies for, being forced into one of the two categories – most often, into the category of those who are not entitled to look. Women and minority groups are a clear case in point.

Another set of complications arises from the specificity of the act we are considering. So far we have been talking about the apparently uniform phenomenon of looking. But, what are its modulations? There are so many ways and styles of perceiving, seeing, beholding, looking at, viewing, descrying, glancing, catching sight of, glimpsing, spotting, watching, inspecting, detecting, noting, noticing, recognising, scrutinising, making out, picking out, setting eyes on, peeping and spying.

Apparently, as Wittgenstein put it, there is no *penuria nominum*. There are fluctuations of all sorts in this vocabulary, hinting at variations in duration, intensity, rhythm, depth, intentionality, attitude, status and reciprocity. Because such variations correspond to an incredible variety of tasks, the list suggests that the act of looking prolongs in all sorts of different directions towards different activities involving thought, awareness, understanding, appreciation, recognition, talk, manipulation and control. Furthermore, what happens if these looking relations in all their variety occur, not between single identifiable individual entities, but within multiplicities – if what stares at me is not a single pair of eyes, but hundreds of thousands...a crowd of stares? What type of visual experience is at play in these crowd states? Who looks at whom? Does the existence of collectives of viewers change the nature of looking, and if so, how?

It is not my ambition here to formulate a full-blown theory of social visibility. Rather, I seek to complexify our understanding of visibility as not simply a monodimensional or dichotomic, on/off phenomenon. In order to avoid determinism and essentialism, I present visibility as a phenomenon that is inherently ambiguous, highly dependent upon contexts and complex social, technical and political arrangements which could be termed ‘regimes’ of visibility. In the following, I will try to differentiate visibility from other visual notions, such as sight, vision, gaze and in particular *visuality*, the cultural counterpart of the sense of sight. In order to do so, I review various theorisations about perceptual senses, teasing out the most interesting reflections for the development of a sensorialised social theory. The literature on *visuality* and visual culture is then used to elucidate the anthropology and social epistémé of the visual and its relationship to the other senses. The complex relationships between seeing and knowing are tackled. This chapter highlights two fundamental dimensions of vision: on the one hand, the intersection of vision, lived experience and power (including aspects such as gendered and racialised gaze, visual shocks, scopic regimes, vision of the body, etc.), and on the other, the deployment of vision as a means of interaction for action coordination (like in ‘expert vision’) and mutual recognition (like in ‘face work’). Finally, the chapter introduces visibility as a form of ‘*visuality at large*’, making it clear that the visible entails more than the visual, more than the sensorially perceptible, which becomes clear when we consider the fact that the visual itself needs to be visibilised, and examine the ways in which this happens.

Ways into vision: Cultural, methodological and epistemological

We may begin by asking: is the visible split between a 'literal' meaning, pertaining to the immediate sensory sphere, and a 'metaphorical' one that instead pertains to the set of symbolic meanings attached to particular phenomena communicated via the media? In short, the answer I try to give in this book to such a question is: no. In other words, I seek to understand the difference between the 'two meanings' of the visible not as one of nature but of degree and more properly, as will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters, of different regimes of visibility. In other words, the claim is that what we are dealing with is not with the simple phenomenon of the polysemy of the term 'visibility', but with the complex phenomenon related to two different yet inextricably interwoven aspects of the same phenomenon of social visibility.

It will therefore be necessary to elaborate a notion of visibility that *includes* but is *not limited* to the already vast field of visual research. The latter alone represents a rich field of enquiry to which culturalist studies of vision, visual studies and visual research methods have made valuable contributions. Notably, the study of visual culture (Elkins 1999; Evans and Hall 1999; Mirzoeff 1999; Macphee 2002) has illuminated the extreme diversity of the visual world: imaging includes not only visual arts but also signs, symbols, graphs, maps, plans, diagrams and scientific images of the human body as well as of invisible cells and stars. For their part, visual research methods (Prosser 1998; Emmison and Smith 2000; Banks 2001; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Pole 2004; Pink 2006; Rose 2006; Stanczak 2007; Pauwels 2008) have established themselves as a legitimate and promising methodology for social research. Yet rather than proposing another cultural history of vision or another visual research methodology text, the aim of this book is to explore visibility as a dimension of the social at large, unrestricted to the visual domain.

From a social-theoretical point of view, visibility is interesting precisely because it allows us to enhance our understanding of the social as simultaneously a material and immaterial phenomenon – or better, as a specific prolongation and convergence between the layer of the material and that of the immaterial in the constitution of the social. Visibility is a social dimension in which thresholds between different social forces are introduced. In this sense, the visible can be conceived of as a field of inscription and projection of social action, a field which can be explored as a territory. From this perspective, my main argument, exposed in

more detailed in Chapter 2, is that visibility is to be understood as crucially connected to social territoriality. As such, my analysis of visibility is part of the elaboration of a general attempt towards a territorological analysis of the social (Brighenti 2010a). My endeavour is in part analytical, in that I try to elucidate the basic dimensions of visibility, and in part critical, in that I seek to pinpoint the political stakes entailed by different visibility regimes. However, overall, my approach is neither analytical (in the sense of analytic realism with pattern variable analysis, *à la* Parsons or system-theoretical analysis *à la* Luhmann) nor critical (in the sense that I do not characterise visibility as bad or simply soaked in power, rather as, at most, ambivalent). It could be described as a 'constructive' (dare I say 'poetic'? I doubt very much I would be up to the task, especially in a language that is not my own and laden with the strictures of the academic genre) attempt to draw the coordinates which could be used to build visibility as a concept for social theory and the social science.

Vision certainly occupies a crucial point in the attempt to understand the field of social visibility. Accordingly, it is necessary to begin from a review of how vision has been conceptualised and studied – not least because, just as we need a spatialised social ontology (Soja 1989) or a spatially integrated social science (Goodchild and Janelle 2004), we also need a fully sensorialised one. Thus, we need what could be termed a 'sensitive' or 'sensational' social theory. Unsurprisingly, these two terms are ambiguous and polysemic. Is a sensitive theory also a fragile and vulnerable one? And is a sensational theory also an overdramatised and spectacular one? Indeed, as we shall explore in greater detail, sensorial receptiveness always leans towards, on the one hand, the sensitive pole – involving empathy, openness and care – and, on the other, the sensational – involving spectacle, glamour and shock.

Culturalist interpretations of visuality include a variegated literature on the gaze and the relationship between sight and the other senses, as well as between vision and knowledge, power, identity and pleasure. I draw important insights from such literature, although my specific aim remains social-epistemological rather than culturalist. As noted above, I want to attain an enlarged definition of the field of visibility. In order to do so, it is necessary to understand the act of looking and the phenomenon of the gaze from the point of view of the social forces that are unleashed in these processes. Both looking and being looked at are active social processes which are far from restricted to a merely cognitive or informational dimension. Looking is (also) a *making-do*: it is affective and haptic, it has a grip on objects and especially on bodies.

As Merleau-Ponty (1964a) contended in his study on painting, vision is act, not thought. It is imbued with desire, passions and power. And, crucially for my analysis, such passions and affects are territorialising, they create and sustain territorial orders in social interaction.

We know, for instance, that in street cultures staring is taken as an intolerable form of aggression that ‘disrespects’ and, as such, elicits instant reaction (Bourgeois 2003). Here, the territorial element is evident, but important analogies are also present in the apparently very different case of the medical gaze described by Michel Foucault (1963a), which represents not only a form of seeing that turns the observed person – the patient – into an object that can be (unashamedly) stared at, but also an investigation of a ‘dark body’ revealing a disease which must be visibilised and abstracted from the single case at hand. In both cases we see that if the stare, a form of look which persists without regard for the reaction of the person who is looked at, goes unchallenged it ends up wholly objectifying the person who is stared at. Such an interplay between the gaze and power was acutely observed by Gabriel Tarde (1999[1898]) who, discussing imitation as a fundamental social process, theorised that influence among persons could be explained as ‘thought of the other’s gaze’. But how literal is this ‘thought of a gaze’ and how can it be explained, or better visualised?

Seeing: The modern take

The modernist imagination elaborated a model of vision that by now has been roundly criticised yet remains hard to kill, as demonstrated by the very necessity of continuing to reassert all the critical points against it. I submit that it is perhaps hard to kill because it was never truly accomplished. Its aspect is deceptively simple: the fact that we can name it (the ‘modern epistemology of vision’) and describe it easily makes us confident that we can also overcome it. But we should already have done so a long time ago; instead, as we come to understand it better, we still find ourselves very much entangled in its *problématique* and its presuppositions – which, on the other hand, turn out to have never been applied as the model presupposed. They never formed a full single hegemonic ‘scopic regime’ (Metz 1982), rather a plurality of contested regimes (Jay 1993). True, we have never been modern (Latour 1993[1991]), but many have spent time and energies dreaming of having been, being or even becoming so – a fact that cannot be overlooked.

It is perhaps the first in a series of numerous paradoxes concerning vision that the central zone of the human eye, which is opposed

to the periphery and should correspond to the point of best sight, is in fact situated in correspondence with the blind spot of the retina. So, not only do we not see where we are supposed to see best, but in a sort of *mise en abyme* we also do not see that we do not see what we do not see – a foundational notion in Heinz von Foerster's (2003) second-order cybernetics as well as Niklas Luhmann's (1995) social theory. In short, vision is *doubly blind* (Elkins 1999). Our strong natural faith in the correctness of visual experience may also explain why we never fail to be impressed with the fact that our eyes can deceive us so easily and thoroughly. And although, as Berger et al. (1972) once stated, the relationship between seeing and knowing is never settled, it is still a very intimate relationship: not only do we have expectations about perception, but these expectations may hamper perception to an unpredictable degree.

The main characters of the stereotypical definition of the modernist imagination can be summarised quickly: seeing is detached, rational and efficient. It is detached because it is supposed not to interfere with the observed object. It is rational because it is governed by the free will of an aware and self-conscious subject. It is efficient because it provides clean data with sharp edges. Such an idea seems to conjure up a God's-eye view, similar to the type of 'view from nowhere' advocated by nineteenth-century French positivism and dreamt of by the early twentieth-century logical neo-positivism of the Vienna School. The making of the modern Western epistemology, however, is far from linear and far from settled. Likewise, the history of modernist vision was never straightforward and included several vacillations. A seminal moment in its formation is usually attributed to René Descartes. So Descartes, the philosopher of the *idées claires et distinctes*, is usually taken as the assertor of the epistemic centrality of sight and the creator of a model referred to as 'perspectivalism' (drawing on Panofsky's 1991[1927] classic study on perspective as a symbolic form). Putting the visible world into a geometric perspective, the methodical eye of the rationalist opposes itself to the curious eye of the encyclopaedist (Stoichita 1993) and brings vision to perfection.

Descartes' theory of vision is founded upon his metaphysical dualism. This dualism is often reproached, but such criticism forgets that dualism was not a failure on Descartes' part, or an unfortunate side effect of his theories. Dualism was a conscious and explicit achievement for Descartes: he set out for himself the task of *demonstrating* the distinction between mind and body, between thought and matter. And the reason for this was that, in his view, to detach one's mind from

one's senses was the only way to overcome the doubts and deceptions inherent to perception.

Descartes seems to inherit Plato's thesis that sight is the noblest of the senses. However, at the same time, for Descartes sight is reliable only in so far as its way of functioning is modelled upon rationality itself. Vision is a process that involves a deciphering of *signs* in which visual clues allow us to reconstruct the genuine order of the world, whose nature is geometric and mathematical. As Galileo also said in that period, the book of nature is written in mathematical language. Such a model made sense and certainly held some appeal, in that it attempted to avoid direct naïve realism – subject to sceptics' attacks – while preserving a realist orientation. Recently, Clark (2007) has shown how early modern European visual culture was characterised by the collapse of the Aristotelian visual trust grounded in the theory of resemblance. Clark calls this an act of 'de-rationalisation' of sight. In my view, it would be better to speak of 'de-naturalisation'. At any rate, it is clear that modern philosophy set for itself the task of restoring visual confidence against the attacks of scepticism through a new form of rationalisation of vision.

This type of new rationalisation bore important consequences. For instance, in Cartesian philosophy, colour was banished from the basic features of vision and relegated to a 'secondary quality'. The subjective quality of colour was debated for over a century until Newton's optics found a way to absorb it into the 'primary qualities', that is, to quantify it as the wavelength of the light. Similarly, depth was interpreted as a 'width seen by profile', as Merleau-Ponty (1945) stigmatised it in his critical discussion of the classic model of perception. He also added that Cartesian philosophy, with its rationalist model of vision moulded upon thought, is the breviary of a thought that decides no longer to abide the visible in its richness, fullness and intensity (Merleau-Ponty 1964a; 1996). Monocularism is a typical symptom of such reductionism. As Gregory Bateson (1988) noticed, binocular vision or stereopsis is not simply a matter of adding another point of view to the single-eyed perspective. The difference between the information provided by the one retina and that provided by the other is itself information; more specifically, it is information of a different logical type, and it is on the basis of this new sort of information that the seer can add an extra dimension to seeing, depth.

To anticipate briefly a few themes, with respect to the technical domain, the modernist model of vision is functional to a detached manipulation of things and, in fact, it is intimately tied to the technical

domain. In the *Dioptrique* (1637), Descartes describes the functioning of the eye *as* and *through* the device of the camera obscura. From this point of view, human vision is technological well before any manufactured tool comes into play. On the other hand, with respect to the cultural and religious domain, the Western modernist model makes a strong assertion against the enchanted visual world that characterised medieval Europe. In particular, the Protestant reformation strongly criticised the miracles and visions typical of Catholic popular devotion. But the persistence of spirits, ghosts, apparitions, demons, *incubi* and their transformation into dreams and hallucinations reveal the complexity of this trajectory.

Sense ratios

The sensorial continuum can be, and indeed has been, segmented in very different ways in different historical social contexts and through different technological lenses. The anthropology of the senses also tells us that different cultures *hierarchise* the sensorial ways of knowing differently. This means that the very idea of the five senses is a Western cultural achievement, while other cultures recognise more (in some cases fewer) perceptual senses (Howes 1991; 2003; Classen 1993; 1997).

In Greek antiquity, Plato famously described vision as the noblest of the senses. Despite the historical and epistemological distance, this idea seems one of the leading reasons for the sensorial and theoretical centrality accorded to vision in modern Western thought. Such 'visualism' is not only ideological, but is situated and embedded in specific organisational and technical practices. Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Walter Ong (1977) explored how communication technologies work as extensions of perceptual senses – 'extensions of man', as McLuhan put it. Far from being neutral, these extensions contribute to enhancing selectively a specific type of sensory perception and establishing a *ratio* among the senses. Such a ratio corresponds to a hierarchical ranking and, in this respect, argued McLuhan and Ong, the supremacy of vision is contextually linked to alphabet technology, particularly in its typographic period. It is the technology of the printed book that enables the vertical, detached kind of modern visual experience. Sense ratios also affect the type of boundaries that exist between different sensorial experiences, allowing for or, on the contrary, forbidding synaesthetic perceptions, in which there is a fusion of different senses or an exchange between them.

One major effect of the centrality of vision is the marginalisation of the other senses, regarded as epistemologically less noble. In general, the modern epistemology entails the triumph of the distal over the proximal senses. In the modern age, the distance senses of sight and hearing have marginalised the proximity senses of smell, touch and taste. Smell, in particular, becomes a problematic and embarrassing sense (Classen et al. 1994). This means that the sensorial ranking is not simply epistemic but imbued with normative consequences about which perceptions are acceptable and which are not. Similarly to as with smell, prominent observers have underlined the castigation and prohibition of touch (Stafford 1993; Cooper and Law 1995; Elkins 1999; Hetherington 2003; Mitchell 2005).

The relationship between sight and touch is particularly important, and we shall return to it in observing how vision is 'inhabited'. In general, while distal knowledge is dualist and abstract, presenting subject and object as clearly distinct and facing each other, proximal knowledge is one in which there is an intimacy and intricacy between objects and subjects in a specific context. Whereas the distal sense of sight is – as we have already said above with respect to the modernist imagination of vision – stable, detached, clean and efficient, the proximal senses are fluid, unstable and disordered. Consequently, while the former produces as final outcomes objectified data that are visualised in a representational format, the latter produces unfinished and processual performances.

As Flusser (2000) observed in the case of visual representations, to generate an image of something is an act of creating a distance: you have to step back from the object, you need to push it away in order to be able to see it, paint it or even describe it. Such inherent distance of the visual can also be used, as both Walter Benjamin and Paul Virilio did (see Manovich 2001: 175), to reverse the argument and conclude that touch is what is really brutal: visual distance is respectful (or 'auratic') *viv-à-vis* a sense of touch which is greedy and omnivorous and ultimately annihilates space into a 'negative horizon'.

One should not be misled by the idea of centrality of vision to believe that the sense of sight was always unanimously praised. On the contrary, the ambiguous moral nature of sight is evident in early modern European culture: sight can be pious, as in Jan Bruegel the Elder's *The Sense of Sight* (1617), but it can also be sinful, as in George Hakewill's treaty *The vanitie of the eye* (1608) (Clark 2007). In short, what spans the modern rationalist and idealist takes on vision is the distinction between the empirical phenomenon of sight and the disembodied, transcendental and normative scheme of vision.

Seeing, knocking, twinkling: Epistème of the visual

The notion of *idea* – from the Greek *idéa*, shape, aspect, whose root is the Indo-European *vid-*, from which the Latin *vidēo* also derives – is itself visual. And if *idea* is a vision, theory (from *theōréō*, I look) is literally a way of seeing. Correspondingly, in common parlance ‘blindness’ indicates refusal to acknowledge, ignorance, lack of receptivity and insensitiveness, while a ‘vision’ is a motivating and engaging plan of action. The first great Greek historian, Thucydides, based his method on ‘autopsy’, or eyewitness testimony. The notion, which in modern medicine becomes a very different practice, reminds us of the inherent credibility that is placed on visual evidence, including photographs and all sorts of technical diagrammatic records. Seeing and knowing are so close to each other that they constantly influence and interfere with each other, to the point that the boundary between perception and knowledge fluctuates and practically vanishes. Hannah Arendt (1958) insisted on the fact that the power of the new modern technological instruments like the telescope was eminently linked to their *immediately* perceptual nature, that is, to the fact that it could be easily overlooked that this seeing was also a knowing. So, how do these influences between seeing and knowing take place, and how are the boundaries between them drawn?

In the Kantian philosophical tradition, the nexus between seeing and understanding is explained through the intervention of a-priori schemata that we use to segment the *continuum* of sensory experience. Thus, there is a circularity between visual perception and knowledge: to perceive something *as* something – or, in Kantian terms, to subsume an object into a concept – we need prior knowledge about how properly to segment the phenomenal appearances. Such prior knowledge is a scheme, a procedural rule by which a-priori categories, which are pure forms of thought, are associated with sensible intuitions. Bridging a-priori transcendental categories – like space and time – and empirical a-posteriori intuitions, schemes work as operative definitions to identify objects in the visual field. In short, expectations guide perception by defining them. Following a classical explanation by Walter Lippmann (1922: §VI, 1), social ‘definitions’ are cultural products that enable the individual to ‘pick out’ relevant phenomena and meaningfully *see* them.

But this idyllic circularity has never satisfied the critics: as already recalled several times, the relationship between seeing and knowing is never settled (Berger et al. 1972), just like, one may be tempted to add, the never-settled relationship between images and words. Clearly, there

is a tricky correspondence here. For only in a specific modernist conception is knowledge represented as a wholly verbalised enterprise, to the detriment of non-verbal, non-formalised, implicit, tacit and 'mute' forms of knowledge and learning (Polanyi 1958; 1967). Conversely, as will be detailed in Chapter 2, seeing and looking are not simply concerned with images, but rather with aspects such as movement, coordination, body postures and gestures which are not entirely 'imageable' in the classic sense of the word (here, an important discussion on the status of the image opens up, which will be outlined only briefly below). Yet the link between, on the one hand, seeing and images and, on the other, knowing and language is a particularly insidious and persistent one. For instance, Foucault's split notions of *le visible* and *le lisible*, particularly as described by Deleuze (1986) – both are authors about whom I always speak with much affection, reverence and admiration – inherit much of the modernist conception (and, one may want to argue, paradoxically so, given that they are usually referred to as post-structuralist and sometimes even post-modernist thinkers – tags of which I am not particularly fond). Foucault's enterprise consisted in an immensely knowledgeable and illuminating analysis of discourses, which however remains sensorially deprived. Even when he analyses social practices – which are necessarily sensorial – he is in fact analysing their rationality, their diagram or *dispositif*, and when he undertakes the analysis of images, he does so only to claim the priority of discourse over a visible which remains wholly heterogeneous and can never be entirely reduced to it. So, if the *regard medicale* is a type of vision imbued with discourse, a gaze that actively illuminates things rather than simply perceiving and acknowledging their natural light or truth (Foucault 1963a), madness deploys its power in a state of 'pure vision', or mute vision, which medicine will constantly seek to 'make speak' (Foucault 1972). In this sense, Foucault (1977) regards Bentham's insistence on the visual set-up of the panopticon as 'archaic', while he individuates the specifically modern element in Bentham's thought in the latter's interest for a 'technical' organisation of power.

Such a dichotomic epistème, split between the visible and the articulable, might be one of the leading motifs running through twentieth-century French philosophy. Martin Jay's (1993) monumental *Downcast Eyes* traced a genealogy of the twentieth-century French intellectual tradition from avant-garde movements influenced by psychoanalysis to philosophers and writers such as Bataille, Leiris, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Althusser, Foucault, Debord, Barthes, Metz, Derrida, Irigaray, Lévinas, Lyotard and Virilio. This remarkable book has been

wrongly popularised as simply asserting that French philosophers have deposed vision from its traditional supremacy. However, Jay clearly addressed the existence of a *plurality* of scopic regimes, which he regarded as inherently contested. Most social theorists from the last century who dealt with vision cannot be said to simply 'against vision'. Much of this 'denigration' in fact amounts to a denunciation of the extent to which *le visible* has been dominated by and subsumed under *le lisible*. Foucault himself often made a distinction between 'bad' and 'dangerous', claiming that he was not simplistically saying that everything he studied – the medical gaze, surveillance, the apparatuses of security, power and so on – was bad, rather that there are inherent dangers in all those things. So, as far as the visual is concerned, there is no innocent eye. In other words, anti-ocularcentrism essentially consisted in the recognition – and the denunciation – that seeing is neither detached nor rational, or even efficient – that, with Foucault, it can be dangerous.

Such danger somehow recalls Michel Leiris' (1939) quest for the 'horn' in literature, the point when writing stops being a contemplative, detached activity and begins to entail a personal risk for the writer, just like the bull's horn for the toreador. There is a stream in twentieth-century French philosophy – whether we decide to call it antio-ocularcentric or not – that tackles the point where the apparently detached mechanism of vision becomes risky and turns into a *personal matter*. An important influence for this quest is Nietzsche's *Augenblick* – the blink of an eye or, as Shapiro (2003) more evocatively suggests, the 'twinkling of the eye' – the moment in vision that reveals the *Abgrund*, the lack of foundation and the abysmal nature of seeing, met by a wince: 'Into your eye I gazed recently, oh life! And then into the unfathomable I seemed to sink' (Nietzsche 1885: §II, 'The Dance Song'). Furthermore, the distinction between the visible and the invisible is here configured as topologically similar to that between the conscious and the unconscious. On this point, Bateson (1988) offered a naturalised explanation to the fact that the processes of perception are inaccessible and only its products are conscious: for all practical purposes, he argued, it is the products of vision that are necessary to the living creature. At the same time, any empirical epistemology cannot but take into account the unconscious nature of the process of image-making and the presuppositions which get built into the finished, conscious image.

Vision exists in a hyaline element; it is permeated by transparency. Transparency means that vision is not only vision *of* something but *through* something. At first, the transparent can be imagined as the

medium of vision; ultimately, however, there is no clear distinction between the medium and its object. Transparency entails constant superimposition and visual ambiguity – a fact that evokes the problem of *depth*, which will be addressed below. Depth *populates* the visual and turns the hyaline into the heterogeneous environment in which mediums and objects are cut across. Depth also raises a fundamentally *haptic* problem. From this perspective, J. J. Gibson's (1979) notion of *affordance* aims to capture the fact that the visible world is not a world of pure shapes, but rather a world of disposable and eliciting objects, which Gibson visually describes as 'surfaces'. Vision is not projected in a vacuum; it is not a *tabula rasa*. Rather, it is guided by affordances, possibilities of action and invitations to action within a given ecological niche (Alley 1985). The environment is filled with 'pick ups', qualities that make seizing and manipulating objects possible. Notably, social places are filled with such affordances. However, it is precisely on the basis of a phenomenologically inspired notion of environment that Tim Ingold (2005) has criticised Gibson's theory of visual affordances as 'surfaces'. Such surfaces (with sharp, well-defined edges) would once again 'depopulate' vision, flattening its lived depth. We shall soon return to the *problématique* of the *ecology of visibility* after having considered some basic cognitive and emotional aspects of vision as approached by physiologists and neurologists.

Visual cognitions

Physiologically speaking, vision is a highly complex sense apparatus. It has often been remarked that vision is a process that occurs without much conscious effort: our eyes seem able to find the information we need by themselves. The fact that seeing appears an effortless activity might be one of the reasons for the old philosophical credo that the eyes simply 'mirror' the world. Neurologists, however, have revealed that a lot of hard work is done by the brain to make sense of visual data and guarantee a seamless visual experience. The sense of sight ranks among the most studied topics in the history of medicine (Goodale and Milner 2004). The very process of constructing the retinal image is a discontinuous and active process, based on constant eye movement, the 'saccades', and a continual sampling through the redirection of the gaze (Findlay and Gilchrist 2003). Cortical research and optical research on eye movements, grounded in biology and neurophysiology (Land and Tatler 2009), have also contributed prominently to the study of visual cognition.

Physiologists and neurologists have found that the visual system is not univocal but is in fact at least dual. There is no single visual system, but different visual *systems* with very different computational modes. Two major neural streams related to the visual cortex V1 have been identified as the 'ventral' and the 'dorsal' (Ungerleider and Mishkin 1982; Mishkin et al. 1983). The former stream has also been described, in a simplified way, as 'vision-for-perception', the latter as 'vision-for-action'. The study of visual pathologies confirms this distinction. Agnosia and ataxia are two different visual disturbances: while the former consists of the incapacity to perceive forms and shapes (damage to the perceptual system), the latter corresponds to the incapacity of coordinating movements (damage to the visuomotor system).

The two visual systems operate at different time scales, with fundamentally different metrics and different relationships to the proper body. The vision-for-action neural stream works in real time and has almost no memory; its philosophy has been described as a 'use it, or lose it' one (Goodale and Milner 2004: 82). In contrast, the vision-for-perception neural stream works on a much longer time scale, which is essential to allow visual recognition of objects and people. The frame of reference, too, is different, given that vision-for-action is scene-based, or impersonal, while vision-for-perception is strongly egocentric and embodied. Tightly connected to this is the fact that vision-for-action works with absolute sizes rather than the relative sizes used by vision-for-perception. For instance, we can easily recognise a cup in a photograph even if it is out of scale, that is, larger or smaller than life, but while looking at the picture we inhibit our visuomotor system, which would be disorientated if we had to grasp the represented image as a real cup.

This distinction between the two visual systems proposed by neuroscientists is interestingly reminiscent of George Herbert Mead's (1959[1934]) distinction – inspired by William James' pragmatism – between I and me, the Self as an individual agent endowed with volition (in today's fashionable terminology, 'agency') and as a socialised subject created by the generalised other. In its absolutism, vision-for-action seems to be strongly tied to an agentic 'I', whereas vision-for-perception seems to be a type of vision that is intrinsically socialised and relativises the agent into a 'me'. More cogently, in the context we are discussing, the modernist imagination of vision is clearly moulded upon the ventral stream, or vision-for-perception. Hence, the 'perspectivalist' qualification of seeing as detached and unobtrusive ensues. In contrast,

the dorsal stream, vision-for-action, which is not representational and remains in large part unconscious, represents that dark side of vision that fascinated anti-oculocentric theorists and which the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty sought to rehabilitate.

Cortical research has also illuminated the fact that far from being a univocal activity, visual processing in the brain involves differentiated strategies of neural organisation, such as population coding, functional localisation, parallel processing, hierarchical processing and association. This gives just a hint of the complexity of the physiological processes at stake. Of comparable, and complementary, importance is the study of eye movements and categorisation. Neuroscientist Michael Land (Land 2009; Land and Tatler 2009) has conducted interesting research on a variety of ordinary activities, including cooking, driving and playing instruments. Recording the eyes' positions of fixation during these tasks, he has revealed that eye movements are inextricably interwoven with knowledge of the situation that is being dealt with. Land describes action sequences as script-based and divided into a series of 'object-related visual actions'.

Object-related visual actions are composed of a series of small saccades, while the shift from one visual action to the next entails larger saccades. So, while the visual experience is smooth for the subject, detailed recordings of people carrying out normal activities in natural contexts show that single fixations of the eyes through the saccades have identifiable functions, which are understandable only as parts of the whole action performed. Single glances are involved specifically in locating, directing, guiding and checking objects and spaces that are being operated upon. While in general the gaze is directed to where information is to be extracted, and vision monitors the ongoing manipulation, the eyes often anticipate the next bodily movements in the script. The gaze moves on to the next object or to the next spot of action about half a second *before* the manual activity on the first object is complete. Object-related visual actions are carried out sequentially and organised in larger blocs or units. For instance, in the case of tea-making, these units are 'find the kettle', 'transport to sink', and so on (Land 2009: 53–54). An important observation concerns interferences and marginal objects. Land has found that the objects that are irrelevant to the action that is being performed are hardly ever looked at. This fact lends support to the idea that the gaze system, in its collaboration with the visual and the motor systems, is guided by schemas in a top-down way. Vision is active in the sense that it does not simply rely

on the salience of what it encounters empirically, but rather follows the meaning of the action into which it is inserted.

Far from being a single, uniform activity, human vision can be said to be *a multiplicity*. Indeed, it involves a multiplicity of visual neural streams, a multiplicity of types of neural processing of stimuli and a multiplicity of types of eye movement.

Inhabiting vision

Let me put my microscope aside for the moment. Whatever anyone may say, to write with one's eye focused on the object glass, even with the aid of a camera lucida, really is tiring for the vision. Grown unused to looking in unison, my two eyes have to oscillate their sensations slightly before they can work as a pair once more. A screw thread behind my forehead is unwinding blindly to readjust the focus: the smallest object I look at appears to be of enormous proportions, a water jug and an inkwell remind me of Notre Dame and the Morgue. I have the impression of seeing the hand I am writing with in exaggerated close-up and my pen is a spike of fog. (Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*)

In retrospect, one can appreciate the whole philosophical debate on primary and secondary qualities that spans seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy as a failed attempt – or a series of failed attempts – to force such multiplicity into a single model of vision. In Descartes, who as noted above is commonly regarded as the father of the specifically modern model of vision, one finds – as in many of his contemporaries – a celebration of sight as the noblest and the most informative sense. Yet in the early modern period the foundation of vision is troubled by a paradox: on the one hand, vision is constituted as a 'technical' process – recall that Descartes approaches the physiology of the eye through a parallel with the camera lucida – while on the other, its ideal model is moulded upon intellectual apprehension. In this sense, the articulation of seeing and knowing becomes circular. Descartes conceded that human vision can be deceived: it is well known that proportions of shapes and hues of colour are easily mistaken at a distance and there are a number of quite impressive optical tricks that can easily be arranged. But what is actually being tricked, he claimed, is not so much the eyes, but rather the relationship between the visual system and the beliefs

that ensue from vision. It is not the senses per se that err, but judgement about sensorial experience. So, it is the correct relationship that is to be ascertained. But, in turn, who is in charge of making the correction: reason or the senses?

The Cartesian theorisation of vision cannot be understood apart from Descartes' confrontation with empirical and sceptical philosophy. Vision and more generally, sensory experience was of course pivotal for empiricists, but the latter's position had a series of weaknesses and shortcomings that were mercilessly pointed out by the sceptics, who had long argued that all the senses are deceptive. Ancient philosophical scepticism, or Pyrrhonism, reappeared in Europe in the second half of the sixteenth century and until the eighteenth continued to challenge and trouble deeply the theory of knowledge. This scepticism amounted to a denial that the senses could grant any form of true, veritable and founded knowledge (*epistème*). The conditions for such knowledge, the sceptics argued, can never be met, and the inherent unreliability of sensory experience can lead only to the *epoché*, or suspension of judgement on truth conditions. As far as vision is concerned, it is precisely the unsettled relation between seeing and knowing that was attacked by the sceptics in a systematic way, in order to show that *any* inference from seeing to knowing was intrinsically fallacious and thus should have been rejected as mere 'dogmatism'. Descartes' method is a direct response to the challenges advanced by scepticism, based on the rearticulation of the relationship between seeing and knowing through a powerful rational theoretical model that informs the description sensorial experience. Similarly, with his telescope experiments, Galileo created a new, initially counterintuitive, way of seeing that was instrumental in supporting his astronomical theory (Feyerabend 1978).

However, the epistemological stake of such a potentially endless debate changes dramatically when the idea of life and the *lived experience* of the subject appears on the scene of the visible. Foucault's attempt to distinguish between the classical (mid-seventeenth to late eighteenth century) and the modern *epistème* (from the early nineteenth century on, that is, as the product of the Enlightenment, with the philosophical currents of naturalism and positivism) is precisely related to the appearance of 'man' as the subject and, at the same time, the object of vision in a new way. Regardless of the periodisation we decide to adopt, it is clear that during the modern age a new dimension of vision opens up – one which was not envisaged by the theory of knowledge and which points to the question of life and/as existence.

The idea that our visual horizon is also our existential horizon can be found for instance in Nietzsche (1881). But it is certainly phenomenology which insisted most clearly that we *inhabit* our vision, as well as more generally our living body (*Leib*). We are not seeing subjects vis-à-vis seen objects, rather we are present in our lifeworld, through an unmistakable sense of 'being there' (*praesentia*). We are placed – maybe even 'emplaced' – in continuity with the world itself. The enigma, observed Merleau-Ponty (1964a), is the fact that our most intimate *topia*, that most natural localisation which is our body, is at the same time *seeing* and *visible*. Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty (1964b) complements this thought with the remark that the *invisible* is not simply something visible that is contingently out of sight. Rather, the invisible is what it is *here without* being an object. The invisible is intrinsic to the visible; it is what makes the visible possible.

The invisible blind spot of the eye, which we have introduced above as the first of the paradoxes of vision, is simultaneously what makes it possible for the eye to see the rest of the world. This means that the blind spot, the invisible, is what *physically* connects the subject-observer to the object-observed and determines their complicity, their ontological continuity. Visibility, as we shall explore more thoroughly in Chapter 2, is the field of such continuity, the open field and the common ground between the *percipiens* and the *perceptum*. The notion of the 'flesh of the world' is developed by Merleau-Ponty precisely to address this openness of the lived, inhabited vision. The flesh is the common texture of the seeing body and the visible world conceived of as inseparable, an inseparability which corresponds to an actual 'opening of the world'. Phenomenology thus opens the way towards a model of vision which is proximal rather than distal and populated 'in depth' with emotions, shocks and, more broadly, social relationships.

Visual emotions, wonders and pleasures

Next to the official Western philosophical tradition and its preoccupation with the epistème of the visual, and often interwoven with it, the popular, magical and irrational approach to the visual has always persisted. Such a perspective leaves scope for fantasy, imagery, illusion, art, visual delusion and all sorts of *scopophiliai*. Here, vision reveals itself as a site of wonder; it includes wonders, marvels and tricks and all those activities, whether religious or profane, that hint at the *spectacular* dimension of the visible. Every form of halted, suspended or severed view is, to some extent, 'spectacular'.

Psychologists, sociologists and cultural critics know that there is a powerful emotional charge in the gaze, which breeds positive as well as negative feelings. Both pleasure and trauma are ubiquitous possibilities of vision, sometimes coexisting side by side and even intermingling with each other (Saltzman and Rosenberg 2006). The human body is the site where the emotionality of vision reaches the utmost intensity. On the one hand, there is a tendency to seek pleasure through the visual objectification – and commodification – of the body while on the other, a whole series of fundamental notions concerning honour, dignity and respect are designed to resist such objectification. The body itself is the field of such tensions. An essentially heterogeneous vision of the body is present in many human cultures, according to which the body is divided both in extension and depth into visible and invisible zones and layers, among which clear, fateful boundaries are established. In contrast to this conception there arises an essentially homogeneous vision, heralded by the modern medical gaze, according to which the body is an entirely mechanical and visible matter, the *fabrica humani corporis* of the anatomist. The Durkheimian distinction between the spheres of the sacred and the profane also speaks to the ambiguous location of the body between the two social and political domains of the public and the private, of the visible and the invisible. In Chapter 5 we shall delve into how visibility regimes are constitutive of the domain of the public and how bodies enter this domain.

Almost paradigmatic of bodily visual relationships is the taboo associated with the vision of the genitals, particularly female genitals (as we know, Georges Bataille reflected on the ‘impossibility’ of looking at genitals – like looking at the Sun and the death). Direct sexual desire is not, however, the only driving factor in voyeurism. The boundaries between the *will to knowledge* and morbid fascination can be difficult to establish, as the case of the corpse makes sufficiently clear. On the one hand, the exploration of human anatomy through autopsy has been fundamental to building the modern medical knowledge of the body; on the other hand, however, there are always deep psychological motives quite apart from knowledge that push people, professionals and otherwise, to seek the sight of a corpse and more, to seek horrific sights in general (González-Crussi 2006). What repels also attracts, and what is forbidden does so to an even higher degree.

In a similar way, the modern spectacle of the execution, not certainly inaugurated by but unmistakably associated with Dr Guillotin’s

creation (designed, as is widely known since Foucault's analysis, to achieve a less barbaric and more efficient infliction of death), raises *inter alia* the problematic issue of the curious and craving crowds that push at executions (Spierenburg 1984). Looking back to the ancient and early modern period, the modern, 'civilised' observer (in Norbert Elias' sense of the term) is worried or even shocked by such a lust for the vision of the body of the condemned, and denounces it as barbaric. On closer scrutiny, however, one realises that the same psychological and sociological mechanisms are still at work nowadays, disguised in a variety of ways. How many would throng to an 'uncivilised' public execution today? Vision and violence have a long, intertwined history.

The role of the body at the interplay of vision and desire becomes clear in those 'crepuscular' phenomena which include dreams, nightmares (*incubi*), sleepwalking, hallucinations, melancholy, ecstasy, hypnosis, and so on. To these phenomena there corresponds a class of professionals who specialise in 'dealing' with them. The list opens up with saints, witches, magicians, jugglers, mediums and, through hypnotists, prolongs to psychologists and psychoanalysts. Leiris' 'horn' is clearly present in these visual experiences and their peculiar effects. Apart from the obvious equivalence between blinding and castration (and self-blinding as self-castration in Oedipus' case), in Freud's (1919) essay on *Das Unheimliche*, or *The Uncanny*, one finds a classic and still fascinating drawing out of phenomena which, while not causing outright panic or fear, are strangely disquieting. Notably, the idea of being robbed of one's eyes is treated by Freud as paradigmatic of the uncanny. Freud describes the uncanny as the hint or partial revelation of what is *heimlich* (literally concealed, furtive and secret), that is, of a taboo. Something that should have remained secret (unconscious), something which was repressed, somehow resurfaces, unexpectedly presenting itself to consciousness. The uncanny, in a sense, is what occurs when we see more than what we should know. Jacques Derrida's (1994) notion of spectrality can be regarded as a sort of reprise on the uncanny. The spectral, for Derrida, is not simply the invisible or the spiritual. Neither soul nor body, but both at the same time, the spectral is a 'supernatural' and paradoxical phenomenon located in between visibility and invisibility. The spectre appears but is hollow, 'departed' in its appearance; it watches but is actually an invisible which sees, a looming 'presence'. Spectral phenomena, suggests Derrida, are found wherever there is seeing.

Visual shocks and the cultural grammar of vision

The third discourse of Descartes' *Dioptrique* (1637), entitled 'On the eye', begins rather straightforwardly: 'If it were possible to cut an eye in two ...'. The idea is later expanded in the famous passage where the philosopher describes the experiment of taking out the eye of a freshly dead man, cutting it in two, and discovering 'with admiration and pleasure' the formation of the retinal image. It is curious to find, a few centuries later, similar adventures with eyes described by the most radical of Jay's anti-ocularcentrics, Georges Bataille – albeit with a stronger emphasis on the element of pleasure (and disgust) than that of admiration. Far from being a coincidence, this unsettling similarity between Descartes' and Bataille's adventures of the eye suggests that the ocularcentric and the anti-ocularcentric positions may be more similar than expected: they are two encounters with the same *problématique* that concerns the nature of vision in social life.

In his preface to Bataille, Foucault (1963b: 272) writes that the eye, this 'small white globe closed upon its own night', is the literal figure of transgression. In Bataille's novels, the violent exorbitation (i.e., the extraction of the eye from its cranial orbit) and the exposure of the empty orbit correspond precisely to this operation of penetrating the hyaline, breaking the illusion of transparency, dethroning the sovereign subject. Transgression, Foucault observes, only makes sense in relation to given limits, and the eye, which is a lamp and a well at the same time, is the exact point in which limits become embodied and are always on the verge of being transgressed.

The transgressive or excessive nature of seeing, which is so emphasised in Bataille's novels (to the point that it becomes unwittingly comic) can be found in a wide range of social intercourses. Biologically and ecologically speaking, the human being is both predator and prey, and its visual experience mirrors this deep-seated ambiguity. In violent situations, reciprocal visual contact becomes crucial (Collins 2008): conflicts produce situations in which gazes are literally turned into shocks.

Another important source of visual shocks has to do with deformity, such as cases of malformations and deviations from 'normal appearances' which are found in 'human monsters' (all quotation marks are due, thanks to Canguilhem). David Lynch's film *The Elephant Man* is one perfect illustration of Goffman's (1963a) notion of stigma, that is, a physical sign that is taken to flag a negative moral characteristic. Goffman insists that stigmatisation links some visible difference (some 'ugliness' or deformity) to the moral dimension (shame). Due to the

stigma, the 'face' (Goffman 1969) of the stigmatised, which represents its moral dimension and its very 'sacrality' as a person, is compromised. Consequently, the physical (but also the moral) monster suffers from an excessive visibility: *monstrum* in Latin is what is shown, exposed to sight. As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2006) has observed, the stigma freezes vision into a *stare*. The encounter with the 'monster' is a visual experience in which astonishment and horror halt the viewer in staring at the viewed. The subsequent visual flight of the viewer to look away from the 'monster' inflicts shame on both. Discussing some cases of facial disfigurement, Garland-Thomson observes how the starees adopt a series of strategies in order to save the ordinary morality of the situation. Notably, under ordinary circumstances what has to be saved is not so much the (moral) face of the staree, but that of the starrer. The stigma produces an encounter in which the rules of social interaction are put under strain. Consequently, reparation is required to save sociality and its basic requirements.

Functional vision, the type of rational distal vision 'under control' described by modern philosophy, is not always easily set apart from spectacular vision and its tendency towards excess (of pleasure as well as of fear and revulsion). Here the work of some important contemporary authors has drawn attention to the fact that the grammar of vision is inherently cultural (Foster 1988; Jenks 1995; Mirzoeff 1998; Mirzoeff 2006). From this point of view, it can be observed that the philosophical foundation of the modern visual epistémé constitutes vision as a *privilege*. Vision is a social privilege articulated in terms of class, race and gender. From Baudelaire's *flâneur*, that 'prince everywhere in possession of his incognito' strolling through the city, to Thomas Carlyle's 'hero' endowed with the capacity of 'visualising' world history and its destiny, in the mid-nineteenth century the notion of the subject of vision arises as an essentially elitist one.

The privilege of vision is not only connected to the observer's position but also to access to a specific cultural competence in seeing. Bryson (1988: 92) proposed an analogy between vision and language: just like the language I speak predates me and my linguistic experience, so visual discourses and codes predate my visual experience. Interestingly, the same paradoxes of private language outlined by Wittgenstein (1953) are replicated in the case of visuality: can there be something like a 'private visual experience'? Visuality spans the lived visual experience and more structural social relations, mediated by the technologies that enable the process of visualisation. As Foster (1988: ix) first put it, visuality comprises the physical act of seeing, the current visual technologies

and the discursive formations that articulate vision. Mirzoeff (1998: 13), in particular, has insisted on the properly technological dimension of visuality, to which we shall soon return.

Vision as/in interaction

While the ancient theory of the eye as an active organ emitting particles has been replaced by modern optics, which as we have seen sharply separates the senses of sight and touch, the idea that eyes are points of energy concentration persists through the centuries in both popular beliefs about the evil eye and medical practices such as hypnotism and, through it, psychoanalysis – albeit obviously in a disembodied way. But precisely because in the modern imagination sight allows for no direct contact between the percipiens and the perceptum, the explanation of the reaction to the other's gaze that the modern theory of vision allows is far from complete or even sufficient. The gaze is a critical modulator of social interaction. For instance, in a beautiful short essay Abraham Moles (1984) has described everyday life in a community from the point of view of its 'space of gazes'. Walking in the street, looking from the window, trading, looking after one's children or meeting a friend are all cases in which eye-to-eye contact modulates the social encounter. Interestingly, physiologists and psychologists are increasingly realising that a rich model of vision needs to include social and emotional factors. For instance, Elaine Fox (2002; 2005) has analysed the specific anxiety that derives from a delayed disengagement of the gaze. Similar experiments suggest the immediately *affective* nature of the gaze and its profoundly territorial dynamic. The gaze is not simply *symptomatic* of the intentions people have when they begin an interaction, but rather *constitutive* of the meaning the interaction assumes for those engaged in it.

It has been observed by ethologists and neurologists alike that all social animals place great importance on the perception and recognition of the faces of their conspecifics (i.e., members of the same species). In many cases, social attention is mediated through gaze perception. The classical sociologist Georg Simmel made compelling observations about this. In his excursus on the sociology of the senses (Simmel 1969[1908]), he investigated the 'strictly sociological function' of the eye, specifically the *reciprocal contact* between gazes. The symmetrical immediateness of eye-to-eye contact – a mutual intervisibility which exists only as long as it is *immediate* – is for Simmel the most fundamental type of human interaction, for it yields an understanding of

the other which is not filtered by general categories but is instead truly individual and singular. This presentation is grounded on the reciprocal visual presence of each component in the interaction.

Later, the social phenomenologist Alfred Schütz (1967[1932]: §4) distinguished between *observation* and *relation*, on the grounds that only in the latter does a mutual commitment between the interacting subjects come about (Merleau-Ponty termed this characteristic 'reversibility'). Here again we find an attempt to account for the territorialising effect of the relation of intervisibility in social interaction. Clearly, what Schütz called 'observation' corresponds to the idealised perspectival take on vision we have described earlier and which, as we have seen, is hardly detachable from its haptic counterpart. For his part, Erving Goffman described the subtle ways in which relationships of intervisibility take shape in rituals of self-presentation (Goffman 1959). In particular, behaviour in public places (Goffman 1963b) is always subject to, and conducted through, practices for the reciprocal management of reciprocal visibility among social actors. Similarly, 'face work' (Goffman 1967) requires the positive recognition and respect of the other's aspect and countenance, through which one is ratified as a legitimate participant in a situation. Notably, here we also appreciate that visibility is not homogeneous; rather, it concerns thresholds. In this sense, the 'normal appearance' (Goffman 1971) of a social setting corresponds to its invisibility. In the absence of alarm signals, the setting is transparent to the observer. In other words, the normal is neither noticed nor thematised; on the contrary, it is the anomalous which is marked and transposed to a different register of visibility.

Analysis of the functions performed by reciprocal gaze, in order to coordinate joint cognitive or expressive work with the others, has been conducted by researchers in the field of non-verbal communication, notably by Adam Kendon (1967; 1990) and David Sudnow (1972), and this continued sociologically a line of inquiry already begun by social psychologists (Argyle and Cook 1976). For these scholars, 'seeing-at-a-glance' establishes the temporal synchronisation (timing) of interpersonal action. Glances are interactive phenomena for the joint production of normal contexts. For Kendon, who inaugurated the study of how people look at each other during conversations, reciprocal gaze signals an act of 'taking into consideration' which is determined as follows: the duration of a gaze is directly proportional to the effort spent on the interaction but inversely proportional to the actors' degree of emotional commitment. Because gaze management is deeply imbued with commitment, it can be a highly delicate undertaking, as evidenced

when gaze is perceived as a territorial challenge or as an affront to honour, and gaze aversion phenomena occur.

Kendon experimentally formed dyads of interacting people and recorded their staring behaviour. All sorts of intervening variables were considered, including age, sex, degree of acquaintance, duration of looks, dominance position and so on. Kendon wanted to show that looking and averting the gaze are elements that synchronise the timing of interaction. However, the intervening variables are so many that, beyond some general observations – direct eye contacts are brief and people look more when they listen than when they speak – no specific constant correlation could be discovered (Rutter 1984). Only general trends can be highlighted, but exceptions are always possible.

Visual interaction is also modulated by a wide variety of factors. Consider for instance the uniform as a device that transforms a person into something more than a contingent human being. For instance, a police uniform represents a powerful interactional device which transforms a contingent human being into a 'representative of the authorities'. Patricia Paperman (2003) has discussed how the Metro police in Paris use the visibility of their uniforms both to provoke 'revealing' reactions in suspects, and to check the social meaning – and, essentially, the impression of legitimacy – which passers-by attribute to the overt physical action – at times violent – taken by the police against individuals apparently doing nothing. The uniform's visibility therefore serves to make the occurrence of any potentially illegal situation visible not only to the interacting parties but to all those present.

In general, we know that mutual glance is proportional to engagement within a situation. Yet, for action coordination to occur, in many instances *not looking* at each other it is as essential as looking: for instance, when crossing the road, the pedestrian looks at the car driver to make sure that her presence is noticed and her intentions understood, but subsequently she must avert her gaze, trusting that the driver in question will slow down and halt to let her pass. Averting the gaze becomes mandatory in the mechanism of civil inattention (Goffman 1959), which again highlights the moral dimension of human conduct as it materialises in mutual visibility relationships: there are appropriate and inappropriate staring behaviours. Physicians, surgeons and dentists often find themselves in a condition in which they have to manipulate the body of their patients as if they were objects: in these cases a series of modulations is put in place to 'bracket' the stage in which the patient is reduced to its mere flesh and restored to a ratified social member afterwards. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of looking or not looking

straight at each other. In many cases – for instance the use of mirrors in a dance school – mediated looks are also used abundantly to coordinate action visually within a group. In short, mutual visibility management corresponds to a management of the *foci* of attention in a social situation. It is in this way that vision is bound up with the constitution of the subject.

Subject-making vision: Recognition and control

The relationship of looking at each other constitutes the site of mutual recognition, misrecognition or denial of recognition of the other – in short, the site where we constitute ourselves as ‘subjects’. Vision is subject-making: something like a ‘subject’ is born only through the creation and development of the visibility relationship itself. While such visibility is not simply visual, vision still occupies a crucial role in it. Notably, also, there is no linear progression in this relationship: it is rather a matter of thresholds and points of reversal. We need visual attention to get the social recognition we seek, but its intensity, for instance in staring, can be intrusive and disturbing. Similarly, visual contact helps to coordinate action with others, but in many cases such coordination also involves supervision and control, that is, the exercise of power. Looking inherently entails power, whereby the viewer asserts himself as ‘ontologically’ superior to the viewed.

The gaze can be employed to direct and impose conduct. Inmates in the panoptic establishment, knowing that they cannot escape surveillance, consciously adapt their behaviour, interiorising certain forms of conduct. Consciousness of being observed plays a crucial role in the process. The guard’s gaze may not be continuous, but its effects are. It is the state of continuous visual consciousness that matters: in this sense, Bentham warned that only sane people should be incarcerated because mad people and minors would not be affected by the gaze of the guard. The subject-making potential of vision is deployed by Bentham through the imagination of a field of positions and relations in which subjects are placed and taken. In other words, the dream of an ‘automatic functioning of power’ through panoptic visibility is based, not only on the asymmetry of looks, but also on its precise hierarchical organisation. Given that the inspector can in turn be subject to inspection, the whole diagram curiously resembles the image of the legal system elaborated by the Kantian philosopher of law Hans Kelsen. Kelsen (1934) described law as a pyramid-like architecture, a *Stufenbau*, or multilayered construction, in which the source of legality of each layer is drawn from

the superior layers and the highest level is presupposed by the whole system. Arguably, it is in this sense that Foucault calls 'archaising' Bentham's reliance on vision as a conforming mechanism, and specifically 'modern' his description of a whole technological configuration of power (the logic of the visibility diagram).

The staree and the those under surveillance are 'objectified'. Stripping a human being naked has always been one of the classic and most powerful ways of humiliating and inflicting violence. But if the viewed are turned into objects, what is the role of objects as such in the visual experience? As we asked at the beginning of this chapter, can they ever 'look back'? Here, we encounter a particularly important notion, that of 'aura'. To confer an aura on an object, Walter Benjamin (1939) first observed in his essay on *Baudelaire's Motifs*, means in a certain sense to endow it with the capacity to stare back. The aura is thus like a look lent to the object or variously bestowed on it. This 'borrowed gaze' – 'now objects perceive me', wrote Paul Klee in his notebook *The Thinking Eye* – entails a form of sacralisation of the object. The auratic object is a *symptomatic* object that embodies a dialectics of distance and proximity; it is an object that stretches toward us and touches us. It is endowed with its specific rhythm, an *anadyomenic tide* of contact and loss (Didi-Huberman 1992), a pulsation.

Gendered and racialised view

She had not recollected the nickel for the coffee. She would have to do so, unless I left it on the table and walked out. But I wasn't going to walk out. A half hour passed. When she hurried to the bar for more beer, she no longer waited at the rail in plain sight. She walked around to the back of the bar. She didn't look at me anymore, but I knew she knew I watched her. (John Fante, *Ask the Dust*)

It is no mystery that the asymmetry between seeing and being seen is deeply imbued with a sexual component. In Western society, as in many traditional societies, it is typically the male who watches, while it is the female who is watched. Obviously present in this mechanism is a form of control, domination and hypocrisy. The dominant visual representation of the woman is contrived to imply that the woman is always conscious of her being looked at, and that the impersonal gaze of the observer is in fact a masculine gaze (Mulvey 1975; 1989). Gendered vision has long been used as a power device for the domination of

women (Berger et al. 1972; Hollander 1980; Dyer 1992[1982]; Cohan and Hark 1993; Doy 1995) and can be said to form a 'matrix of vision' (Farough 2006). Seduction is a social relation that unfolds wholly within this sexualised dimension of visibility. Sight is a sense that can violently provoke lust, and visuality is often imbued with voyeurism. Visual culture, from the history of the art to advertising, is replete with examples of visual attraction which is implicitly or expressly erotic and sexual.

The counterpart of the sociotype of the monster is the *exemplum*, or *model*, who incarnates not only an idealised beauty but also essentially a role model and a visibility diagram. It has been observed by critical authors that while female models avert their eyes, expressing modesty and submission, male models' looks are represented as dominant and fierce. Women, it is implied, are (should be) passive, men active. In most cases, while not looking back, the female model does so in a way that suggests that she is conscious of the presence of the beholder. It is not simply the presence or absence of the gaze that matters, but also the kind of look: the female model's gaze, when it becomes direct, always suggests invitation and complicity.

Such schemes are grossly stereotypical and advertisers have massively exploited them. More poetically, in *À la recherche du temps perdu* Marcel Proust glosses his impression of a beautiful stranger whose gaze momentarily met his own in the city as 'the gods of Olympus have descended to the streets'. One finds here one of the loftiest celebrations of modern seduction, which is essentially impersonal in nature. Nor is this feeling necessarily only Western. In Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), one of the bandits remembers the appearance of the wife of the samurai, whom he will end up assaulting: 'A glimpse and she was gone: I thought she was a goddess'. In Fante's quote above, the duration of the gaze is embarrassingly prolonged.

With race, and collective identities in general, the issue becomes even more complex because, while minority group members are often forbidden to look back, they are not so much stared at as rendered invisible. Once again, the issue here broadens from merely a visual one to a more complex one that concerns the articulation of a social field of visibilities. But, even confining ourselves for the moment to the visual side of the matter, what is the *awareness of being observed*? The literary descriptions of men watching women highlight a phenomenon of extraordinary importance for those interested in studying how visibility constitutes itself. Only apparently is watching active, and being watched passive. In fact, at present the social and psychological sciences do not have the tools with which thoroughly to explain how awareness

of being observed unfolds. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological notion of *chair du monde* seems to entail a more promising way, to which we shall return in Chapter 2.

Imitations

The word 'image' shares the same roots as *imitor*, *-āri*, to imitate. As such, the etymology seems to endorse the Platonic theory of visible things as copies of ideas, against which twentieth-century phenomenology has developed its philosophical programme. But what is the place of images in the inhabited vision and the experience of seeing we have outlined so far? Semiotologists taught us that images are not flat but layered. They enclose various levels of meaning, a fact to which Roland Barthes (1977) referred as a 'floating chain of signifieds'. The same image, for instance the portrait of a powerful person, can be used to convey deeply different meanings, ranging from unconditional faith to farce and caricature. Photography provides a particularly pregnant illustration because in it the referent seems naturally to 'adhere' to its image. In his book on photography, Barthes (1980) identified the central tension within the photographic image through the notions of *studium* and *punctum*. While the *studium* represents the background (technical, cultural, etc.) knowledge that is inscribed in the picture, the *punctum* is the immediate and singular event which constitutes the haptic power of the image, its capacity to shock and elicit reaction. In other words, the *punctum* is the capacity of the image to act directly upon the viewers – to reach out and take them away, so to speak.

This tension within the image between a direct sensible presence and an inscribed, embedded discourse is created by a complex *temporality*. On the one hand, the image presents itself as here-and-now, it is perceived immediately and as immediately belonging to the present, yet on the other, it also prolongs and stretches towards other places and times, bringing us somewhere else, into a different spatiotemporal dimension. It is perhaps in this sense that Benjamin described the image as an 'immobilised dialectics' (*Dialektik im Stillstand*). Susan Sontag (1977) reflected on a similar aspect describing photographs' 'selective transparency'. The photograph always oscillates between its appearance as a document and its power-producing mechanism which works through interpretation. Because of its objectifying, even predatory side, the photograph, Sontag suggested, became an ideal tool of control, as its use in police offices and police archives reminds us (see also Gilardi 2003). But just as the photograph-as-document claims to 'unmask the world'

in a sort of modern quest for truth, it is also always taken as the apparently opposite pole, making the world beautiful. 'Beauty is truth, truth is beauty', Keats – the romantic poet – wrote. More recently, in her book on the representation of pain, Sontag (2003) stresses that the history of documentary photography and photojournalism – where the ideal of 'objectivity' would be most expected – has been in fact since its inception a history of fakes, and several among the most famous war photographs are *mises en scène* or at least still dubious shots. This reminds us of the deep interweavings between *le visible* and *le lisible*.

Visual commodification is an omnipresent tendency in images. In the case of cinema, only few great directors – who Deleuze (1983) regarded as 'thinkers by images' – were capable of leaving behind verbalised, pre-interpreted images and proceeded resolutely towards 'pure' images. The image, Jean-Luc Godard once said, will only come in the time of resurrection. From their earliest stage, modern visual arts were intertwined and often indistinguishable from commodities on display (Foster 2002). These are dirty images. But perhaps they are the same image seen from its two opposite sides. These two opposite poles of the image coexist in a complex temporal *décalage*. In this respect, Didi-Huberman's (2003) reflection on the four pictures of the Birkenau crematorium taken by members of the *Sonderkommando* in August 1944 is extremely important. While accepting that no naïve realism can be applied to photographs, or even images in general, Didi-Huberman stresses how these four pictures, taken in such an extreme situation, *are* documents: they are 'images notwithstanding' (*malgré tout*). Because the extermination of memory was part of the extermination itself, these photographs exist at the point of convergence between two 'impossibilities', but clearly distinct from both of them: the close disappearance of the witness, and the 'unimageability' of the testimony. The survival of the four images from Birkenau refutes these two impossibilities which threaten to swallow them and restores to us the document-image: the existence of these images, Didi-Huberman writes, refutes the claim of the impossibility of imagining what happened.

Once we have the documents, though, we still need the right eyes to watch them.

The visual and the visible

Foster's (1988) attempt to 'socialise vision' through the notion of visuality approximates the notion of visibility as it will be conceptualised in this book. The point, as already stated above, is that the field of the

visible is not equivalent to that of the simply visual. The visible can be better understood as an *extension* or *prolongation* of the visual.

'Prolongations' are connections among ontologically heterogeneous elements comprised within a composite mechanism or an encompassing dynamic. Such a dynamic is neither evolutionary nor systemic. In the work of Elias Canetti (1960), one can find a similar relationship between the mass and the individual: the individual is a prolongation of the mass, or what remains when the 'thriving' mass withdraws and an individuated social entity appears. Similarly, Canetti describes how climbing prolongs into trading, jaws into prison, and excrement into morality. These relations should not be misunderstood as implying a notion of evolution: the individual is not better than the mass, and trading is not a refined version of climbing. Rather, these activities remain distinct but they share specifically topological and 'haptic' similarities. More recent sociological approaches like actor-network theory (ANT) move in a similar direction by stressing the continuity *cum* ontological heterogeneity of the related items, doing so from a perspective which is neither systemic nor evolutionist. From this point of view, prolongation has similarities with what Latour (1993[1991]) used to call 'mediation work' or, elsewhere, '*factiche*' and 'collective of beings'.

Just as one can evidence a visual dimension in the media, so one can show a dimension of visibility in visual interaction. Some scholars of visual culture have emphasised this aspect by adopting a markedly relational approach to the visual. Mirzoeff (1999: 13), for instance, focuses not on the visual object but on the visual *event*, in which the visual sign is technologically produced and culturally interpreted by the viewer. Using the concept of prolongation, one may say that the constitution of the visible is that of a prolongation of the visual *impregnated with the symbolic*. Yet to understand this notion correctly, one must reverse the traditional approach to the study of the symbolic and say, *not* that it is the objects of the field of visibilities (images, gestures and 'representations') that symbolise something (values, social cohesion, identity, etc.), but rather that symbols are specific relations in the field of visibilities, like images, gestures and representations. In other words, symbols are no more or less than whatever *renders* things visible. Thus a peculiar tension is established between symbol and image. Whereas a symbol is an 'image under control' (despite, or perhaps due to, the fact that the content of the symbol is often projected into the realm of the inexpressible), images are never fully controllable; on the contrary, they always comprise an elusive quality.

Consequently, to speak of the visible as the visual imbued with the symbolic is to assume as one's unit of analysis the hybrid nature of the *articulability of the visible*. As recalled above, Foucault (1969; Deleuze 1986) postulated the visible and the articulable as two separate and incommensurable domains corresponding to the non-discursive and the discursive. He insisted on the heterogeneity and anisomorphism between visual display and discursive articulation, as well as on the 'primacy' of the discursive over the visible. The notion of visibility proposed in this book seeks to avoid the dichotomic separation of the visible and the articulable. On the one hand, the visible is stratified – it is a 'fossil', to invoke Benjamin – and among its strata one always finds discourses; on the other hand, discourse itself is imbued with images, with emergent shapes, colours and shades which cannot be reduced to a mere abstract scheme, even less to a structure, a series of functions or a grammar. As recalled above, we should not forget that Foucault was – and always presented himself as – a historian of thought and rationality. As such, his analysis is entirely located within the discursive, and while fundamental for a critical analysis of this domain, it does not say much about the materiality of the social.

The visible and the articulable are co-present in the field of visibility. Contrary to the radical separation of the visible and the articulable, as soon as we try to imagine the pure visible or the pure articulable separate from each other, we rapidly lapse into a paradox. The aesthetic domain (and specifically the aesthetic-visual) certainly impacts upon us first, instantaneously, but only because in reality the political domain (Foucault's articulable) has always been present. The two domains speak different languages, but they support each other and, in a sort of wave-particle dualism, they carry each other forwards. It is not simply that they occasionally mix; rather they are always mixed together. There is no visible without modes of seeing. And the same abstract articulation that makes these 'modes' possible can be understood as an invisible in Merleau-Ponty's sense, rather than a separate, uncorrelated regime. The fundamental ambiguity of visibility derives precisely from these continuous interweavings among its components. *Inscription* in the visible through inscription technologies is consequently a process that always takes place in the dual form of the observable and the articulable.

To say that the visual is visible may of course seem banal. However, less trivial is the corollary that *the visual itself needs to be visibilised*. In this respect, the example of digital visual information retrieval can be illuminating. We have become accustomed to the discourses of the omnipotence of digital convergence. All types of information, we are

told, can now be converted into digital format and exchanged in all sorts of imaginable ways. Enthusiasts claim that we are now entering the age of 'total information', where everything is, technically if not politically, visible. Experts, however, tell us a different story. In the first place, no universal semantic indexing of images exists: there is no Dewey system applicable to images available over the internet, and image tags are only contextual and purpose specific (Enser 2008). But apart from technical considerations about the feasibility of such systems, the theoretically relevant point is that digital images indexing systems are devices developed to *visibilise the visual*, and the difficulty of doing so speaks of the complexity of the field of visibility as it processually unfolds.

We can conclude the chapter by examining some procedures for visibilisation, remembering that failure to find convincing ways to visibilise events, subjects and objects may lead one to being socially marginalised. In H. G. Wells' story *The Country of the Blind* (1904), the protagonist ends up jailed and subsequently enslaved because he insisted on referring to an invisible domain of experience which did not exist, or better *should not* exist. One must not only create procedures for visibilisation, but also create alliances and communities of practice to adopt and support them.

Technical procedures for visibilisation

Foucault described the medical gaze as an expertise that reads the symptoms and visibilises the illness which hides itself in the body of the ill person even when it is in plain view. Being an expert, one might infer, means being able to manage certain visibilisation processes. The expert, Lippmann (1922: §IX) observed, perceives differences to which the lay person is blind, and becoming an expert about a given phenomenon entails multiplying the number of aspects and facets of that phenomenon. Power is not only exercised in seeing without being seen, but also in seeing the invisible through specific procedures for visibilising it. In this sense, technically produced images such as laboratory images can be used by experts as 'signatures of the events' (Knorr-Cetina and Amann 1990), and something similar happens even in the case of figures in social theory and philosophy which, strictly speaking, are 'pictures of nothing' (Lynch 1990).

The expert recognises more differences than the lay person, but not simply that. In the work context of airport personnel, for instance, Charles Goodwin (1996) has studied how the supervision of embarkation and disembarkation procedures via CCTVs takes place. Goodwin

has observed that being able to perceive a significant event – for instance, *seeing* that there is a problem with a movable ramp to connect to the aircraft – is an activity conducted situationally and collaboratively. Coordinated work is achieved through verbal and non-verbal communication jointly, in which team members give and receive ‘instructions for seeing’: that is, instructions (often in the form of phonetic emissions lasting a few tenths of a second) on how to interpret the images and react accordingly.

To what extent are such ‘instructions’ themselves visible or invisible? Are they visualised or do they function according to some ‘status of visibility’? In trying to answer this question, we are once again led back to considering the technical and technological nature of visibilisation procedures. Recently, Amoores and Hall (2009) have examined the visualisations of passengers’ bodies at airports’ security check-ins, showing how these visualisations are both political *and* depoliticising (see also Kruger et al. 2008). Biometric controls digitally ‘dissect’ bodies and hide the political consequences of the enacted social sorting (Lyon 2002). In general, the visualisations offered by technical apparatuses can be hardly challenged or called into question on the basis of their products, precisely because the ‘objects’ through which they produce their images remain external to the process and invisible: the referent cannot be invoked to discuss the procedure itself. So, every procedure of visualising is normative, but there is a complex way in which normativity turns out to be itself technological, generated ‘endogenously’ from within a given social local context (Garfinkel et al. 1981; Goodwin 1995).

Just like a ‘stigma’ in Goffman’s sense is taken to visibilise a moral characteristic of the subject, so all sorts of classifications of human beings need to visibilise certain features and certain differences technically to allow for the differential treatment of people. To examine one case: for institutional racism to work, differences between the alleged ‘races’ must first of all be made visible. From this point of view, racial physiognomics is a science of visibilisation which selects and ‘shapes’ certain phenotypical traits as relevant markers of ‘race’ while excluding other potentially conflicting traits. Classifications are techno-epistemic infrastructures which enable the production of sustained visible effects precisely in the moment when they recede into invisibility (Bowker and Star 1999).

Finally, it should be remembered that historically the technologies of visibilisation have varied widely. Maps have provided important visibilising tools for quite a long time, enabling people to perceive and frame spatial relations and routes. Similarly, the telescope and the

microscope created new spaces of visibilisation (Wilson 1995). In this respect, Foucault (1966: 146–150) observed that the microscope (but the same holds for the other mentioned instruments) did not so much widen the visible as it transformed the ways of seeing, creating new scientific procedures for visibilisation. These instruments transformed ‘seeing’ into ‘observing’, which corresponds to a systematic, structured, taxonomical – but therefore also inherently focused and ‘limited’ – type of seeing.

More generally, we can conclude this first chapter by remarking that the recognition of the cognitive, socio-technical and cultural nature of vision, that is the recognition of human vision as a multiplicity, favours the shift towards an enlarged consideration of a dimension of the social and sociality. If vision is subject-making, is constituted as a privilege and serves the coordination of attention in social situations, a rich ecology of visibility must refine the understanding of the unsettled relationship between the percipiens and the perceptum as taking place on a common ground. The open field of the visible is the prolongation of the visual field and the element in which the social territorialises itself.

2

Visibility and Social Theory

In the previous chapter we observed the curious zone of convergence according to which, on the one hand, neurophysiological cognitive research is discovering and increasingly recognising the relevance of the social (traditionally conceived) and emotional aspects of seeing, while on the other fashionable social theories like ANT tell us that we should displace the centrality of humans in the ensemble of the social world as exclusive agents and the only entities entitled to perceive. My suggestion here is that the only possible advantageous zone of convergence between these apparently dissonant claims is a *relational* social theory in which the *percipiens* and the *perceptum* are analysed as flexions of the same perceptive phenomenon, event or act, which constitutes a territory within a social environment. I call this perspective an ecological phenomenology, and I will try to explain why.

Avoiding the dichotomy between *le visible* and *le lisible*, the visible and the articulable, the notion of visibility I propose regards it as an 'open field', or an 'element' in which the social occurs. In this sense, the proposed conception recalls the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza (1677: II, § 40), which is neither merely sensorial and empirical, based on the direct impact of one thing on another, nor merely intellectual and rational, based on adequate ideas, but rather represents an 'intuitive' science of singular essences (modes of existence, degrees of potency or intensities). This 'intensive' view overcomes both the empirical and the rational to attain singularities, through what Deleuze (1978–1981) in his course on Spinoza called 'transcendental empiricism'. In Chapter 5, we shall look at how the public can be conceived of as one such singularity. In this chapter the aim is to locate visibility in the context of current social theory and research on contemporary society. I explore the consequences of defining visibility as a property of the social field,

adopting a relational point of view on the social sphere which privileges relationships over the related term and events over objects. Visibility, I argue, can be fruitfully connected to the concepts of (social) *territory*, *multiplicity* and *rhythm*, all notions designed to bypass the dichotomies between subject and object, as well as between the material and the symbolic or, better, the immaterial. In short, the visible is conceived of as an 'element' of the social, in which territorial thresholds are drawn, inscribed and projected.

Visibility as a sociological category

Visibility cannot be reduced to traditional sociological categories like actor, organisation, system, class, gender, race, and so on, although it meaningfully intersects all of them. This does not amount to saying that society can be reduced to the visible or that it can be interpreted entirely in terms of visibility, even less that visibility has become a distinctive feature of contemporary society alone. An idea of the latter kind would very soon lead to an imperialistic use of the concept of visibility similar to other 'x society' theories, like the 'risk society' thesis, the 'consumption society' thesis, the 'network society' thesis, and so on. Theories of the 'x society' seek to provide descriptions of society on the basis of certain features that are regarded as prominent in a given historical social arrangement. For instance, Innerarity (2004), who has coined the phrase 'invisible society', uses the concept of visibility in this way. However legitimate 'x society' theories may be in general, their formulation is fundamentally different from the attempt to define and use a concept or a category as a descriptive, interpretative and analytical tool for social research.

It is thus important to avoid untenable generalisations about visibility. For instance, the widespread argument that literacy is being displaced by a 'culture of the screen', or a predominantly visual culture, is clearly oversimplistic, if only because it presupposes the homogeneity of the visual; it conflates the visual and the screened, but in fact the visual is not necessarily homogeneously screen-like. Rather, what needs to be explained is the variety of affects generated between the viewer and the viewed, as well as their specific rhythms and ensuing territorialities. Again, this requires that we move from the visual to the visible. Visibility is not a quality that generally and uniformly inheres in the social; rather, it inheres in configurations, connections, events, forces, mechanisms, associations, regimes, strategies, practices, rhythms and situated activities. Forming thresholds, drawing

boundaries and defining relational territories are processes which may be directed towards the most diverse of goals: focusing attention, establishing mutual respect, affirming hierarchies, coordinating action, issuing commands, raising resistance, and so on. It is through these many configurations of visibility that social relationships are stabilised and power effects are determined.

The field of visibility is relational, strategic and processual or, better, 'evental'. First, it is relational because it determines relationships between seeing and being seen or, more generally, between noticing and being noticed. Such relationships define subject positions, and one can only become a subject *within* such relationships. Second, it is strategic because it can be, and indeed is, manipulated by subjects themselves in order to obtain real social effects. Finally, it is evental because it contains intrinsic margins of indeterminacy as to the outcomes of the various compositions of visibility relationships. Visibility can be attributed to sites, subjects, events and rhythms. The social effects of visibility are not linearly correlated to visibility *per se*, but rather depend on the interplay of certain sites, subjects and rhythms. This means that social places and sites can be explored on the basis of both the affordances of visibility that they offer to different types of actors and the use to which these affordances are put. Such a quadripartite image of sites, subjects, events and rhythms is instrumental in revealing the inherent deep ambivalences of visibility effects. The effects of visibility swing between an empowering pole (visibility as recognition) and a disempowering pole (visibility as control). The opposition between recognition and control highlights that visibility is a two-edged sword: it can confer power, but it can also take it away; it can be a source of both empowerment and disempowerment. Visibility is a rippling, anadyomenic phenomenon. The notion of 'visibility regimes' aims to capture such ordered, but also changing and always partially indeterminate, effects of empirical visibilities: visibility regimes account for the systematic and routinary (i.e., invisible) set-up of visibilities in contemporary social-technological complexes, as well as their contingent compositions.

The socio-technical and the bio-political

The struggles and controversies over visibility are neither simply optical nor simply cultural. Rather, visibility constitutes a sort of *social* optics. Because struggles and controversies necessarily entail reshaping pre-existing visibilities and, at times, even questioning the dominant regime of visibility, they essentially revolve around the tight nexus

between the political, the technological and the social. Consequently, the notion of visibility that we need is not one that naïvely conflates invisible things with non-existent ones – a claim which would lead us straight to a reductionist ontology. Of course, as Evans-Pritchard (1956: 231) taught us, ‘there is more in the action than meets the eye’. But from a social point of view, what matters are the ways in which, and the processes through which, sites, subjects, events and rhythms come to be visibilised or invisibilised, creating or enhancing differential in/visibilities.

On the one side, the importance of visibility has been pointed out by several social theorists, who remarked that contemporary ‘struggles for recognition’ often take the form of struggles for visibility (Honneth 1996[1992]; 2003; 2007; Voirol 2005). As defined by Alexandre Kojève (1947) in his classic commentary on Hegel, the struggle for recognition surpasses the usual struggle for the distribution of material goods regulated by market laws. The desire for recognition is of a peculiar type. What is at stake in the process is not the mere satisfaction of a *libido*, but rather the fact of being ratified by others as human beings endowed with equal power (dignity) – or even more power (honour). Recently, Peter Sloterdijk (2006) has made a similar point in opposing the ‘thymotic subject’ of rage and other contentious passions to the ‘erotic subject’ theorised by psychoanalysis.

On the other side, the technological nature of vision has also been emphasised (Mirzoeff 1998; Macphee 2002). Technology changes not simply the content but also the form of human perception and attention. Walter Benjamin (1979[1929–1937]) first observed this fact in the case of cinema; Marshall McLuhan (1964) built his whole theory of media and mass communications on this point; both Gilbert Simondon (1958) and André Leroi-Gourhan (1964) insisted on the inherently technical nature of human action, and more recently, Paul Virilio (1994[1988]) has extended these same considerations to the case of the new technologies of vision. Indeed, as we shall see in the next two chapters, the field of the visible is materially shaped not only by visual technologies, but, more generally, by all types of communication technologies. Each new technology can be said to reshape the field of the visible to a specific degree. From this point of view, the usefulness of the notion of visibility lies in the fact that it bypasses the traditional commonsensical distinction between objects and environments. In particular, when one considers the embedding of information technology in contemporary spaces, it becomes evident that it is increasingly difficult to differentiate objects from environments: objects are what appear as the visible side

of larger environments which are heterogeneous and filled with differential affordances. Objects can be extracted from the environment (visibilised) and brought back to it (invisibilised). In previous sections, we have referred to this fact regarding vision as an *ecology*.

However, visibility is neither simply political nor simply technological. We can better understand the phenomenon of visibility by conceptualising its nature as at the same time *socio-technical* and *bio-political*. Visibility is socio-technical because it concerns linkages and mediations which occur in that 'middle realm' where ideas and material forces coexist, and where thought – properly understood – presents itself as embodied in material connections and linkages (Vandenbergh 2007). The socio-technical realm is the place where thought comes to be inscribed and projected into materials and concurrently, materials become thoughtful or, more fashionably, 'smart'. At the same time, visibility is bio-political because it concerns populations. It is exercised within a multiplicity in which subject positions are created on the basis of the place they occupy within the relationship itself, the paths they are allowed to follow in an open space and the possible events that are envisaged. Consequently, the fundamental anadyomenic ambivalences of visibility can be expressed as follows: bio-politically, visibility oscillates between recognition and control, between an enabling and a disabling pole; socio-technically, it oscillates between the convergence and the divergence of different processes of 'embodiment'.

As noted above such processes of embodiment are acts of inscription and projection *into the visible*. The dynamic of inscription, from the Latin verb *inscribo*, -ere, 'to write into', includes scratching surfaces, making tattoos, writing, posting *affiches*, establishing metrics, and so on. The dynamic of projection, from the Latin verb *prōicio*, -ere, 'to throw out' or 'forwards' (also, to extend), includes the act of screening on a surface, as in the case of cinema, as well as other forms of 'reaching out', such as broadcasting, networking, and so on. Visibility is the element in which it is possible to inscribe and project a series of *thresholds* in the 'flesh' (*à la* Merleau-Ponty) of the social. But what are precisely these thresholds of the social? They are the boundaries of given territories. Most importantly, *boundaries are not the opposite of flows*. To say that the social is made of territorial boundaries does not mean saying that it is static (such an emphasis on facts and structures dominated sociology in the first half of the twentieth century). Rather, boundaries can be understood as *critical thresholds* of flows. So, the complementary acts of boundary-drawing, flow-selecting and territory-making are acts of

inscription in the visible. The visible is the *element* in which thresholds are inscribed, and in which the distinction between the visible and the invisible can be meaningfully established. Every such distinction is in fact an act of boundary-drawing and, as we shall explore in Chapter 5, boundaries can be drawn only *in* public and *for* a public.

A territory is a way of materially defining, inscribing and stabilising patterns of relations between and within a multiplicity of *socii*. Put the other way around, a territory is the effect of the material inscription of social relationships. Territories exist at the point of convergence, prolongation and tension between the material and the immaterial, between spaces and relationships, between extensions and in-tensions, between motilities and affects. Claims create territorial relationships whenever they introduce visible boundaries. Boundary-drawing is therefore the kernel of the territorial claim, and territory-making is in fact boundary-making. Territories are the operation, or effectuation, of boundaries, yet most importantly boundaries themselves are not objects but forms and templates of social interaction aimed at producing various functions, managing distances and setting thresholds between events and subjects.

The haptic

One perceives the visible, but in most cases one does not perceive *that* it is visible. Rather, one's attention is soon caught by the inherent qualities of the visible phenomenon in terms of its appeal, attractiveness, repulsiveness, shocking and/or pleasing nature, and so on. In most cases, then, the visibility of the visible remains invisible. In other words, visibility exists in the tension between seeing and noticing. This fact has noteworthy consequences. In particular, it enables us to recognise that the visible is both a matter of *representation* and of straightforward *presentation*. Politically speaking, the visible is a field of positions, but aesthetically speaking it is an immediate, literally 'not mediated', experience. What is visible presents itself to the subject and acts *directly* upon it. For instance, as we have observed in Chapter 1, looking is a form of visual action because it affects the subjects who are involved in the visual relationship. Every gaze intersects other gazes and interacts with them. Each gaze reacts to, responds to, qualifies and confers meanings on the others. But simultaneously, gazes are haptic forces; they have a grip on objects and especially bodies. It is not necessary to subscribe to magical thinking to establish this point, yet interestingly in magical and popular mentality the idea of the activity of the gaze is taken 'dead seriously'.

For instance in the *malocchio*, the evil eye, the look of envy turns into curse and execration, an assault on the Self which strikes with no less power than a blow.

Visibilities are constituted from within social events. For instance, gazes as visibility interactions are social forces that act through the reciprocal, immediate inscription in the flesh of the social. Whereas modern science, as Merleau-Ponty (1964a) classically put it, does not live the world but merely manipulates it from a distance, gazes operate immanently from within the world. This fact may in part explain their powerful, visceral effects, which modern science has not yet been able to capture. The affective nature of visibility relationships recalls the duality outlined by Foucault (1963b) when he described the eye as both a lamp and a well. Vision stretches out and concurrently absorbs (typically, in Bataille the eye 'eats' the visible and is eaten). Extending these considerations, the visible can be appreciated as a field of social forces always on the verge of reversing or merging into each other. Everything seen is within the reach of action or, as Merleau-Ponty (1964b) wrote, is marked on the map of the 'I can', while on the contrary the invisible is not so much what is distant as what is 'out of reach', what is here *without* being present and, as such, escapes all acts of inscription and projection. The viewing eye *is* the invisible, but only in so far as it has purely a perceiving function – which, and this is precisely Merleau-Ponty's point, never occurs. In other words, the eye is perceiving but is also perceived; it is also an object: it is *an object that perceives*.

In the history of epistemology, such a duality within unity corresponds to the 'doubling of man' described by Foucault (1966) in his reconstruction of the modern *epistème*. Man, Foucault famously contended, is a recent creature, constituted by the human sciences no earlier than the late seventeenth century. It is a creature always located in an ambiguous position: man is at the same time *a* specific object of knowledge, and *the* knowing subject – thus paradoxically *souverain soumis, spectateur regardé*, 'enslaved sovereign, observed spectator' (Foucault 1966: 323). While humanism of the classical age constitutes the Cartesian seeing subject as the sovereign who inspects nature as an invisible spectator, the human sciences that appear around the late seventeenth century constitute the human being as their object and by doing so, they specifically render it visible. This is why Foucault described representation as an 'architecture of visibility': in the modern age representation has created a space of knowledge where it is possible to place both natural phenomena and the human being and above all, the human being as a

natural phenomenon or even better, the human being and nature as a single field of enquiry.

For all of these reasons, rather than being a perspective on the world visibility is better imagined as a field of action and affection that lies in the flesh of the world. The result of the acts that inscribe or project something into the visible is the territorialisation of an environment – a haptic ‘extraction’ of an object from the environment. This is why to investigate visibility we need a perspective that enables us to recognise the multiplicity and the materiality of these processes, as well as the fact that they unfold within a horizon of experience and existence: in short, what we need is an *ecological phenomenology* of the visible.

The field of visibility

To understand visibility as a field entails essentially two things. First, visibility is always intervisibility, it is a relational and positional quality. Second, visibility is an aspect of social life that enables us to introduce thresholds of relevance and selective attention (inscribing or projecting them). As a property of subjects, sites, events and rhythms, visibility is employed as a means of sorting, classifying and ranking or, better, as a means that enables the functioning of classificatory infrastructures. As a field, the visible is where socio-technically and bio-politically social actions unfold. So, every social struggle necessarily comes with its own politics of visibility: for instance, social movements can be described as contentious moments in the structuring of the field and the distribution of visibilities in the field.

A theory of visibility is a theory of *receptivity* and *perceptivity*. Receptivities and perceptivities are reciprocal affections between different social compositions – for instance, bodies as compositions of material forces (haptic forces) and experiential forces (what psychoanalysis calls ‘drives’). Receptivities and perceptivities are intrinsically relational notions, and visibility concerns the management of relational attentions within a multiplicity of subjects. Political philosophers such as Hannah Arendt (1958), Cornelius Castoriadis (1975), Claude Lefort (1986) and Jacques Rancière (2001; 2006) have stressed the fact that the constitution of the social is political and that politics are not pre-constituted entities (as for social contractualist theories), rather they emerge from the pragmatic horizon of a multiplicity of subjects that *share a world in common*. Politics thus concerns setting the rules, allocating roles and powers and, more radically, imagining the foundations of society. This is what Castoriadis called ‘instituting’ power. In the same

sense, Rancière argues that the task of politics (as opposed to that of policing) is to question instituted borders. From this perspective, the field of visibility presents itself as arranged in various consensual, or contested, 'regimes'. A regime is a repeated, agreed upon and more or less settled pattern of interaction. Each regime attempts to settle a series of normative questions: in the case of visibility, what is worth paying attention to, what we have a right to observe and what can be seen safely, taking pleasure from it. The notion of regime in the phrase 'visibility regime' can be better specified by drawing on Michel Foucault's (2004b[1978–1979]: 37–38) description of the *régime de veridiction*, or 'veridictive regime'. According to Foucault, a discursive regime includes the set of conditions that must be met before any discourse on a given topic – more specifically, a discourse that can be received as true or false – can be made. Put differently, each discursive regime includes its own 'truth games'.

The management of visibilities is a social enterprise whose output is a field of interactions created by the acts that draw cones (from few to many or from many to few) and vectors (from one to one or from many to many) of visibility, defining the reciprocal *constitutions* of subjects through their positioning within a field of visibility symmetries and asymmetries. The specific effects of the different regimes create the space in which subject positions happen and set up the normative dimension of the visible: corresponding to every definition of a field of visibility are demands and tensions which endeavour to establish a connection between the possible and the proper, between what *can* be seen and what *should* or *should not* be seen, between who can and who cannot see whom.

Three models of visibility

Consider three types or models of visibility: the visibility of recognition, the visibility of control and the visibility of spectacle.

The first model – visibility as *recognition* – derives from Georg W. F. Hegel's master-servant dialectic (Hegel 1977[1807]) according to whom, the existence of the human being is constituted through mutual recognition. Self-consciousness needs to be recognised (*ein Anerkanntes*) by another self-consciousness in order merely to exist. With his use of the concept of self-consciousness in this dialectic of identity, Hegel was the first modern philosopher to expressly thematise the reflexive and inter-subjective nature of the knowing subject, which in the master-servant dialectic he treated in relational and social terms. The origin of the

notion of self-consciousness lies in Leibniz's distinction between perception and apperception, which corresponds to a distinction between mere perception and a type of perception that is conscious of itself. By contrast, neither Descartes, the philosopher of intuition as evidence, nor Locke, the philosopher of identity as permanence, alluded to this concept. The term *Anerkennung* (recognition) was introduced into philosophy by Fichte in his *Foundation of Natural Law* (1796). Notably, in Hegel's use, recognition, which begins as a matter of life and death, prolongs itself from survival to work, with the servant gaining a more direct access to the world than the master. The consciousness that toils attains, through the very practice of serving, comprehension of itself (and of its self) as an independent being. Karl Marx's theory of alienation can be said to trace from this point. Indeed, the genealogy of the work-alienation dialectic in Marx is to be retrieved in the notion of recognition and therefore in a practice of visibility.

An intersubjective conception of identity was introduced into social theory by George Herbert Mead (1959[1934]). Since in social interaction a *significant other* bears witness to our existence and proves it by observing us, visibility pertains to the processes of subjectivisation, objectivisation and the onto-epistemological construction of objects and subjects in the social world (also Blumer 1969). For Mead, the significant other is prolonged into the *generalised other*, that is, the sanctioning gaze with which the community controls the behaviour of its members. Goffman's (1959) notion of 'presentation of the Self' applies Mead's frame to everyday interaction rituals. In contemporary political philosophy, Hegel's concept of recognition has also been used by Charles Taylor (1989), who has interpreted it as a fundamental category of modern human identity. In every political unit composed of plural and heterogeneous elements there develop various 'struggles for recognition' (Honneth 1996[1992]) so that an entire field of 'politics of recognition' arises (Taylor 1992). Honneth, besides proposing three fundamental spheres of recognition (love, law and social solidarity), concentrates on the effects of a lack of recognition – or misrecognition. These configurations of social visibility have a crucial impact on the type of relationship that develops between minority groups (of whatever type: cultural, ethnic, sexual, political, religious or moral) and the social mainstream. The famous novel *Invisible Man* (1947) by Ralph Ellison provides a powerful literary example of how, for racial minorities – but the same holds for minorities of other types – being invisible means being deprived of recognition.

However, visibility is not linked to recognition in a direct and linear way. The function performed by *thresholds of visibility* intervenes. In

other words, there is a minimum and a maximum of what we may call 'correct visibility'. The adopted criteria of correctness are far from irrelevant, and in fact they constitute the stake of several political struggles for recognition. At any rate, besides the diversity of criteria of correct visibility, a fairly general effect can be observed: beneath the lower threshold, a person is socially excluded. Stephen Frears' film *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) paints an extremely vivid picture of the daily life – especially the 'night' life – of the illegal immigrant. Yet, although the illegal immigrant is socially invisible, s/he is also a highly visible *homo sacer* and indeed symbolically crucial for defining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Agamben 1995; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004). Analogous dynamics of invisibility and hypervisibility are apparent in the debate on the urban underclass (Mingione 1996; Wacquant 1999; 2006). When persons move, or are pushed, above the upper threshold of correct visibility, they enter a zone of supravisibility or super-visibility in which any action undertaken, being overly visible, becomes so enormous that it paralyses the person performing it. This is a paradoxical double bind whereby a person is prohibited from doing what s/he is simultaneously required to do by the set of social constraints to which s/he is subject. Media representations of immigrants as criminal are supravisible, and so too are numerous other forms of moral panic which selectively focus on actors assumed to represent moral minorities (Dal Lago 2001). The positioning of a subject below or above the thresholds of correct visibility relates to the problem of managing one's social image, and particularly the extent to which it can be managed in one's own terms or in those of others. Distortions *in* visibility give rise to distortions in social representations, distortions *through* visibility.

The second model of visibility counterposes the dynamics and struggles for recognition with the ancient concept of the *arcana imperii* and the modern concepts of discipline and control. The *arcana imperii* is a theory according to which power is closely bound up with invisibility. In different contexts, Elias Canetti (1960) and Norberto Bobbio (1999) have described well, from a critical point of view, the characteristics of the elitist tradition of the *arcana*. In this conception of power, what really matters for government is not legitimation but the dark core where matters are decided and ordered – the unknown room where the planner compiles his algorithm. Bobbio (1999: 357) insists that autocratic states of a Machiavellian type are characterised by the fact that in them crucial political decisions are made in invisible places, such as the secret cabinet, the secret chamber and the secret council. While the model of visibility as recognition is rooted in the idea that visibility

confers power, the tradition of the *arcana imperii* starts from the diametrically opposite premise that invisibility strengthens power. As Canetti (1960: 290) aphoristically put it, 'secrecy lies at the very core of power'. Primo Levi (2007[1947]) observed that in Nazi Germany, those who knew did not speak, and those who did not know never dared to ask. With Canetti, we may therefore conceive power as a form of external visibility (visibility of effects) associated with inner invisibility (invisibility of identification): the effects of power are visible to all, but what power is in its essence, and where it really resides, will not be revealed.

As we have observed in Chapter 1, the whole anti-ocularcentric tradition described by Martin Jay (1993) has focused on the inextricable interweaving between vision and power. The most notable in this line of authors who conceptualised visibility as control is certainly Michel Foucault. His thesis on the formation of the disciplinary society describes a scenario of visibility which is completely different from the model of recognition. By tracing the origin of the word 'surveillance' in clinical language (Foucault 1963a), the disciplinary thesis reveals a meaning completely different from being seen and observed: not recognition but subjugation, imposition of behaviour and a means of control. In the disciplinary society, visibility means deprivation of power. Also often overlooked is the fact that 'discipline' – or 'surveillance' – and 'punishment', in Foucault's (1975) celebrated book, form a largely *counterposed* couple. Discipline is almost the opposite of punishment. Foucault saw the disappearance of punitive torture as marking the advent of a new type of 'political technology of the body', which sought not only to produce 'docile bodies', but also to conceal the normative scheme from the public's gaze through internment, creating on the one hand the disciplinary institutions (the 'punitive institution'), and on the other, the *mise en scène* of public morality (the 'punitive city').

The practice of examining or inspecting the inmate creates a subject who does not struggle to be visible but is instead obliged to be visible (Foucault 1975: 205). Examinations and inspections, upon which discipline is founded, require a visible subject with a body, upon which to exercise power. Subjection of the disciplinary subject is determined by the awareness of its constant status of visibility and the constant possibility of an inspection. The simple fact of being aware of one's visibility status – and not the fact of being effectively under control – efficaciously influences behaviour. Although Foucault regarded the visual aspect of Bentham's creation as archaic and identified its specifically modern aspect in the idea of diagrams of power, the Panopticon can be

understood as an integral mechanism of visibility, or better a *dispositif* of visibility. Indeed, what is most important for its effective operation is not only the first-order asymmetry between the guard who watches and the inmate who is watched but also the asymmetry regarding the entire control device. The panoptic diagram consists also in a *second-order* asymmetry of vision between those aware of the existence of the diagram and those unaware of it – those in the dark, so to speak.

The third model of visibility to consider is the visibility of spectacle. What characterises the spectacle is that it exists in a regime separate from everyday life. For critical theorists, the spectacle is a set of images detached from life but simultaneously served as an illusory (ideological) form of unity. As the Situationist Guy Debord (1992[1967]: § 4) wrote in a sentence that plagiarises Marx, ‘the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images’. For the Frankfurt critical theorists, too, the visibility of advertising objects and media personages is only the other side of the coin of discipline, control and standardisation of the masses. The auratic nature of the spectacle derives from its *totalising nature*, together with its *lack of action*. Allen Feldman (2005) has more recently used the phrase ‘actuarial gaze’ to denote a regime of spectacular visibility pertaining to the traumatic realism of disaster. The actuarial gaze operates through emotions such as shock and fear. It organises threat perception and prophylaxis, exposing some subjects and hiding others; it classifies events and marks out a separation – a *cordon sanitaire* – between event and non-event, between visible and invisible.

Aside from value judgments on separateness, reification and commodification of the visible, the spectacle understood as a *dispositif* of visibility undoubtedly has numerous interesting aspects that can be studied. Visibility asymmetries are not only connected to particular political and technological systems but also closely interweave with situational factors. It is always the here-and-now of the situation that determines the importance of the normative or normalising dimension of the visible within a given techno-political setting. The spectacle is an ancient anthropological interactive structure, in whose most elementary forms a minimal role is played by technological factors. Those who ‘make a spectacle of themselves’ by performing a specific role which makes them visible to an audience alter the situational field of reciprocal visibilities. This modification also partly explains the relief and pleasure felt by the audience: during the spectacle, all gazes are morally authorised to direct themselves at the performer and even to fix upon him/her, thereby temporarily resolving uncertainties concerning their

reciprocal management. Hence, while the deliberate performer of self-spectacle, the actor, often needs the gaze of the audience, any other unwitting performer modifies the field of visibilities in the same way by offering him/herself to an audience's gaze.

The case of the political scandal, for example, displays a dynamic whereby certain actions, behaviours or matters initially intended to be kept invisible are suddenly revealed to a broad public (Thompson 2000; Adut 2008). The more visible it becomes that there was a state of affairs originally intended and even organised to be invisible – that is, the more evident it becomes that there has been an attempt to conceal something – the greater the impact of its revelation. During political scandals there arises, as already noted, a type of visibility gone awry: actors previously accustomed to being visible, who have indeed built their entire careers and fortunes on being visible, suddenly find themselves persecuted by their selfsame visibility, at times with tragicomic if not grotesque effects. What constituted their strength is now their most implacable enemy. Concentrations of visibility-as-power seem irremediably to attract their visible nemesis made up of degradation and downfall.

The three models outlined so far are not rigidly exclusive of each other. Von Donnersmarck's film *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, 2006) shows the ambiguous space that exists among the different schemes of visibility as recognition, as both control and spectacle. When, during a casual meeting in a bar, the actress Christa-Maria Sieland asks Gert Wiesler – the Stasi captain who, unbeknownst to her, has been spying her for months and eavesdropping on every instant of her life (hence the title of the film) – to tell her who he is, Wiesler responds with the simple and enigmatic sentence: 'I am your public'. On the one hand, Wiesler is indeed one of the many spectators who observe Christa-Maria Sieland on the stage, but on the other he is also the privileged and solitary spectator who controls every intimate moment of her private life. In both cases he is the unseen anonymous observer, witness to the existence of Christa-Maria, and as such without an existence of his own.

Recognition, and lack thereof

That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact.
(Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*)

Together with the management of gazes, the management of distances is socially crucial. Simmel (1906) first argued that the importance of a person corresponds to the dimensions of his/her 'personal sphere' and, consequently, the distance we keep from him/her. In his excursus on ornament (*Schmuck*), Simmel also described how jewellery and *parures* create 'another, wider sector' which surrounds the individual, stretching beyond the prosaic sphere of materially necessary objects. This fact is connected to what Durkheim (1893: § III, concl., III) called the sacrality of the person that characterises the cult of the individual. It is a phenomenon remarked by Canetti (1960), too, when he connected the existence of distances to power, and ultimately founded power on a specific configuration of distances. The powerful surrounds him/herself with distances which must be carefully maintained. More generally, gazes, distances and touch are all part of the same field of visibility. Merleau-Ponty (1964b) described the meeting with another gazer as the meeting with another *percipiens*, which makes us visible. Once we conceptualise visibility through its various senses and socio-techniques, we can better appreciate it as an achievement that goes well beyond the merely visual.

The boundary between visibility and invisibility of the social 'others' is thus extremely important from a bio-political point of view. Visibility is the element in which social sorting of people takes place, relegating some social groups into invisibility. Basically, all types of minorities and exploited classes experience the effects of invisibility as lack of recognition, but it is not only marginal people who are invisibilised. Something similar happens with the invisibilisation of hard-to-deal-with social problems. In modern societies, illness and death are treated similarly (Elias 1985). The body of the dying person is often cast apart and treated according to rituals that regulate its problematic visibility (Sudnow 1967). So, invisibility can lead to an absolute lack of recognition. Ellison's *Invisible Man* forcefully made the point in the case of racial groups, with particular reference to blacks in the United States as a population abandoned to itself, while Canetti (1960) described the phenomenon of inflation in post-First World War Germany not simply as an economic problem, but as a process of invisibilisation of individuals, who were downgraded into a single, worthless mass.

In a similar vein Zygmunt Bauman (1989), in his book on the Holocaust, regards the invisibilisation of the humanity of victims as a necessary moral anaesthetic for murderers and accomplices in the extermination. Inhumane treatments of all sorts, Bauman suggests, become acceptable when the victims are first constructed as non-humans, that

is, when their humanity is invisibilised. In the context of the Holocaust, an essential part of the invisibilisation process was performed through the *lager*, a space that is not only legally paradoxical, a 'state of exception' (Benjamin 1978[1921]; Agamben 2003), but also territorially removed from public sight. The camp offers an extreme instance of application of those governmental devices for the management of the population, its movements and the bodies of people introduced since the late seventeenth century, precisely that which Foucault described as bio-political. Yet, as Cheliotis (forthcoming) suggests, it is not possible straightforwardly to oppose inclusion and exclusion: distance is always coupled with a specific type of framing of the other, or what we may call a *style of visibilisation*. In order to make something or someone visible, a cognitive frame is required. Once again, while aesthetically immediate, visibility is politically mediated.

Another reason why inclusion and exclusion do not correspond to visibility and invisibility in a linear way is the fact that there are several cases in which visibility does *not* lead to recognition. We know that all sorts of totalitarianisms destroy intimacy and its invisibility. The styles of visibilisation thus correspond to certain visibility regimes, which are constitutive of *the domain of the public*, and how bodies enter this domain. Also, the notion of privacy is extremely contingent, given that the private and public dimensions of bodily events are historically and socially shifting. For instance in early modern Europe members of royal families were objects of constant scrutiny: queens such as Marie de' Medici and Marie-Antoinette had to give birth to their children in public, while kings were ceaselessly surrounded and watched by servants and members of the court, even while carrying out their bodily functions.

Finally, the case of 'infamous visibilities' should be considered. In his critical analysis of Herrnstein and Murray's 'Bell curve of intelligence' Gilman (1996) speaks of a process of invisibilisation of statistico-normative normalcy (*id quod plerumque accidit*), which is set aside but in fact always presupposed in the observation of the 'pathological' anomalies that deviate from the mean (groups visibly more and less intelligent than the average). As already indicated in the first chapter, the stigma is an interactional visibility device, whereby a negative moral characteristic is associated with a physical sign (Goffman 1963a). For this mechanism to work, the sign in question must become perceivable and visible to all. Goffman observes that the visibility of a stigma is different from detailed knowledge about it, as well as from its immediate relevance to interaction, because many stigmata are visible *before* they are known or

thematized as such. Consequently, there exists a sort of 'precession' of visibility: visibility establishes the thresholds above which the mechanism of stigmatisation operates.

Recognising recognition

The kid wasn't a person anymore. He was that gun and nothing else, the nightmare gun that lived in every New Yorker's imagination, the heartless, inhuman gun that was destined to find you alone one night on a darkened street and send you to an early grave. (Paul Auster, *Invisible*)

You are not from the Castle, you are not from the village, you aren't anything. Or rather, unfortunately, you are something, a stranger, a man who isn't wanted and is in everybody's way... (Franz Kafka, *The Castle*)

To account for the complexities of visibility-as-recognition, the notion of recognition must be sociologically refined, specifying the existence of different types of recognition. This should be done not on the basis of the social spheres or settings in which recognition is exercised – as Honneth proposes in his philosophy – but, on the contrary, starting from the relational dimensions of recognition in its formation during social interactions. On this basis, at least four types of recognition can be identified: categorical, individual, personal and spectacular.

Categorical recognition is founded on the simple and for the most part routine typification of people. It is the type of 'urban' recognition par excellence in that it is exchanged among strangers. As argued by Lyn Lofland (1998), categorical or 'typical' recognition defines the public domain. The public, as classically described by Simmel (1950[1903]) and Wirth (1939), is a domain of interaction in which people are 'biographic strangers', personally unknown to each other. In this context, people recognise each other and make themselves visible to the other through categories or social typifications. This type of recognition is of course always close to stereotype. Discussing Sebastião Salgado's photographic book *Migrations*, Sontag (2003: 69) criticises Salgado precisely because he typifies his subjects and, by doing so, deprives them of singular recognition. Sontag rejects the attitude of several photographers, who bestow a name and singular recognition only to famous people, while reducing the others to 'representatives' of given ethnicities, tribes or other various collectives characterised by their sufferings.

However, singular recognition is not the same as *individual* recognition, or identification. Identification is typically exercised by the state with regard to the population. It acquires its most complete form in instruments of classification and control. Since the nineteenth century, these have included registry office records and identity cards. Biometric tools for recognition were introduced in the late nineteenth century, and in 1902 Alphonse Bertillon for the first time identified a criminal using his fingerprints. Today, biometric profiles are highly developed, to the point that they 'cut across' the body (Amoore and Hall 2009). James C. Scott (1998) has analysed critically the development of a 'gaze of the state' in modern countries. From the perspective of the government, Scott remarked, a way of seeing predisposes a way of acting and intervening in reality. The centralist gaze of the state is impoverished: it filters the multiplicity of social life and reduces the plurality of lived experience to a Procrustean bed in order to improve legibility in the interpretation and management of phenomena concerning the population. According to Scott, social engineering, supported by a high modernist ideology, has expropriated local experience, in that the gaze of central executive power is narrowly focused on functional manipulation and the imposition of uniformity on the population. The legibility of social phenomena is often obtained at the expense of recognition of their richness, so that a single gaze, analogous to a 'view from nowhere', hides the multiplicity of real gazes. Drawing on Foucault's (2004[1977–1978]) refined notion of population as an object of government, we could say that individual recognition represents that *singulatum* which, as an essential complement to the *omnes*, allows definition of the object on which the acts of government are exerted.

The third type of recognition is *personal* recognition, which derives from what is commonly termed 'personal acquaintanceship'. Goffman (1963b) provided a fine-grained description of the norms associated with acquaintanceship, and particularly the 'right to initiate a direct relationship' to which personal recognition gives entitlement. For instance, in the urban environment the possibility of directly addressing someone is regulated and only *personal* recognition gives unrestrained rights in this respect. Most other interactions between people in the street are based upon *categorical* recognition, which is associated with specific types of 'direct relationship' (for instance, asking for directions).

Finally, *spectacular* recognition has to do with the distinction between the two regimes of the ordinary and the extraordinary, or between the

profane and the sacred. The most typical case of spectacular recognition in everyday life is that of 'celebrity sighting'. As observed by Ferris (2004: 239), the distinctive feature of this type of encounter lies in the fact that while celebrities are not personal acquaintances of their fans, the latter feel as if they were and are caught in the tension between the attitude that they should behave accordingly and the realisation that there can be no real direct relationship based on personal acquaintanceship between themselves and their idol. For instance, Susan Sontag (1987) tells the adventurous story that took place when she was 16 years old and, with her friend, found out Thomas Mann's phone number. They decided to call him and pay a visit to the old writer, and the young Sontag was particularly surprised that the old Mann *really looked like* the pictures of him.

The types of recognition just described undoubtedly interweave, but they do not perfectly overlap. The most sociologically interesting cases are precisely those located in the zones of intersection and ambiguity: personal recognition without individual recognition (people to whom we occasionally speak but whose names we do not even know), conflict between categorical and personal recognition (social types from which we expect a certain behaviour which is not forthcoming) and the short circuit between categorical and individual recognition (such as the circuit of discrimination and 'criminalisation' of immigrants).

The visible and the territorial

When he first arrived in London he used to stare boldly into the faces of these passers-by, searching out the unique essence of each. Look, I am looking at you! He was saying. But bold stares got him nowhere in a city where, he soon discovered, neither men nor women met his gaze but, on the contrary, coolly evaded it.

Each refusal of his gaze felt like a tiny knife-prick. Again and again he was being noted, found wanting, turned down. Soon he began to lose his nerve, to flinch even before the refusal came. With women he found it easier to look covertly, steal looks. That, it would seem, was how looking was done in London. But in stolen looks there was – he could not rid himself of feeling – something shifty, unclean. Preferable not to look at all. Preferable to be incurious about one's neighbours, indifferent. (J. M. Coetzee, *Youth*)

Durkheim and Simmel's remarks on the extension of the personal sphere and the sacrality of the individual, as well as Canetti's observation on the role played by distances in social life, suggest how visibility is linked to territoriality. The events of visibility are embodied and material – or, better, they interweave the layers of the material and the immaterial into a single force. The visible is the dimension in which distances are created and demarcated. Phenomenologically, depth is an intensity of the visible, it is what determines its haptic force, while ecologically, the field of visibility involves the demarcation of thresholds through inscriptions and projections, together with the maintenance of critical distances which make it possible to draw *boundaries* and create *territories*. These territories shape both relations within a specific situation, and prolongations from one situation to others. Goffman (1963b; 1971) initially defined regions and situations on the basis of spatial and physical parameters, using the concept of 'barriers to perception': prima facie, a region and a situation extend as far as the look can reach. But this definition of region is complicated by the imaginative dimension, which is an integral part of every territorial composition. In fact, what counts as a barrier to perception may vary a lot according to a series of conventions and the intentions people manifest towards those conventions. Once again the normative dimension of visibility emerges, predicated upon the tension between perceiving and noticing.

Ambiguities between recognition and control are due to the 'intrusive' nature of visibility. For instance, the protagonist of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Youth* struggles with the complexities of urban visual contact with strangers. His problem has to do with what Goffman (1959) called 'civil inattention'. Here, the crucial question is of how to determine the correct, acceptable threshold of visibility-as-attention that guarantees recognition without entailing intrusion. Drawing and setting boundaries between recognition and intrusion is complex, and in order to facilitate this task, boundary-crossing is shunned as a form of contamination, or symbolic pollution. Dirt corresponds to disorder in a system of symbolic classification (Douglas 1970). Dirt is threatening and excessive; it is *supravisible*. The supravisibility of dirt is linked to its contaminating nature. Dirt as disorder is a *skándalon*, a snare – which, as Douglas herself noticed, is not necessarily bad: if on the one hand, disorder threatens the purity of the model, on the other, it also provides the model with its initial creative possibilities. Therefore, disorder offers a problematic visibility that has to be managed in some way. Rituals are ways of dealing with disorder, taking advantage of its power while

confining its 'epidemic', contaminating character. Visibility is 'set in stone' – at least tentatively – through the rituals that regulate classificatory boundaries.

In the management of spaces, thus, visibility defines position, opposition and disposition of subjects engaged in a social relationship within a situation. While inscriptions and projections into the visible are socio-technical accomplishments, their effects have bio-political importance in that they draw diagrams of power which are then symbolically and normatively codified.

Visible subjects, invisible powers

... the admirable autonomy of the service, which one divined to be peculiarly effective where it was not visibly present. (Franz Kafka, *The Castle*)

Discipline, as described by Foucault (1975), is a collaborative power based on a specific regime of visibility. The parts that form this regime, or diagram, include the body, the routine, the inspection and the role. The aim is to co-opt people themselves into discipline, because discipline could not work without the active collaboration of its subjects. Hence, interiorisation, responsibility and spontaneity are necessary to discipline. Of course, the idea of *producing spontaneity* might look like a paradox, but the basic point is that, once placed into a field of visibility, the subject becomes self-conscious and even responsible towards the system which has placed him/her in a specific position of the field. In this way, the subject is not only subjected, but also assumes the perspective of power upon him/herself. Through visibility, the planned power relation comes to be inscribed into the subject, who becomes, as Foucault (1975: 202–203) put it beautifully, the 'principle of his [and her] own subjection'. In the dream of the disciplinary discourse, authority is exercised uniquely through the gaze of power – the inspecting gaze which places upon the surveilled the responsibility to surveil themselves.

Discipline substitutes a form of power focused on symbolism and visible, spectacular signs with another based on constant exercises and practices. Disciplinary visibility is almost the opposite of punishment: it consists in reform and domestication of conduct. As mentioned above, the 'and' in the title *Discipline and Punish* is largely oppositional. Most importantly, even when it has to punish, the disciplinary logic wants to avoid turning punishment into a spectacle. Discipline is anti-spectacular by nature: it is prosaic and dull. For instance, queuing for

security checks at the gates in airports is a very common disciplinary experience of today. In disciplinary practices we see that people do not simply take care of themselves and mind their own business; rather they take care of the whole regime in place, collaborating with it at their best, as they are trained to do. The glue for this training and the whole *dispositif* at stake is a specific *architecture of visibility* (like the Panopticon). The norm, a notion Foucault received from Canguilhem, is extremely important in this respect, because it ensures a visible model which is both a statistical mean and a prescription. The norm does not refer to what one does but to what one is, and it presents the case under scrutiny in the light of a law of normalcy – if only an individual law. Notably, the norm is a form of power that does not exclude; rather, it includes even, or especially, ‘abnormal’ subjects with the aim of ‘correcting’ them. In this sense, Deleuze (1986) observed that the panoptic diagram is blind and mute but makes others see and speak. This means that the panoptic regime of visibility is a *veridictive* regime, one that creates a field in which truth games are played according to previously established, invisible rules.

Reg Whitaker (1999: 35) has identified what he has regarded as a problem in Bentham’s reasoning on discipline achieved through surveillance. According to Whitaker, compliance with rules can never rest on training alone: it must also at some point resort to threat and coercion. However, Whitaker presupposes the surveillant gaze as concerning only a cognitive task of acquiring information about a subject, but overlooks the affective dimension of visibility relations. The gaze creates affects; it is an affective machine, just like the threat. And not simply that: perhaps the gaze and the threat are intimately connected; after all, a threat is not a punishment but a visibility device. The dimensions of visibility are therefore multiple. In his research on governmentality, or the rationality of modern government, Foucault deals with a set of aspects that Dean (1999: 23) proposes grouping as: ways of seeing, ways of thinking, ways of acting and ways of forming subjects. In all of these dimensions it is possible to retrieve one of visibility. A way of seeing is a way of recognising and, at the same time, controlling; a way of thinking entails a vocabulary, a lexicon made of relevant terms and categories which define an expertise or know-how in terms of visibility asymmetries; a way of acting includes the acts that intervene and direct, which correspond to the haptic dimension of visibility; finally, a way of forming subjects concerns the field effect of placing, distributing and setting relationships between subjects which become mutually visible selves.

Surveillant visibility-as-control

Studies on surveillance and the technologies of control have explored visibility-as-control in its tiniest details. Widely speaking, surveillance concerns the systematic and purposeful acquisition, archiving, sorting, retrieval, analysis, interpretation and protection of information. Dandeker (1990: 37) first remarked that surveillance involves at least three types of activities: the collection and storage of information about people, objects and events, the supervision of activities through instructions or design of space and the monitoring of conduct to ascertain compliance with instructions. More recently, David Lyon (2001; 2002) has conceptualised surveillance as an attempt to visibilise the identities and conduct of people under scrutiny. From the twentieth century a multiplicity of surveillance agencies began to operate, routinely manipulating and controlling visibilities to their own advantage, and as a result the practices of surveillance have transformed visibility into an unprecedented political and social issue.

Granted that surveillance can be interpreted as the specific management of the relative visibilities of people, it has been remarked that in contemporary society surveillance has become methodical, systematic and in many cases automatic, rather than being discontinuous as it was in the case of the original disciplinary model (Staples 2000). The reality of control has changed, so that the virtual control of the disciplinary inspection is replaced by real control made possible by the new technologies – or, better, a zone of indistinction emerges between the virtuality of control and its actualisations. Asymmetries of visibility give rise to specific ways of seeing which are qualitatively different from one another. Because the subjects under surveillance cannot see who is observing them and cannot establish direct eye-to-eye contact with them, they always seem in a certain sense to be suspect, if not guilty, merely because they are being observed unidirectionally. More radically, following Simmel's intuition of the reciprocal nature of the fundamental form of sociability in eye-to-eye contact, subjects under surveillance are not even human subjects. Inherent to the unidirectional gaze is a sort of dehumanisation of the observed – and perhaps, indirectly, of the observer as well. The technologies of vision generate a gazeless or 'industrialised vision' (Virilio 1994[1988]: 56), a market in synthetic perception populated by vision machines.

However, as already remarked, visibility does not simply concern visual tools, such as video cameras and technologies for the management of images. The more that surveillance becomes supported by advanced

technologies, the more it becomes abstract and apparently no longer connected to human beings and their biological eyes. Thus, it becomes increasingly crucial to track and to check information and dataflows, which are often in digital format (Lyon 2004). Gilles Deleuze (1990) was the first to speak of a shift from the disciplinary society to the society of control – a new scenario in which the closed institutions produced by the disciplinary form have been superseded by new arrangements: the corporation has replaced the factory, the individual has been replaced by a new type of *dividual* being and finally, it is the password, rather than the old watchword of the disciplinary society, which has become the central discursive device.

Contemporary surveillance processes are no longer interested in *observing* people, but rather in *tracking* movements (not only of people, but of money, choices and habits – in short, of information) in a way which enables the surveillant agencies to grant or deny access to specific spaces for specific subjects. The entire process changes from being centred on people to being centred on codes. In this new regime of visibility, control is no longer exercised within a single gravitational system with the government apparatus at its centre; rather, it is distributed, delegated and disseminated. Resuming the notion of assemblage developed by Deleuze and Guattari, Ericson and Haggerty (2000) have termed this new type of mixed control exercised in network form ‘surveillant assemblage’. Such an assemblage is composite, centralised (as was the Panopticon) and polycentric (because of the pervasiveness of the network form). It operates both top-downwards and bottom-upwards. The surveillant assemblage denotes a situation in which visibilities are not organised unitarily, as in the scenarios of the Panopticon or Orwell’s Big Brother, but polycentrically and heterogeneously. This feature highlights the usefulness of an analytical category in understanding the visibility strategies developed by actors.

Spectacle and separation

The visibility of the spectacle seems to be the opposite of common everyday life visibilities. The notion of spectacle propounded by critical theorists has highlighted the separatedness of the spectacle from real life (Debord 1992[1967]). Only ideologically (deceivably) can the spectacle be assimilated to life and presented as a totality of life; in fact, as the Situationists phrased it, the spectacle is but the ‘totalitarian dictatorship of the detail’. While McLuhan’s medium theory insists on the continuity of the process of mediation through the image of

the 'extension', critical theorists contended that in practice, the media create spectacles that are severed from real life and experiences and absorb them. For critical theorists, such a separatedness represented a new opium of the masses, a culture industry that led to passivity and acceptance of domination (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979[1947]). The modern mass media, which will be the topic of the next chapter, were regarded as the weapons of choice – 'weapons of mass distraction'.

The scholarship of Michel De Certeau (1990[1980–1985]) and other authors in the cultural studies tradition, notably Stuart Hall and his collaborators (Hall et al. eds. 1980), challenged this overarching gloomy view. These authors suggested looking at the prosaic details of everyday life as sites of resistance and micropolitical manoeuvres. In its mundanity, everyday life appears in most cases 'encoded' and difficult to visualise, both visually and verbally. What is difficult to express in words is precisely its taken-for-grantedness (Inglis 2005). With Georges Perec (1989), the everyday is *endotic* rather than *exotic*, and a new *anthropologie du proche* ('anthropology of the nearby') (Augé 1986) is required to make sense of it (see also Sheringham 2006). It is precisely to tackle the automatisms associated with everyday life that Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 94) elaborated his notion of *habitus*, which he famously described as set of embodied dispositions placed beyond the grasp of consciousness. These dispositions are not simply implicit; they *cannot* be made explicit, otherwise they would not work. Michael Taussig (1999) calls 'public secrecy' these naked foundations which are 'generally known' yet cannot be articulated. According to an old adage, one cannot see the trick and use it.

Each concentration of power produces its forms of visibility-aspectacle. The pre-modern spectacle of power included, as noted by Tony Bennett (1995: 23), festivals, tournaments and public theatre pieces. Such a display, however, was intermittent. The modern public museum, on the contrary, was created as a permanent type of spectacle. Its pedagogic function was to be achieved through its exemplary nature. As we have already considered in Chapter 1, the *exemplum*, or model, has a visibility that is similar but opposed to the *monstrum*, or monster. Exemplarily, the museum offers a modern spectacular visibility which, at the same time, through its aspects of methodical continuity and exercise, shares resemblances with discipline. Again, we can observe a peculiar and perhaps uneasy convergence, given that discipline rejects spectacle and is eminently practical, it penetrates the body in its everyday postures and *habitus*. In the end, the question 'is the spectacle paralysing?' does not find an easy answer. Both the mass media and the modern city, as we shall see in the following chapters, have been accused of producing

hyperaesthesia and *anaesthesia*, that is, a type of visibility that is both shocking and dull at the same time.

Invisible foundations

My Prince, I had to deceive your people, because you had already deceived them before and I knew your lies, and had pity for them. (André Gide, *El Hadj, ou le traité du faux prophète* (the treaty of the false prophet))

As we have seen, whether in the form of recognition or in the form of control, the foundations of social power seem to be entangled with visibility issues. Once organised in regimes, asymmetries of visibilities serve ceaselessly to reproduce the very power/knowledge asymmetries of which they are the product. In both its socio-technical and bio-political dimensions, the taken-for-granted forms an unthought, invisible presence. With reference to the crucial role software plays in the creation of contemporary spaces, Nigel Thrift (2005) has recently spoken of a 'technological unconscious' embedded in the material foundations that make social intercourse possible. But the issue of a social unconscious, or a social unthought, is not new at all.

In Pascal's *Pensées* (1670: § IV, 301), the passage on the 'mystical foundations of authority' first established the link between invisibility, custom, habits and the social order at large. Political philosophers and legal theorists know very well the existence of such a blind spot: while the system can always justify this or that norm, this or that measure, it cannot but fail to justify its own existence as a whole. The original act is arbitrary: Pascal even calls it a 'usurpation'. In his *Pascalian meditations*, Pierre Bourdieu (1997) uses the term *méconnaissance* (neglect) to indicate the amnesia of the historically contingent genesis of every given social order. In his earlier works, Bourdieu (1979) claimed that class struggles take the form of classificatory struggles and called this peculiar dynamic of a layer of invisible violence that produces the superimposed layer of visible social peace 'symbolic power'. Elsewhere, Bourdieu (2000: 124) praised Karl Kraus for his counterintuitive capacity to make visible the invisible 'already-seen' of social life, suspending 'natural' belief in it (arguably, an attitude similar to Percec's investigations into the endotic) – for such a move is necessary to break with the pre-comprehensions of the social world which are the product of *méconnaissance*.

In the end, Bourdieu's notion is not really far from Antonio Gramsci's (1971[1929–1935]) view on hegemony. Hegemony is a sort of invisible

domination which is organically and invisibly articulated and reproduced throughout society. It is only during revolutionary moments that hegemony, the long-term 'war of position' for the conquest of the state, a slow motion war which defines an unquestioned framework of power wherein local conflict can be subsumed, is finally called into question because a visible 'war of movement' takes over. More interested in the failures of reason and of rationalist thinking, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979[1947]) described the ways in which the Enlightenment, whose original mission was to emancipate the human being from magical thinking and foster the progressive technical domination of nature, has turned into myth and mass deception. The culture industry is a myth-making machine that produces amnesiac hegemonic effects of *méconnaissance*. Here again, the foundations of a given historical order are concealed and kept invisible. Of course, the weak side of critical theories lies in the fact that they easily give way to conspiracist thinking. In this respect, some unorthodox views may bring interesting insights into the process of amnesia of the social order's genesis. For instance, in his important essay on the psychological structure of fascism, George Bataille (1979) contrasted homogeneous and heterogeneous elements in society. Basically, his idea is that the homogeneous corresponds to what we may call the normal, or the invisible. Bataille insists that the homogeneous elements end up bestowing social and political power to the heterogeneous elements because they fail to find in themselves a reason to exist. Overall, the process that leads to fascism is thus generated by an urge to create visibility as heterogeneity.

Bataille's sociological thinking – as well as that of the other members of the *Collège de sociologie* – was influenced by Émile Durkheim. For Durkheim (1912), the invisible force that shapes the grammar of single intercourses is nothing other than society as a whole in its object-like nature, or 'thingness'. The single individual, Durkheim held, is acted upon by a superior power, but this power is not transcendental or metaphysical. On the contrary, it is society itself, which in its immediate and external presence is like a God to the individual – a God in both the sense that it is omnipotent and the sense that it 'scares and takes care'. The power of society is visible in its effect, but invisible as such because the individual does not recognise it: s/he might even think that society does not exist, and indeed this is what occurs in most cases. But is it possible to visualise such an invisible foundational dimension of society? Working in the Durkheimian tradition, the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1970) assigned to rituals the role of providing a visible symbolism for social relations: rituals are practical moments in social

life whose aim is explicitly to visibilise the nature of the social relation that is being performed or worked upon.

Rituals are visibilising devices that present themselves with the strength of total social facts. More generally, all sorts of accounts, explanations and justifications are based upon various orders of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). Similarly, rhetorical arguments are discourses that connect premises and consequences endowed with different levels of visibility, according to their more or less shared nature. Starting from what is more established, accepted and invisible they try to bring into the same foundational invisibility that which is new and contested. Rhetorical *topoi* link together given items in order to produce some other new items, and their peculiarity is that they do so in a way which is not objective because the positions and dispositions of the speaker and the audience are integral part of the whole topic machine (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958). Trumping arguments entail, if not entirely consist of, invisibilisation strategies. Just consider the contemporary rhetoric of 'security reasons'. All sorts of prohibitions, impositions and recommendations are routinely put in place through this type of rhetoric. What kind of invisibility is generated, for instance, when you are recommended to perform a 'security update' on the software of your computer? The politics of 'recommendations' creates a hierarchy of visibility by establishing an unmarked position vis-à-vis a marked one. The power to invisibilise alternatives is, as Stephen Lukes (2005) remarked in his critique of behavioural theories of power, a crucial form of management of social relationships. Control over the political agenda, and the exclusion and invisibilisation of certain issues, cannot be adequately tackled unless it is understood as a function of collective, organised forces – that is, as a field effect.

Resistances

In Chapter 1 we saw that symbols are devices for visibilisation. This holds for all socially and politically contentious events, too. So, the protest march, the strike and the picket are visibilisations of social conflict. But there are other important *dispositifs* of visibility that are connected to resistance. For instance, the passage from the invisible to the concealed flags a moment of dissociation between first-order and second-order visibility. When something invisible is perceived as concealed, we can say that its absence has been visibilised. The sociology of *affaires*, disputes and formal protests (Boltanski 1990) provides us with abundant examples. The grammar of public denunciations of injustice

is inherently a grammar of the different procedures for the visibilisation of the issues at stake. Those who protest find themselves obliged to proceed through a struggle over second-order visibilities well before addressing their substantive concern.

However, resistance against an unfavourable present and resistance against subjugation can also pass through invisible practices, and this is the important point raised by James C. Scott (1990) in his analysis of the informal tools of resistance deployed by the subordinate classes. According to Scott, the official story of the relationship between dominant and dominated should be distinguished from the unofficial one. The official 'public transcript' of subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant one does not tell the whole story of the relationship, as there is also a 'hidden transcript' taking place offstage behind the scenes. Protests, revolts and revolutions are characterised by bursts of collective outright defiance, but they are exceptional events and the absence of direct confrontation does not mean that hegemony goes unchallenged. Resistance should rather be looked for in the everyday constellation of the 'weapons of the weak', which include dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, foot-dragging, slander, arson and sabotage. For subordinate people, the only effective resistance may be invisible resistance because whenever resistance becomes visible it also provokes ferocious repression and retaliation from above.

Besides these informal means of resistance, secret societies also form invisible communities which can host practices of resistance. Diana Crane's (1988[1972]) historic research into 'invisible colleges' detailed how early modern scientific communities were formed through networks of savants who, prior to the formation of modern disciplines with their distinct *epistemai*, spread their ideas through personal letters rather than scientific journals and the press, as later became the case. In general, secret societies are, as Simmel (1906) first noted, always based on reciprocal trust and protection, and above all the protection of the secret that makes the group possible, defining as it does the group's autonomy and its tendency to exist in a separated social space. The secret society opposes itself to the way in which people normally know about each other, hold expectations of roles and disclose personal information and opinions in conversations and revelations. Secrecy can be regarded as a typical and quite notable social device of visibility. For Simmel, the secret allows for an extraordinary widening of social life. This is due to the fact that the secret doubles the world, introducing the possibility of another, invisible world which is placed side by side to the visible one. The 'second world' created by the social phenomenon

of secrecy is an invisible world that affects and influences the visible, 'obvious' one. An apparently fictitious device thus determines a real extension of possibilities in social life.

The secret is, somewhat paradoxically, extremely visible because its existence is necessary to define the boundaries of the group. Umberto Eco once remarked that the best secret is the empty secret because it is unbreakable. Eco wanted to attract our attention to the fact that the secret is not only information content, but a social relationship, too. The relationship created by the secret is independent from the alleged content of the secret. Not only can it exist without such content, but it is in fact best secured by the absence of any content. However, Eco overlooked that in most cases the secret is not only a mere cognitive game, or a disembodied social relationship. More often than not, the secret is a socio-technical relationship. It is not simply a 'contact of minds' – to borrow the term from Perelman – but technical objects are involved in it. It is not simply a matter of information content, but rather of the objects and techniques that embody, encode, transport, sort and differentiate access. Secrecy is technically and technologically managed, and increasingly so.

Resistance is resistance to being observed and being seized through a haptic gaze: it is resistance against being over-visualised. The idea or the feeling that there is an invisible observer makes someone feel like prey. In his essay on Kafka, Canetti (1979[1976]) makes this point in a way that is remarkably similar to Deleuze and Guattari's (1975) description of the process of 'becoming invisible' in Kafka's stories as a way to resist power situations and flee. In a different context, Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) distinction between 'molar' and 'molecular' also refers to the affective qualities of visibility. Molar and molecular are two poles of desire that correspond to, respectively, the paranoid and the schizophrenic. The molar corresponds to visible desire: it is the official institution, centred upon itself, endlessly reasserting its central truth. On the contrary, the molecular is the invisible desire that perverts the institution and pushes it towards new revolutionary points of reversal.

Finally, a particular situation of visibility with evident bio-political importance is connected to the crowd. In Chapter 1, we hinted at the situation of the 'crowd of stares'. Crowd states alter perception. But whose perception? A crowd is not properly a subject, nor is it an entirely objective phenomenon. Indeed, it is inseparable from the experience of a status of thriving (Canetti 1960). The crowd presents us with a multiplicity in which it is impossible to perceive single distinct entities. Such an incapacity is clearly subjective and relative to an adopted perspective: there is a degree beyond which the human eye and the

human brain cannot handle distinct entities and give way to the state of indistinction that characterises the crowd (we know little about whether other animals live constantly in crowd states or are able to 'individualise'). The crowd thus concerns the difference of nature that exists between two regions of visibility. There is a threshold or degree of visibilisation between individuated and crowd visibility. This threshold can be modified and repositioned through technical means and various technologies. Indeed, architecture can be designed to manage and contain crowds: just consider the role of huge stadiums under totalitarian regimes as places for crowd rallies, as shown in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. But many other different systems and techniques have been developed to break down multiplicities, repositioning the thresholds of visibility between individuated and crowd states: for instance discipline, as described by Foucault, is a way of breaking down multiplicities into manageable parts in order to control them.

The invisible and the hyaline: Social theory as a way of seeing

The need to find ways and procedures for visibilising social phenomena and subjects unites lay people and social theorists. It reveals that lay people *are* social theorists on their own account and for their own practical purposes. Conversely, contrary to what is commonly believed, social theory is extremely concrete, certainly much more concrete than methodology, simply because the epistemological *is* the concrete. Visibility issues are prominent in social theorising and, interestingly, intersect different social practices. While the evidence is, literally, something that stands before our eyes, there is a strong sense that the existence of the invisible, the un-evident or covert, makes us unfree. The invisible is what determines us. As such, it becomes a challenge for enlightened reason. Freud's (1923) conceptualisation of the province of the unconscious as an *Es* or *Id* that invisibly drives the subject is a typical case. But the invisible as a specific social force is already present in Adam Smith's (1776) notion of the 'invisible hand', which attributed a self-regulating quality to the market. Inspired by a tradition of writers including the controversial Mandeville, Smith theorised a process that later Hegel would have called 'heterogenesis of the ends'. The invisible hand is neither a metaphysical nor a psychological force, rather a process through which a composition of actions performed by different actors pursuing their own private interests promotes an end which was not part of their original intention, namely public good and societal welfare.

This tradition of social thinking has recently been somewhat revived by analytic sociology in its quest for the 'invisible codes' of social mechanisms (Cherkaoui 2005) which give rise to emergent systemic properties. Structuralism recurrently encountered the same problem, given that structures, as was said in 1968 *pace* Lacan, do not walk down in the streets. For his part, one of the fathers of modern anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski (1922: 318), described ethnography's enterprise as an attempt to visibilise invisible social structures. His method prescribed extracting the principles of social, legal and political organisation out of a multitude of empirical, often opaque, manifestations. The goal of the ethnographer was thus to tackle the invisible realities of social facts hidden behind or, better, disseminated through a multiplicity of mundane everyday practices. In the post-structural age, this idea becomes the view that, put simply, ethnography is a 'way of seeing' (Wolcott 1999) or even a literary genre (Dal Lago 1994). In the ethnomethodological field, Harold Garfinkel (2006) has argued that the point with ethnomethodology is not simply 'thinking sociologically' (a phrase by Bauman) but rather 'seeing sociologically'. In a sense, one cannot fail to see sociologically because the ethnomethods for observing the social order are the same ethnomethods used by social actors to make it: the properties of the 'autochthonous' or 'endogenous' order of the social are not descriptions but practical accomplishments.

The description of social theory as a way of seeing leads us back once again to the issue of the hyaline. The social presents itself as transparent, or better translucent to the observing subject. The thresholds between the visible and the invisible correspond to various coefficients within the same hyaline element. In his beautiful essay on Rousseau, Starobinski (1971) described how the French philosophers gave a strong moral connotation to transparency and opacity: for Rousseau, the time of transparency is the time of innocence, while opacity is the time we are forced to live in, the time of inequality and injustice among human beings that characterises society (Jean-Jacques can become an observer of opacity only through a process of separation from society – particularly, urban society – and solitude).

It is well known that system theory rules out the notion of 'transparency' of the social system on the basis of the logical paradox of the observer that would ensue. According to Luhmann (1990), the social system is an autopoietic system that already observes itself. The problem is how to maintain, during the self-referential process, the distinction between the observer and the observed, given that where such distinction fails, paradoxes and tautologies follow. When confronted with

paradoxes and tautologies (but tautologies are themselves paradoxes) various strategies of de-paradoxification – that is, of reintroducing significant distinctions – open up, and these include unfolding the paradox, making it invisible, civilising it and making it asymmetrical (Luhmann 2004: 64; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2009). The observer occupies a vantage point over the observed because only the observer can see that what the system assumes to be necessary is in fact contingent (Luhmann 1990: 139). In other words, there is an observational vantage point from which it is possible to see the blind spot of the system, which the system can never see. This mechanism is recursive, so knowledge is not about overall increases or decreases, but rather always about shifts in a balance of visibility and invisibility. However, the blind spot of Luhmann's theory remain precisely the hyaline – hence, material – nature of observation. Criticisms of transparency can be found elsewhere. For instance, analysing the traditional conceptions of space, Henri Lefebvre (1991[1974]) criticised both the illusion of transparency that characterises idealist philosophies and the illusion of opacity that contradistinguishes materialist-mechanist ones. However, Lefebvre did not observe that the existence of thresholds between the visible and the invisible, that is, the existence of coefficients of the hyaline, cuts across all three types of spatiality that he proposed in the attempt to overcome the old dichotomies, namely perceived, conceived and lived space.

Innovation studies illustrate well how visibilisation strategies work. The new is systematically over-visibilised, according to a cognitive balance which can be found frequently in scholarly debates. One example is the 'space annihilation' thesis which originated in the 1990s when enthusiasm and concern about digital communication and virtual reality attracted a good deal of public attention. At the time, the argument was starkly dualist (material *versus* digital, or reality *versus* virtuality) and often rhetorically phrased in terms of 'replacement', 'supplanting', 'beating', 'eroding' and 'subverting': the old is eliminated by the new, or *as* the new is taken on; the old media are being replaced; social, economic and political activities massively migrate towards the new media; physical space is absorbed and destroyed by placeless communication; previous distinctions such as the opposition of here and there collapse or 'melt into the air'. In its crudest, mid-1990s enthusiast formulation, the thesis is now frowned upon by its very creators and early supporters (e.g., Mitchell 1995). Apart from its evident technological determinist flaw, the space-annihilation thesis represents a typical dialectic of visibility. Even substantively, it can be granted that technological innovation reshapes visibilities but in complex and non-linear ways. For

instance, the technological relevance of invisibility was remarked on by Star (1999: 377) when she noted the 'singularly unexciting' nature of infrastructures and their tendency to recede into invisibility.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to show that the notion of visibility can be exploited in social theory as a category that avoids the pitfalls of essentialism-as-reification. In this context, the remark by Marcel Mauss (1938) about different styles of walking – *à la française, à l'américaine* – is crucial. Today, Mauss' observation raises a number of unanswered questions in social science: what is the proper 'layer' of existence of a *style of walking*? What type of social entity is it: an object, a practice, a convention or a model? How come drunken talk and baby talk remain similar across the most diverse languages? Visibility is neither a thing nor a symbol. Rather, it is an element within which procedures for visibilisation and styles of visibilising are enacted, repeated and contested. These styles and procedures ultimately correspond to *modes of existence*, which are neither collective (or universal) nor individual, but *singular*.

We can hardly speak of universality here, since we clearly do not want to arrive at any ideal-type of American walk, drunken talk or baby talk. Even if we tried we simply could not, because *there is actually nothing there*: if we studied the style of walking *à l'américaine* we would find out that it is different for men and women, different for adults and children, different for blacks and whites, different for upper and lower classes, different for sober and drunk people, different for babies and parents, and so on. Nor can we locate a style of walking at the individual level, otherwise it would not make sense to call it 'American', 'drunk-like' or 'baby-like'. Rather, these are things that *flow through* individuals, so to speak. All these 'styles' – let us provisionally call them so – operate upon a substratum introducing their specific distortions, or flexions, in it. A style does not produce any substantial, thing-like result, yet it undeniably exists – *it is something*: it is a singularity, a mode of existence. This is why I have argued in favour of a phenomenological ecology – if anything like that is attainable – of visibility. With reference to Aron Gurwitsch (1957), we could call visibility a 'field of consciousness', in the sense that it is a non-individual, non-psychological consciousness. To address it, we need a phenomenological sensibility towards the here-and-now (the visible as it is inhabited in depth), and at the same time we need an ecological sensibility toward the prolongations of the here-and-now in heterogeneous environments crossed by rippling, anadyomenic rhythms and territories.

3

Media Visibilities

Crowds and publics

In Chapters 1 and 2 we observed that visibility cannot be reduced to its visual dimension but must be conceptualised within the framework of a wider ecology of attentions. Communication media further illuminate this fact. In this chapter, we will focus on media visibilities as a fundamental component of contemporary social-technological complexes. It is necessary to consider how visibility shapes global ideoscapes, that is, the global arenas of public imagination and affect in which sites, subjects, events and rhythms are localised. The notion of communication media is wide and, to some extent, open-ended. It is usually understood as including modern inventions such as the printed book, the press, photography, optical toys such as the magic lantern and other pre-cinematic moving image systems, the cinema, the electronic media of radio and television and, finally, the fluctuating family of digital media known as the 'new media'. However, the list does not per se correspond to any clear-cut concept of medium. As we have just said, the list is not exhaustive: for instance, Marshall McLuhan regarded as media things such as light bulbs, clothes, cars and aircraft, too – not to mention, of course, material structures such as the railway and the telegraph.

Upon closer scrutiny, a fundamental duality at the core of all communication media can be remarked upon: the duality of physical and informational communication. Historically speaking, as Armand Mattelart (1994) has shown, *commerce* formed the *trait d'union* between these two sides – or types – of communication. Since the late eighteenth century, the image of *circulation* increasingly emerges as a powerful paradigm for both 'material' goods and services and 'immaterial' information. The issue of *distribution* follows the issue of circulation. The two major

diagrams of the workings of communication media derive from two fundamentally different ways of organising distribution: the broadcast and the network, each endowed with its respective infrastructures. Also, importantly, the media are not simply spatial but also temporal forms of circulation and distribution. Such a possibility is due to the development of the modern technologies for recording words (in print) and since the mid-nineteenth century also images (photography), sound (the phonograph and the gramophone) and motion (Marey's chronophotography and, soon after, the Lumière brothers' cinema).

Besides the duality between physical and informational communication, another fundamental question concerns the mediating function itself. Mediating between who and whom? Modern communication media have been designed in and for a mass society. The role of the media is indeed at the centre of the three major lines of critique of mass society: the anti-modernist one, which charged the mass society with the destruction of local cultures; the elitist one, which denounced the destruction of high culture, and the critical one, which abhorred indoctrination and the manipulation of the masses. By and large, twentieth-century mass media have been based on the broadcast form, whose diagram of visibility is irradiation (Thompson 1995): it is, in other words, a diagram of 'synoptic' visibility (Mathiesen 1997) where the many see the few. The many are precisely the 'mass' in the mass media. What kind of visibility is entailed by the mass as an audience?

To understand mass audience as a regime of visibility we need to go back to the peculiar phenomenon of the crowd. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, crowds became the object of intense reflection and a lively intellectual production which included, among others, positivist criminologists (Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri and Scipio Sighele), physicians and neurologists (Hippolyte Bernheim, Alexandre Lacassagne and Henri Fournial), historians (Hippolyte Adolphe Taine), psychologists (Gustave Le Bon) and sociologists (Gabriel Tarde and Émile Durkheim) (Brighenti 2010b). Mass psychology dealt with a range of crucial phenomena of communication taking place within a crowd, which were variously conceptualised as 'suggestion', 'psychic contagion', 'hypnosis', 'influence' and 'imitation'.

The issue was not one of mere intellectual amusement. The practical, governmental question concerning how to control urban crowds was lurking throughout the whole debate. Crowds are indeed a complex topic. As we have already observed, the crowd cannot be regarded as either a proper subject in sociological terms – in so

far as it is markedly different from a social group or an organised collective – or an object – in so far as it cannot be successfully reduced to a mere physical analysis of its material mass. Rather, crowd states are ‘thriving’ or ‘undifferentiated’ states (Canetti 1960). They concern the difference of nature between two regions of visibility that correspond to the major models of visibility considered in Chapter 2. There is a threshold or degree of visibilisation – a floating threshold, to be sure – which separates the region where individual and personal recognition are possible from the region where only categorical recognition is possible and where, eventually, the process of recognition *tout court* fails and *pure* crowd states occur. Such a threshold is not only psychological but is modified and repositioned by technical and technological means which stabilise and amplify certain procedures for visibilisation.

These considerations assume significance when we turn to the mass as an audience, or ‘public’. In 1894 Gabriel Tarde, who still lived in his native provincial town of Sarlat, was shaken by the echo of the events of the Dreyfus affair in Paris (he was an active Dreyfusard and a supporter of Zola). Like most of the other crowd theorists, Tarde feared crowds and did not join them. Nonetheless, he recognised, at the root of the crowd, the same mechanism of sympathy, or imitation, which he found at the basis of all social life. As a crowd theorist Tarde is already unique enough, in so far as he managed to inscribe the crowd phenomenon within a general philosophy of society. But his most original contribution is not to be found here. The Dreyfus case was an event distinctively different from the anarchic crowds of the Paris Commune (1871) and, later, the crowds of the protofascistic Boulangist movement. The affair marked a shift in Tarde’s interests, away from crowd phenomena *per se*, towards public opinion and its dynamics. The fact became evident when in 1895 Gustave Le Bon published his best-selling treaty on crowd psychology, in which he spectacularly foresaw the coming of an ‘age of the crowds’. Tarde (1901) replied in this vein: I am sorry, but in all honesty I have to disagree with ‘Docteur Le Bon, that vigorous writer’. Then Tarde reversed Le Bon’s prediction and stated that the coming age would not be the age of the crowds, but rather ‘the age of the public, or publics’. For Tarde, the public was a special object, which followed different laws. The public is ‘a dispersed crowd, in which the reciprocal influence of minds is transformed into action at a distance, at increasing distances’. In other words, the public is defined by territorial dispersal with synchronicity of attention.

Media publicness

If the public is a constitutively mediated multiplicity, the question of the organisation of mediation becomes a politically – and even biopolitically – crucial one. Twenty years after Tarde, in *The Public and its Problems*, John Dewey (1927) defined publics as those particular groups that come into existence as collectives of people who are going to be affected by the direct or indirect consequences of certain acts. The recognition or visibilisation of that set of affecting acts is crucial for the coming into existence of a public as a ‘re-active’ group, that is, a group that aims to respond as a whole to those acts. The public became a ‘mass’ public because the mass media organised distribution to large numbers, through which knowledge and/or affections, as well as knowledge about affections, circulate, shaping social relationships and territorialising a spatially dispersed multiplicity. The public is a spatially dispersed (hence, mediated) but attentionally and emotionally synchronised social territory.

The technical and organisational requirements of large-scale distribution of information and other media content shape the regime of visibility that determines the arrangement of the inter-visibility of mediated subjects, places, events and rhythms. By and large, as we have observed above, during the whole twentieth century the dominant regime has been the *broadcast*, a diagram of visibility in which communication flows from one sender to many receivers – or better, from few to many, given that, sociologically speaking, the sender is not an individual but in fact an organisation, such as a private or a state-owned media company. The broadcast disseminates visible messages emanating from one (political, cultural and informational) centre to the surrounding peripheral territory.

Huge debates have revolved around the public of the mass media qua receivers of its messages and the public nature of mass media themselves. Social representations that shape the ‘public gaze’ circulate through, and are distributed by, the mass media. Thus, the media appear as arenas that contain and circulate public topics of discussion. But the essential fact is that those arenas are also the place where the process of production and construction of the social representations unfolds and something like a public gaze comes into existence. In this sense, as we shall explore in Chapter 5, the public sphere can be observed from the perspective of an ecology of public, spatially distributed but synchronous attentions. For the same reason, the structure

of media visibilities can give scope for both emancipation and domination and, as such, turns into an important political stake.

For instance, in his remarks on the radio, Bertolt Brecht (1980[1932]) highlighted the disproportion between the rhetoric of the 'unlimited possibilities' of the new medium and its actual content, or lack thereof. Nowadays, reflected Brecht in the 1930s, the bourgeoisie has the technical means to say everything and spread it everywhere, but it turns out that it has nothing to say. The German writer famously invoked a shift in the function of the radio from mere 'distribution' to real 'communication'. The broadcast media, Jean Baudrillard (1976) argued almost 45 years later, issue a 'word without answer'. The mass media are intransitive. Whereas Brecht urged the use of the media for a pedagogy of the masses through a form which we have called 'exemplary visibility', whereby media contents become a normative *exemplum*, Baudrillard, inspired by the great myth of May 1968 and still at his 'critical stage' (later, as known, he gained dubious recognition as a 'post-critical' thinker), argued for the destruction of every form of mediation and the reappropriation of direct communication.

In the meantime, reception studies have complexified the image of the receiving spectator, now seen as not simply a receiving pole in the communication flow but a more composite, diversified group who actively decodes and interprets the received messages in local meaningful contexts and for a variety of selective purposes (Hall et al. 1980; Fiske 1987; Morley 1992; 2000; Katz and Liebes 1993; Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Hartley 1999). From this perspective, the mass media emerge as a contested terrain in which struggles for interpretation, appropriation and, as Silverstone (1999; 2005) has claimed, domestication take place. This is certainly a more fertile starting point for analysing mediated visibilities. We can follow an insight by Gabriel Tarde (1901), who first observed that what really counts in the press is not the impact of the news on the readers, but the impact of the readers on other readers. The media are not only about distribution and circulation, but also and especially about collective synchronisation of shared attention and synchronous affection, as it happens in 'media events' (Dayan and Katz 1992) and, to some extent, 'media rituals' (Couldry 2003). In other words, the media are territories. Like every other territory, they are bounded. Also, as public territory they are essentially visible to all (or at least, to many). In a sense, all boundaries can be drawn only *in* public and *for* a public. The joint aspects of publicity and mediatedness are at the core of the notion of public sphere. But before exploring the

political significance of mediated visibilities it is necessary to examine more closely the social-theoretical notion of mediation.

The invisible medium

Walter Lippmann (1922) was among the first to reflect upon the existence of a chain of mediations that separates the opinion about given facts from those facts' 'real environment'. What, he asked, are the mediators that bring the fact to one's knowledge? Of course, today the notion of a fact's 'real environment' sounds naïve, but Lippmann's point has the merit of drawing our attention to the specific process of mediation and the role played by the form of the medium in this process. Such a form inherently involves both perceptual senses and meaning. The mass media function as both *sensorial extensions*, as the McLuhan-inspired tradition has claimed, and *symbolic mediations*, as the British Cultural Studies tradition and other interpretive approaches have contended. This duality mirrors the fact that visibility concerns the technologies of the senses and at the same time the technologies of attention: as we have phrased it in Chapter 2, visibility is socio-technical and bio-political.

Socio-technically, the medium presents itself as prosthetic. Its functioning is perceived as a prosthesis of the subject's perception. McLuhan's (1964) medium theory integrally conceptualised media as extensions of the human senses. As noted earlier, McLuhan defined the media as comprising not only the *mass* media, or those which Parsons and Habermas called the 'generalised media of exchange' like money and power, but more broadly and radically any infrastructure of communication and signification. Thus, medium theory directly attends to the socio-technical nature of visibility; it points to a zone of indistinction in between a given technological instrumentation and the kind of social relations or associations that 'match with' that instrumentation. In this view, by extending the sensorial range, the media transform social space and time, recasting the 'pace and scale' of social interaction.

In essence, medium theory's major claim is that content is medium-sensitive. Media are not neutral extensions, they systematically shape the content, calibrating the ratio between various perceptual senses and engendering specific modifications within the field of the visible. Each medium is defined by its specific sensory ratio. However, here is precisely where McLuhan ultimately furnished only a sketchy, *grossière* description of the specific relationships between a medium and its senses.

His hypothesis that each such relationship corresponded *tout court* to a particular type of medium and to a type of society where that sense is hegemonic can be easily criticised as an evolutionary theory based on technological determinism. In fact, all media are sensorially mixed. As recently argued by Mitchell (2005), there are no purely single-sense (e.g., visual, auditory or tactile) media. Hence, to avoid reductionism, McLuhan's sensory ratio needs to be pluralised, taking into account the polysensorial and semiotic mixtures of different sign-functions that characterise a medium.

Yet, as described by its advocates, medium theory is neither crudely deterministic nor disinterested in media content. From the vantage point of 20 years of critique of McLuhan, his follower Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) described electronic media from the point of view of the 'situational geographies' of social life they create. For instance, through the electronic mass media previously separate social spheres, such as the private and public domains, the official and informal registers, as well as traditionally different age- and gender-sorted activities, are conflated. The possibility created by electronic media of closely watching political leaders, or exposing children to adults' thoughts about them, inevitably alters role models, changing previous patterns of authority. On the other hand, Meyrowitz's version of medium theory also ignited controversy. Indeed, his important claim that mass media create a 'para-proxemics', or an impression of closeness between the viewers and the viewed, led him straightforwardly to the idea that electronic media allow for 'no sense of where' – which again is a reductionist thesis (not to mention that the very idea of a geography without a 'where' is almost nonsensical).

In spite of all its shortcomings, medium theory certainly has two important merits for any attempt to conceptualise visibility as a sociological category. First, it bridges the gap between the strictly sensorial dimension of the visual and the enlarged, socio-technical field of visibility. This unified conception, which avoids dichotomising the visual and the visible, or *le visible* and *le lisible*, should not be confused with a naïve trust in the representational truth of media contents. Second, medium theory introduces visibility at the core of the process of mediation. The media make messages visible; they are procedures for visibilising, while they make the structures of such visibility invisible (with McLuhan, they are the 'massage' of the 'mass age'). Consequently, media studies themselves are concerned with giving visibility to those specific effects of media technologies which would otherwise be hidden by the messages communicated.

The invisibility of the medium is directly connected to its prosthetic nature. The tool tends to become transparent to its user. Michael Polanyi (1967) made this point compellingly. According to the Hungarian-born philosopher, the tool necessarily remains out of the field of operations and, more precisely, on the user's side of the performed operation. As an extension of the user's acts, the tool becomes a part of the user; the latter literally pours him/herself out into it. Polanyi called this implicit relationship 'subsidiary awareness': as we also observed in Chapter 1, the tool user does not look at the tool, rather s/he is aware of it as a necessary subsidy in the action that is being performed. In other words, the user dwells in his/her tool, is territorialised onto it.

Such an 'awareness without vision' that characterises dwelling – in our terms, a territorial relationship between the user and the tool – corresponds to the hyaline nature of the field of visibility that we described in the previous chapter. In a similar vein, with his notion of 'infra-ordinary', Georges Perec invited newspaper readers to push themselves beyond the articles into that unsaid 'rest' or 'margin' of the news where it would only have been possible to 'interrogate the habitual'.

Prolongations

On this basis, it is necessary to amend McLuhan's notion of 'extension' to account for both the material and the imaginative dimensions of mediation. The concept of 'prolongation', inspired by phenomenology coupled with Deleuze's (1988) reading of Leibniz, could help us to do so. Whereas the notion of sensorial extension ultimately leads to a determinist view of the process of mediation, the concept of prolongation is designed to account for a process through which heterogeneous elements are joined or linked together without eliminating their heterogeneity.

Media are often described as composed of a physical and a symbolic component. But, ultimately, the distinction between the physical and the symbolic is not a good one, for two reasons: first, the symbol always has a physical component in itself; second, as we argued in Chapter 1, symbols are just procedures of visibilisation, relations in the field of visibilities. Too much cherished by the Durkheimian tradition, symbols are less useful in understanding social life than images and bodily gestures. A better starting point for conceptualising mediation, it seems to me, is the phenomenological notion of *Lebenswelt* or lifeworld, first proposed by Edmund Husserl, imported into sociology by Alfred Schütz (1967[1932]) and later subscribed to by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

The lifeworld is the here-and-now of the lived experience of the social – its locale, a *plenum* or region or bloc of space-time that exists immediately. The lifeworld is endowed with endoconsistency; it is an ecology of heterogeneous synchronic components enveloped together. It is, as we have put it in Chapter 1, the *praesentia* of inhabited vision.

Ethnomethodologists have revealed in detail how social solidarity itself is based on the timing of interaction that takes place largely implicitly in the *plenum* of the lifeworld (Garfinkel 1967; Heritage 1984). More recently, Boden and Molotch (1994), in their critique of the space-extinction thesis, have spoken of a ‘compulsion of proximity’ that persists even, or particularly, in advanced modernity. Intimacy and copresence, Boden and Molotch explain, are the basic dimensions of social life, while media are just ‘approximations’ to the pure state of copresence, which is required whenever sensitive, complex or uncertain conditions are to be dealt with. The state of highest complexity is the lifeworld *qua* copresence, with its dense situations in which social relationships are immediate, symmetric and reversible. On the contrary, any sort of mediation introduces a selective weakening of the primary characteristics of symmetry and reversibility.

However, the Now-Here is not isolated. It almost constantly and incessantly prolongs towards the ElseWhere. As David Morley (2000: 149–150) describes, the media are ‘disembedding mechanisms’ that enable individuals to escape from their locale in their imagination. Through the media, visibility encounters mobility. Similarly, Cresswell and Dixon (2002) have described how the film enables the viewer to travel, how it motilises the gaze (also Manovich 2001: 107). Most importantly, such a disembedding aspect does not delete the sense of ‘being there’, the *praesentia* that characterises the inhabited lifeworld. This means that the *praesentia* or immediacy of the here-and-now is not absolute but can be altered and manipulated. Immediacy is but the impression of immediacy. Thus, phenomenologically speaking, media coverage creates a powerful effect of presence for distant events which enables ‘being in two places at once’ (Scannell 1996). The sense of presence and aliveness of electronic media, and television in particular, pushes the viewer to understand and engage with what is seen as real and ‘there’. There is no opposition between the media and the lifeworld. However, the proximity of media coverage is still untouchable; it is haptically different from the rest of the lifeworld. As Claude Lefort (1986) critically put it, it is a mere ‘hallucination of nearness’. Again, it is a hallucination due to the threshold of visibility whereby only the message is visible while the medium remains invisible.

But if such a hallucination were simply unfounded, we would face once again the risk of dichotomising the visible and the articulable in the media, as it happened in 'anti-ocularcentric' French thought. For instance, Roland Barthes (1977) described the cinematic experience as congenitally 'traumatic' because it involves an irreducible tension between vision and the linguistic translation of the visual experience; similarly Christian Metz (1991) wrote that cinema is easy to understand but hard to explain because it is more expressive than significant. While the classic tradition in French thought tends to introduce a dichotomy between *le visible* and *le lisible*, Debray's (1991) mediology attempts, on the contrary, to understand mediation as a continuous socio-technical process (Vandenberghe 2007). By doing so, it interprets the medium as an 'expressive material', to borrow the concept from Deleuze and Guattari (1980). Debray (1991) also stresses that mediation entails not only a spatial but also a temporal extension: transmission through time inherently transforms the message while it passes it on. This view is in contrast for instance with Metz's (1991) idea that the film and its viewers cannot but fail to meet each other because only when the film is finished can the viewers start seeing it.

In conclusion, the use of the notion of prolongation allows us to reveal that media visibility does not essentially differ from visuality in social interaction. The difference between visuality and visibility refers to the specific regimes of visibility and the configurations assumed by the field of visibility in different empirical contexts. Whilst the role of vision in social interaction has been amply explored since the time of the classical sociologists, considering media studies in the context of a general reflection on visibility as a sociological category means in the first place 'de-exceptionalising' media vision. As prolongations, the media are means among others to configure the relationships and asymmetries of visibility.

Speeds and rhythms

The link between mediated visibility and time compression has been highlighted (e.g., Bartram 2004). Conceived of a science of speeds, Paul Virilio's (1977) dromology aimed to tackle the consequences that such an extreme spatiotemporal compression has on perception. The speed exemplified by the electronic media, Virilio argued, determines a state of hypervisibility and detachment from reference points, origins (*le Natal*) and local times. Such a detachment turns into a 'loss of the object' of perception. Articulated in different ways, similar ideas

can be found in Baudrillard (1976), who spoke of the 'precession of simulacra', and McLuhan (1964), who first described electronic media as entailing sensory 'implosions'.

The important analytical suggestion here does not lie in the simplistic prophecy about some alleged 'death of the distance', but rather in regarding speed as an omnipresent dimension of visibility. More precisely, media illustrate that visibility always possesses differential speeds. In this sense, 'rhythm' is a more useful notion than speed because it implies differences, that is, thresholds, that entail a series of periodic or aperiodic returns (Lefebvre 2004[1992]). Rhythm is a relational concept which integrally consists of a relationship between different places, subjects and events. If media produce forms of synchronicity, these forms are not mere implosions or annihilations of the related elements, but rather synchronic configurations.

Rhythms define ecologies of coexistence of heterogeneous elements. This does not deny that a change of rhythm produces important effects. For instance, excessive rhythms of information can lead to saturation and anaesthesia, although this is not the overall gloomy characteristic that the moralists depict. More generally, the rhythmic dimension of media visibilities always pushes and pulls them between a paranoid and a schizophrenic pole. For instance, Bourdieu (1996) analysed television's ephemerality as strengthening stereotypes, *idées reçues* and doxastic common sense. On television, Bourdieu argued, it is almost impossible to carry on an argument (although he himself managed to do so!). Television, Bourdieu claimed, is the domain of the fast thinkers, who use impressionistic and emotional rather than rational communicative strategies. However, to make sense of how media rhythms really work, we must consider how they interact with the 'framing' and the 'affective' aspects of visibility.

Framing in/out

We must turn to considering how the visible (the 'message') is presented and how it reaches the viewers. These two aspects of 'informing' the content and 'reaching' the recipient correspond, as I will try to show, to the acts of framing and affecting (or 'performing', as McQuail 1992 called it).

The classic 1930s and 1940s communication research by sociologists and social psychologists like Harold Lasswell, Paul Felix Lazarsfeld and Kurt Lewin on the effects of the media were attempts to measure the effects of the exposure of recipients to the visibility of a certain

message. By contrast, mass media theories that emerged from the 1960s and 1970s on increasingly attempted to take into consideration the contextualisations and modalisations of representation (an earlier attempt to contextualise the media messages was of course provided by Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). For instance, the theory of agenda-setting, according to which media do not tell people what to think but rather what to think about, was an attempt to distinguish analytically the *what* from the *how*, the 'mere visibility' of a news story from the type of framing in which it is presented (McCombs and Shaw 1972; McCombs 2004). In order to analyse the cleavage between what is seen and how it is seen, agenda-setting theorists compared what they called the *issue priorities* of the mass media with those of the audience.

However, the distinction is practically untenable. Precisely because they are contextualised and modalised, contents are essentially framed. The very definition of '(social) issue' as a series of events and items of news grouped together presupposes a selection and thus indirectly a frame. The frame makes it possible to give meaning to the content: it literally in-forms – puts into form – the reported events and news. Mediated vision thus depends on a frame of reference. The frame is also proprietary if one considers for instance the rise of companies' logos on the television broadcasts (Denis 2002). Yet that does not necessarily entail any unified perspective. On the contrary, the professional production of media content by journalists follows organisational and cultural criteria for news production that are relatively unrelated to content but never absolutely univocal and allow for personal choices and meaningful position-takings (Cohen and Young 1973; Schudson 1989, 1996).

Framing refers any framed phenomenon to more general interpretive principles belonging to genres and representational conventions. The frame originates as a representational device with modern perspectivalism, as summarised in Leon Battista Alberti's theory of painting. Most remarkably, the frame isolates its content from the outside and severs it from the *continuum* of events in which it was originally immersed. By doing so, the frame creates a fundamental partitioning between visible and invisible events, as well as visible and invisible people and facts. Through the same and single act, something is framed in and something else is framed out. What is framed out is not only content that could potentially be framed in just by moving the camera's eye. Rather, what is framed out is, in a sense, the structure of the medium itself. The frame constantly reassures the viewer that 'all you see is all you need to know' (Altheide and Snow 1979).

In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu (1996) focused his critical analysis of television on the exploration of the ‘framed-out’, the structure of production that sustains visible media contents. Bourdieu took into consideration not so much the relationship between the technological infrastructure of the medium and the content of the message, as the relationship between the content of the message and the economic, organisational and cultural infrastructure of its production. With respect to journalism, Bourdieu described the structural mechanisms that enable ‘invisible censorship’ to be exercised on the public’s vision. Television, Bourdieu reflected, increasingly determines access to social existence (in our terms, visibility as recognition), but its ability to construct democratic visibility is curtailed by the dependence of its messages on the economic structure of its production, invisible because literally ‘out of frame’. Hence, the hypervisibility of television messages produces repercussions and distortions in other social fields, such as the political and the legal domains. The critical idea that ‘mediatic vision’ (Champagne 1993) is a form of ‘symbolic violence’ (Bourdieu 2001) shares uncoincidental resemblances with Debord’s (1992[1967]) description of the ‘society of the spectacle’: both are theses about the distribution of in/visibilities in the socio-technical domain of mass media. Whereas the Situationist critique attacked the separation of visible representations from real everyday life, the Bourdieusian critique has stressed the effect of in-frame/out-of-frame, that is, the invisibilisation of the productive institutional apparatus behind visible representations.

Propaganda, advertisement and attention management

But one reads the papers as one wants to with a bandage over one’s eyes without trying to understand the facts, listening to the soothing words of the editor as to the words of one’s mistress. (Marcel Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé*)

Let us now turn to the affective side. In itself, Hannah Arendt (1968) remarked, truth is not more visible than opinion. Indeed, several of our problems descend from the fact that in most cases truth is markedly *less* visible than the sum of the opinions circulating. Besides that, the issue with media visibilities concerns not simply opinions as cognitive positions, but also the elicitation of position-taking. Because of the inevitable presence of a mediating frame, there is no neutral stance in this type of visibility. Together with images and news, the spectator constantly receives a series of ‘proposals of commitment’ (Boltanski

1999: 149) towards a world which strictly speaking is beyond his/her reach. Seeing invites believing (Philo 1990; Messaris 1997) and, well beyond the cognitive dimension, pleasure, fear, anger and shock are at stake as haptic components of visibility. The well known issue of sensationalism in the news follows: journalists and mass media producers tend to pander to the unhealthy curiosity of their audience, indulging in disruptive, abnormal events because they can easily 'hit' the audience this way (Hartley 1996). But because, as we have observed above, affections through visibility take place within certain rhythmic thresholds, rhythms that are pushed too much can also turn affections into reactive anaesthesia. Activities such as propagandising and advertising are played out between two such extremes of hyperaesthesia and anaesthesia.

In the years around the First World War, an intense reflection on the power of propaganda and censorship developed. Propaganda, as Walter Lippmann (1922: § II, 3) wrote, entails censorship in so far as it is systematically based on the creation of barriers and filters between the public and the events; precisely the existence of such barriers makes it possible to manipulate public visibilities. Lippmann also warned that refinements of manipulation techniques could easily lead to a 'manufacture of consent', which Herman and Chomsky (1988) later indicated as being at the basis of the political economy of the mass media. In Chapter 8, we shall return to the political import of visibility and the challenges issued to democracy by such a condition. Now we must examine how broadcasting is manipulative.

The metaphor of the 'bombardment' of information, which has by now completely died due to its gross inadequacy and too many literal bombardments all over the world, initially attempted to capture the joint effect of the rhythms of media visibility and the spectator's inability to rely upon his/her personal knowledge when facing a world beyond his/her reach. Soon after totalitarian regimes in Europe unleashed the 'raping' powers of political propaganda (Tchakhotine 1939; Ellul 1976), Adorno and Horkheimer (1979[1947]) decried the evils of an apparently depoliticised and wholly commodified form of commercial propaganda that they called the 'culture industry'. For these classical critical theorists of the Frankfurt School the mass media formed a uniform doping system: television shows, for instance, were composed of various superimposed layers of manifestness and hiddenness which issued latent messages in the form of presuppositions and expectations 'before a single word is spoken' (Adorno 1954). Both politicians and advertisers are in the business of shaping the mediated visible. In most cases

in post-Second World War capitalist countries censorship is no longer carried out explicitly, as it used to be and largely still is under dictatorial regimes; rather, it has been performed by diverting and shifting attention. The field of mass media visibility is an apposite mix of compelling advertisements and ossified stereotypes, which have proved to function as perfectly complementary 'weapons of mass distraction' (Fraser 2005) to produce legitimation through prestidigitation and misdirection of attention (Freudenburg and Alario 2007).

Images are extremely powerful in directing and misdirecting attention essentially because they are *seductive*. Siegfried Kracauer (1997[1960]: 164–165) famously described the somnambulist 'state of reduced consciousness and great receptivity' that characterises the spectator before media images. However, if we want to avoid conspiracist thinking, we have to recognise that manipulation is not omnipotent. Not only because, as Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) first argued, reception is mediated by opinion leaders who can be external to the media themselves, but also because spectators have critical abilities of their own (Hall et al. 1980; Morley 1992, 2000; Katz and Liebes 1993). In particular, in parallel to de Certeau's (1990[1980–1985]) view on readers tactically 'poaching' the text's terrain, cultural studies authors have emphasised that reception entails 'decoding' the message in potentially resistant and contesting ways (Williams 1974).

Even the trivial pattern of everyday television and radio use corresponds to a customised and idiosyncratic palimpsest put together 'on the go' by media *bricoleur*-users. Hence, the management and synchronisation of public attention is an all-but straightforward phenomenon. To explain how certain news stories and issues attract more attention than others, Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) have started from the consideration that attention is a scarce resource and that the news actually has to struggle with other news in order to become visible (interestingly, this approach can be applied to new media, too: see Maratea 2008). From this perspective, the media are not tools – or weapons – but rather arenas of public attention in which public attention itself gets distributed and drawn on various competing issues according to a number of variables of visibility.

For display purposes only

In the media, both things and people are simultaneously on display. Such an activity recalls the already described case of the spectacle, a form of visibility that is severed and isolated from the rest of life.

Kracauer (1995[1927]) depicted cinemas as 'cathedrals for the cult of distraction', where the dream world of the movie, severed from comparison with the real world, could absorb all the viewer's attention. From this perspective, the mass media were said to encourage mass voyeurism and passivity. The spectacle is not only linked to high-tech mediation apparatuses, though, it is also a traditional visibility regime with its format of interaction, as theatre pieces, performances, exhibitions and museums remind us. Fairs, exhibitions, art galleries and, above all, the modern museum formed spectacular visibility devices for the display of things. If the modern museum that emerged around the mid-nineteenth century aimed also to be mnemonic and pedagogic, with both a strong class dimension and a disciplinary mission to attain (Bennett 1995), the contemporary museum, Foster (2002: 95) has recently observed, returns to prioritising its own spectacle value above all else, determining a new triumph of the visual spectacle as a capital-enhancing strategy. Visibility is at the core of brand equity strategies of not only museums. Arguably, marketing in contemporary capitalism has visibility as its basic feature, as 'the struggle to be displayed' in market research shows (Barrey 2007): for instance, the recent documentary *Beer Wars* (2009) by Anat Baron raises a very lively series of points about the politics of visibility in retail stores.

The display of people is even more complex, as it entails social representations: here we encounter stars, heroes, freaks, deviants, ordinary people and the rest of us. Social representations are bundles of consistently packaged information. They are, so to speak, *visibility crystals* (I take the metaphor from Canetti's description of the sect as a 'mass crystal'). The labelling process (Becker 1963) describes the *in vivo* process of shaping social representations. Once their core is formed, these visibility crystals circulate, and are shared and diffused; they last for a period that is proportional to the distinctiveness and endoconsistence of their core, together with the degree of visibility they manage to reach. It is possible to study the ways in which the elements of these socially learned repertoires of collectively established and often institutionally assured assumptions react to and are mixed with each other (Moscovici 1985; 2000; Rocher 2002). The work of reciprocal management of attention entailed by social representations takes place through the establishment of precise thresholds separating and bringing into contact what is observable with what is not. Representations are referred not only to persons: it is sufficient to consider the case of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990; 1995). To know a place takes time, as every place is made of a stratification of experiences and encounters, but time is precisely

what tourists do *not* have, thus they need to enjoy places through pre-packaged representations, such as the quick, sketchy and stereotypical representations offered by tourist guides and tour operators.

The stereotypes produced by the 'categorical' type of recognition we examined in Chapter 2 can be understood as visibility crystals. The role of media in the creation and diffusion of visibility crystals has been widely recognised. For instance, Walter Benjamin (2003[1935–1939]) argued that both the star of the cinema and the totalitarian dictator are products of the mass media. More recently, Patrick Champagne (1993) has analysed the representation of the *banlieu* inhabitant, Dario Melossi (2000) the representation of the criminal and Michael Welch (2006) the representation of Muslims in the post-9/11 period. Following Bourdieu, Patrick Champagne has discussed the development of a 'mediatic vision' which explains the distinction between dominant and dominated groups as resulting from the capacity to control the representations of oneself conveyed by the media. Likewise, Dario Melossi has pointed out that representations of the criminal differ widely from one historical period to another: they alternate between sympathetic and antipathetic because their production and circulation are structurally located within the broader organisation of social relations. Focusing on a specific case, Michael Welch has examined how the post-9/11 'war on terror' has exacerbated patterns of anti-Muslim institutional racism, including ethnic profiling, targeting and other wrongdoings against citizens.

The issue of the visibility of ethnic, sexual and moral minorities and marginal people reveals how social representations lean towards and are always dangerously close to stereotyping. For minorities, just as invisibility can easily lead to lack of recognition, supervisibility can easily lead to misrepresentation, distortion, disempowerment and inferiorisation. Recent gender studies research has shown how women continue to be harshly judged for departures from traditional feminine ideals (Jackson and Tinkler 2007). On the contrary, when women cease to be invisible, they are quickly labelled as 'incorrigible' (Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006). Since the 1960s, sexual minorities in the West have struggled and reached heightened visibility. Yet, while Kates and Belk (2001) have attempted to show how gay and lesbian communities seek visibility through events like the 'pride days' according to Clarkson (2008), visibility runs the risk of imposing upon gay people a normative conception about an allegedly 'correct' way of being gay. Also, while gay men have produced geographically visible enclaves in inner-city areas, Podmore (2006) argues, lesbian communities have remained largely

invisible, as they are based more on personal networks than physical places. Moral hierarchies that reflect dominant values can be replicated within minorities and stigmatised groups themselves, as shown by Anderson (2000) in the case of inner-city families and Bourgois and Schonberg (2007) in the case of homeless drug addicts.

Visibility crystals are collective and work in an aggregated way, while spectacular recognition, ambiguously located close to the individual and the personal, applies to 'important people': celebrities, media stars and starlets (Dyer 1998; Cashmore 2006). Here, the struggle for visibility-as-recognition is a struggle for individuality. The modern mythology of media stars is akin to the old 'legends of the artist' (Kris and Kurz 1981), in which exemplary visibility served to identify the great artist, although undoubtedly the mass media have introduced important modifications. Meyrowitz (2009) has recently observed that through the electronic mass media, and in particular television, people have become addicted to the possibility of watching other people closely. For instance, in so called 'reality shows' – which at some point in the late 1990s seemed for an instant to have incarnated Baudrillard's otherwise vague notion of 'hyperreality' – we find a scheme where people in the audience enjoy watching other people 'like us' who, on the other hand, aspire to become 'no ordinary people', that is, starlets. It is really a struggle to become an individual, someone who lasts. But because these shows are moulded upon a social Darwinist mechanism of 'selection-elimination', the wish to become individuals remains chimerical for most of them. The fact that these are people 'like us' means that no specific substantive competence is required – purely social competence and, more specifically, a competence at social manipulation. While all participants seem to enjoy their instant, '15 minutes of fame', most of them fail to become individuals; on the contrary, they are doomed to remain categories, 'sketches' or 'types' (the envious, the vengeful, the merciless or the awkward); their names are forgotten the next season.

Studies of scandals (Thompson 2000; Adut 2008) have also highlighted how the notion of what constitutes a private affair is elastic and can shift dramatically. The scandal consists of the visibilisation qua publicisation of some alleged fault or transgression. Political scandal is a visibility mechanism gone awry – or even, one might say, a *nemesis* of visibility. In most cases, personal scandals concerning political figures have turned out to have been politically directed by spin doctors, political adversaries and manipulated journalists. In general, scandal originates in the structural tension between the need for visibility as

a means to exercise political and social power and its unforeseen collateral effects.

The visibility of suffering

In this chapter, we have seen how, depending on its rhythmic and haptic components, media visibility can enhance participation and empathy as well as, on the contrary, inertia and distance. A final case to illustrate the peculiarities of media visibility and the ambivalences of visibilisation procedures is the media coverage of sufferings of various kinds. Such coverage may promote different types of moral attitudes: it is generally expected to produce support and mobilisation in favour of those who suffer, but can also turn out to produce moral anaesthesia or even connivance. The problem is discussed by Susan Sontag (2003) in the case of war photography, which could sustain a commitment against the war and in favour of its civil victims, but could also celebrate the heroism of soldiers in action and even imply the inevitability of war. Such a traumatic realism of disaster has been described by Allen Feldman (2005) as an 'actuarial gaze' that is currently thriving on mediated visual global shocks.

Thus, the enlargement of the field of the mediatically visible produces potentially contradictory outcomes. Whereas the optimistic view claims that the global visibility of suffering inevitably brings with it the potential of really caring for distant and otherwise invisible others, the sceptical view challenges the idea that visual immediacy and the 'hallucination of being there' (Lefort 1986) leads to any real concern for those distant unfortunates who are 'like us' (Chouliaraki 2008). So, while optimists insist on aspects such as the globalisation of civil society and the independence of coverage revealing suffering, pessimists reply by pointing out, on the one hand, the absence of any real global audience, fragmented into a plurality of linguistic and cultural regions, and, on the other, the sustained marketisation of 'humanitarian' news that distorts them towards sensationalism, sanitisation and decontextualisation.

In what Luc Boltanski (1999) has described as a 'politics of pity', there is no neutral observational standpoint on suffering: if you choose to ignore the existence of the unfortunates whose suffering is presented to you through the media, you are making a clearly marked moral and political choice. Considerations of suffering intrinsically elicit reaction: taking sides is not optional. However, the opposite risk exists, too: namely, that you might sadistically enjoy the spectacle of the others'

pain. Of course, this is no less morally reproachable than indifference. How, Boltanski asks, is it possible to distinguish a disinterested, altruistic way of looking from a selfish, indifferent one, and how is it possible to distinguish a genuinely compassionate and sympathetic gaze from a perverse and therefore no less selfish one? The question is relevant not only for moral philosophy (specifically, Boltanski urges us to move from the frame of a 'politics of pity' to that of a 'politics of justice'). The broadcast diagram of media visibility, as we have observed above, is bound up with contradictions and tensions of this type. The public is a constitutively mediated multiplicity and the media constitute the arenas where an ecology of public spatially distributed yet synchronous attentions grow. As first understood by Tarde, social research should strive not only to observe the effects of the media message on the spectators, which occur through framing and affecting, but also, and especially, the effect of the spectators on themselves, that is, the territorialisation of the public as a multiplicity of attentions.

4

New Media and Networked Visibilities

Visibility networks; visibility in the network

Besides traditional mass media, 'new' media, too, give rise to specific visibility regimes, which are different from the diagram of the broadcast analysed in Chapter 3. Of course the category of 'new media' is always historically relative, given that every medium functions through re-mediation of former media, so that what seems to be most immediate is in fact hypermediated (Bolter and Grusin 1999). For us, writing at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the new media in question are digital, networked, portable, personal and locative media. In this chapter, the analysis of mediated visibilities undertaken in Chapter 3 is extended to the new media based on a set of distinctive digital information and communication technologies. By-now extensively investigated phenomena like 'ubiquitous computing' (shortened, 'ubicomp') and 'mixed' or 'augmented reality' show how visibility is located at the centre of a series of socio-technical and bio-political nodes of contemporary society. To my mind, a double exploration is required: first, of how visibility circulates in networks, or, how it becomes networked; second, how networks themselves become means to produce, enhance and manage visibilities, or, how they configure themselves as visibility networks.

The context in which this process unfolds is the emergence of the image – both metaphor and practice – of the network as a new social topology and a new spirit of capitalism (Castells 1996; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). The network topology applied to capitalism, as has been widely commented, has led to a mix of flexibilisation, decentralisation and de-hierarchisation, on the one hand, together with heightened inequalities, cleavages and overall worsened social conditions, on

the other. Consequently, it is crucial to analyse in detail how visibility is shaped through the wide array of new networked information and communication technologies and their specific features.

Some of the key characteristics usually associated with new media are digitality, portability and interactivity. Lev Manovich (2001) also enumerates five 'operational principles' of the new media: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding. These features highlight the processuality of new media and their constant reorganisation of contents through an open-ended, user-centred process. Hans Magnus Enzensberger's (1970) old view that the structure of the mass media entails no inherent opposition between content producers and content consumers might have been wrong with respect to the mass media, but seems to become a literal reality in the case of the new media under scrutiny. Similarly, Stuart Hall's et al.'s (1980) description of the message as a dynamic entity at the centre of a series of encoding and decoding activities seems to be incarnated in the representational pliability and constant reorganisability of new media contents. On the contrary, Baudrillard's (1976) characterisation of media as 'word without answer' does not apply here. The notion of spectacle critically applied to traditional media becomes problematic, too, in so far as the spectacle entailed separation and inaction. Instead, new information technologies are 'interactive' and 'participatory' by definition, and while informatics develops into 'social informatics' (Sawyer and Tyworth 2006), lay people acquire skills that were once possessed only by computer engineers. Wikipedia and other wikis can serve as an example of skilled participation, while social tagging and their folkonomies (i.e., folk taxonomies) show how even the task of classification turns into a shared practice. The interactivity possessed by the new media seems to promote culture jamming and do-it-yourself attitudes, and even forms of 'do-it-yourself citizenship' (Hartley 1999). Bluntly, in the 'information age' we are all 'prosumers' (simultaneously producers and consumers: Toffler 1980; Kendall 2008).

While a discourse of openness and empowerment, pivoting around the notions of connectivity and access, has surrounded the new media, the latter have turned out to be extremely ambivalent, possibly even more ambivalent than traditional mass media. The sheer size of the new media business has had a crucial impact. For instance, the initially largely voluntarist culture of the Internet has been significantly marginalised by the wave of intense commercial exploitation that has taken place since the late 1990s. But it is neither simply a matter of big economic actors taking pride of place, nor only an issue of commercial

competition and paid-for access services reshaping what had previously been a communitarian hacker ethic (Himanen 2001; Goldsmith and Wu 2006), upon which the myth of cyberdemocracy through virtual communities had been established (Rheingold 2000[1993]).

Participatory what?

New media make users more vulnerable to surveillance and other forms of control. Perhaps never before has the distinction between empowerment and vulnerability, between recognition and control, been thinner. More radically, we have to recognise that these two opposite poles reside within the same place and the same act. So, while for enthusiast commentators nowadays 'little brothers and sisters are watching' Big Brother (Häyhtiö and Rinne 2009), sceptics have argued that the neat outcome of the new quest for visibility is nothing other than a 'participatory panopticon' (Whitaker 1999), through which Big Brother's performance is simply 'outsourced'. Under these conditions, Mark Andrejevic (2004: 194) has remarked, participation has nothing to do with power sharing. Michel Foucault (1975: 195) had already clearly understood that discipline *is* participatory. Discipline works by transforming the subject into 'the principle of [its] own subjection'. However, Foucault did not think that that process could be fun or playful. On the contrary, as we shall see, the new forms of control, whose possibility is for the most part inscribed in the new media technologies themselves, are made possible by the fact that people engage voluntarily in them. Numerous activities involved in new media can be described as networked discipline, while the power holders, who are increasingly identified with the 'node switchers' (Castells 1996: 471) and the 'algorithm programmers' (Beer 2009), become even more invisible.

As a matter of fact, in everyday use of new ICTs, most people seem to care little about the node switchers. User-generated visible content of all sorts, provided for instance through webcams and mobile phones and instantly shared through video posting sites such as YouTube, seems to attract much more attention through the renewal of an exhibitionistic-voyeuristic circuit. Concurrently, the personalised visibility of blogs and personal profile platforms (e.g., Facebook) promotes diaristic and confessional accounts, and, more generally, 'express yourself!' types of urges. Unsurprisingly, recent surveys have recorded that the most popular topic among Northern American bloggers is 'me' (Gurak and Antonijevic 2008). These are of course only some of the many possibilities of using the new media to manage networked visibilities, but

the examples provided above have been enough for critics to denounce social networking as mere 'phatic communication', that is, communication completely void of any content except for the act of communicating itself (Miller 2008). Through phatic communication, people basically seek to become visible to others, gaining recognition but especially and above all engaging in a sort of game, which is certainly also a game of surveillance (or *sousveillance*, surveillance from below) and control, but which is played because it fundamentally entails fun and enjoyment.

If enhanced communication had initially been celebrated as fostering social integration, concerns have also been raised about the fact that differentiation, diversification and the 'pluralisation of lifeworlds' could instead lead to social fragmentation (Lievrouw 2001). Any straightforward integration/fragmentation dichotomy, however, risks being mistaken for another opposition which is certainly more relevant for those interested in studying the field of social visibility, namely the opposition between the *mainstream* and the *minoritarian*. Whereas the mainstream corresponds to a rhythm of broad synchronisation of attentions which, as we shall see in the next chapter, approximates but remains distinct from the characteristics of the public domain, the minoritarian corresponds to a multiplicity of rhythms of smaller-scale territorialisation of communitarian, subcultural or oppositional attentions.

In the new media, one can find both mainstream and minoritarian uses, and their rhythms ecologically superimpose and modulate each other, following their distinct speeds and temporalities. The fact that almost all generalist mass media (the press, television, etc.) have now migrated onto the Internet does not make it impossible for alternative bloggers and independent reporters to use that medium, but it certainly affects the respective scales of visibility; similarly, the fact that major companies such as Amazon sell e-books via their proprietary e-book devices certainly affects the scope for alternative forms of e-book sharing.

For a territorology of the new media

Arguably, there is a need to develop a territorology of the new media. The network has often been conceptualised as almost the opposite of the territory, on the basis of the fact that the former would be discontinuous while the latter would be continuous (Lévy 1994; Jessop et al. 2008). However, the absolute distinction between territories and networks is not very well placed (Brighenti 2010a). In fact, networks are a specific type of territory, in which access points are hierarchically arranged,

ideally to the point of closing all access ways except the predetermined ones, and in which speeds of connection are similarly sorted according to hierarchical demands.

Thus, the network should be better conceived of as a territory in which a specific visibility regime is instituted: in any network topology, the visibilisation emphasis is placed not on territorial boundaries but on some selected territorial flows – which of course does not at all mean that boundaries are absent; quite the contrary, boundaries are absolutely necessary to institute networks, at the very moment that attention is drawn away from them. Networks are territories in which certain flows are hypervisibilised while certain others are invisibilised and hampered, or simply made impossible. Also, territories are phenomena of multiplicities and singularities: far from being private or merely interpersonal constructions, but also different from being collective social facts, territories always involve crowds, packs, swarms and publics – all those types of interconnections which Tarde's (1902) inter-psychology first sought to explore. To speak of a territorology of the new media also means arguing against the 'exceptionalism' that at the initial stage has surrounded research, all too eager to emphasise the alleged absolute novelty of its object.

Let us consider a few cases in which a territorology of the new media could aid our understanding. The Internet provides a glaring example of the shaping of new media territorialities through visibility. Domains are territorial constructs, as shown by the fact that for instance large web portals have developed specific techniques – known as 'walled gardens' – to direct users' navigation invisibly so as to keep them within their url addresses for as long as possible. But the Internet is also a meaningful environment where social interaction and presentations of the Self take place. The studies of computer mediated communication have devoted a lot of attention to these processes (Walther 1996; Thurlow et al. 2004).

The shift from web 1.0 to web 2.0 has been described as a shift from merely creating and circulating documents through hypertext linkages to involving people in online interaction and cooperation (see e.g., Fuchs 2008 – who, perhaps prematurely, qualifies cooperation through the Internet as 'web 3.0'). Certainly, web 2.0 online platforms including the famous Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Second Life, Flickr, delicious, digg, Technorati, iChat, Messenger, GTalk, Skype, etc. fundamentally revolve around social networking, which is in turn based upon the creation of social territories as social ties. Social networking and social bookmarking platforms represent a wealth for sociologists,

as they provide an unprecedented opportunity to observe *in vivo* social capital in action. They also reveal compulsive quantitative behaviours – for example, ‘gaining’ new ‘friends’ every day – which border on various forms of addiction, abuse and disorder (Morahan-Martin 2005; with respect to children, see Buckingham 2002). Finally, blogs, too, develop territorialising techniques, ranging from merely technical tools such as registrations and RSS feeds to the creation of normative and emotional more or less gated communities, just like larger news websites do (Tremayne 2005).

Ranking visibilities

The new media are arenas of pluralised visibilities. But such a pluralisation has also entailed new rules of intervisibility ranking and indexing. The Internet provides an example of how visibility has been shaped in a medium that originally prioritised no clear criteria of visibility. In early 1990s, the net was seen by its practitioners as materialising – precisely through, allow me the wordplay, dematerialisation – the promise of horizontal and rhizomatic relationships. Theoretically, there is no inherent reason why the various nodes of a pure network structure – which, of course, the Internet is far from being – should exhibit differences in degrees of visibility. The network was praised as enabling a collaborative, non-conflictual, non-zero-sum game type of visibility. Indeed, while the logic of conflict pushed to its extreme is ultimately to be reduced to the sadly well-known zero-sum game of ‘killed or be killed’ (‘do or die’, in the ghetto version), the logic of the network potentially supports a positive-sum philosophy of ‘link *and* be linked’.

However, things are not that easy. Here, the Google search engine has represented a revolution in the visibility architecture of the Internet. Sergey Brin and Larry Page (1998), the creators of the Google PageRank algorithm, adopted a citation system and decided to rank pages on the basis of an iterative sum of ratios between the page ranking of links pointing to the page in question and the number of links in it that point out. They also imaged a random web surfer who, starting from a random page, either follows one possible link to another page or ‘gets bored’: the probability that this surfer arrives at a given page is that page’s rank. As Carr (2008) has suggested, Brin and Page realised that every time someone inserts in one’s own website a link to another website, she is expressing a judgment – better, we can say that she is conferring visibility to the linked page. Treated in an aggregated way, chains of linkages emerge that are topologically similar to scientific citation

networks. Scientists commonly discover relevant publications following chains of citation links from other papers (Chen et al. 2006; Langville and Meyer 2006). Besides, as just observed, the visibility of the linking page – which ideally corresponds to scientific authoritativeness, etc. – is also essential to determine the final rank of the linked page.

While this sort of visibility ranking appears as eminently ‘meritocratic’, part of Google’s algorithm – turned from an experiment by two computer science Ph.D. students at Stanford into one of the most successful net companies ever – is secret. We know little, for instance, about the precise effect of sponsored links, toposensitive queries and other commercially relevant intervening variables. Critics have described Google as a ‘parasite of the digital datascape’ and the perfect embodiment of the diagram of cognitive capitalism (Pasquinelli 2009). Concurrently, people struggle to achieve visibility through Google, which – and this is crucial – amounts to visibility *in* Google. Through a full-blown self-fulfilling prophecy, Google has itself turned into one of the major authorities that bestow visibility: how does Google’s PageRank rank its own visibility? Let us recall that AdSense, Google’s advertisement system, is largely based on a self-fulfilling prophecy: advertisers place a price on some search terms which will then appear whenever users perform searches with those terms. Advertisers who place higher prices appear first and they are charged by Google every time their link is clicked. This is, literally, the new media business of visibility.

In conclusion, it should be observed that the struggle for visibility over the Internet represents a peculiar prolongation of the logic of recognition. As Mitchell (2003: 62) aphorised, ‘I am visible to Google. I link, therefore I am’. As we have noted above, this form of networked visibility certainly has powerful ranking effects; at the same time, though, it presents us with a very different situation from that theorised by Luc Boltanski and his collaborators with their notion of ‘test’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). For Boltanski, a test is called for every time it is necessary to place and rank people in positions of unequal value. But, in fact, the new media present us with a hyaline situation in which the ranking criterion and the ranked results become perfectly coincident. Visibility thus turns into the element that determines, sorts and distributes positions in its own field.

Acting through visibility

The bio-political importance of new media visibilities is further illustrated by the ways in which the achieved visibilities are incorporated

into social action. Dynamics of commodification, disciplination and control, but also resistance and engaged action, can be identified. To begin with, commodification means that all sorts of delivered information have a commercial value and are potentially for sale. As observed by Whitaker (1999: 123), the real business for surveillance agencies today no longer rests with producing secret dossiers, but rather private sellable databases. Databases are bio-political tools par excellence: they concern not so much single individuals and their bodies, but rather populations and possible events. From this perspective, the power of the database is to record correlations and present them as answers to certain queries. For instance, the associative function present in many online stores 'people who bought this also bought that', 'if you like this you would also enjoy that' – also known as a 'recommendation engine' or 'adaptive cross-merchandising' – is clearly statistical information. Its commercial value is appreciated when it is offered for free to the next customer as a form of personalised advertisement in order to get that customer to buy more. Private databases are formally created with data always given by consent, but in fact more often than not acquired silently and invisibly thanks to low profile data-gathering strategies. We do not know exactly what Google does with the texts of our emails on Gmail but it is plain to see that whenever you type the name of a place you are instantly offered hotels and car rent services in that locality. It is in this sense that consumption of information has also disciplinary effects on individual consumers.

Thus, the fact that, through 'interactivity', consumers also act as producers is not as liberating as imagined by early futurologists in the 1980s and not only because the pluralisation of consumption can hardly amount to any new genuine citizenship (precisely at a stage in which traditional citizenship is undergoing a deep crisis). In most cases, what happens with the regime of networked visibility is that consumers generate data (or alternatively data are extracted from users' online behaviour), which are later turned into marketable commodities by the service providers of the network platforms and expert data miners who control both the architecture of enclosed digital territories and access to them (Beer 2009). Even projects that explicitly aim to challenge the traditional routine of production and promotion in fact seem to endorse a similar model. For instance, in the case of music production 'net-community labels' like *Isong* and *MyMajorCompany* have made their appearance, presenting net users with a wide array of artists and then producing only those artists most voted for by the public.

What is peculiar in new media visibility is that it is nearly impossible to oppose action 'from above' and action 'from below' straightforwardly. Certainly, mainstream networked visibility is increasingly being shaped as a participatory panopticon, or as cognitive-capitalist exploitation, but self-identified oppositional groups and their alternative or tactical use of the media, too, are being ensnared into the business of shaping the field of visibility – and, most importantly, this field is imagined by the latter through the same type of regime in which the former operate and thrive. The mainstream and the minoritarian do not cease to exist but, at a certain level, the minoritarian that aims to become oppositional or dissenting tends to be caught up, not so much into some substantial forms of consent as much as into the very logic that distributes, circulates and valorises visibilities. Let us quickly consider how various types of media activism, including 'hacktivism' (Jordan 2002), 'cyberactivism' (Downing 2000; McCaughey and Ayers 2003), alternative media and Independent Media Center–Indymedia (Atton 2002; Couldry and Curran 2003; Jankowski and Jansen 2003) engage in networked visibility. Increasingly, political dissidents, civil liberties activists, anti-war movements, green anarchists, groups contesting the copyright system, and so on work through RSS feeds, miniblogs, blogs and blog-like websites, often powered by open-source software such as Drupal, WordPress and Joomla, or otherwise hosted for free on easily accessible platforms such as Blogger, Blogspot and Twitter.

While activists sometimes praise themselves as having 'revolutionised the media', the reality is more nuanced. To some extent, it is true that their action challenges the type of traditional media professional production we have described in Chapter 3. Indeed, media activists are fit to compete with professional journalists for the role of 'watchdogs of democracy', for instance by exposing abuses, denouncing police brutalities and highlighting thorny ecological issues. But in practice, for the most part what activists are doing is campaigning for the visibility of certain issues among others, in an attempt to 'infect' mainstream media with the issue in question. By doing so, they become actors in an agenda-building process. While apolitical social networkers and private companies campaign for the visibility of their own name or logo, media activists campaign for the visibility of their own topics of choice, but in the end they are struggling within the same regime of visibility. This fact reminds us of many contemporary situations described by Slavoj Žižek in his innumerable pamphlets, in which apparent polar opposites, such as religious radicalism and secular radicalism, turn out to (perversely) 'work great together'.

While media activists practise antagonistic politics through visibility, those who want to resist a networked power that applies a social triage to profile and targets those to be excluded from benefits, can only hope to become invisible. Privacy and censorship issues emerge every time the architecture of visibility itself is called into question, confirming once again that visibility is a double-edged sword. For instance, when in 2009 a court in the US ruled that Google should reveal the identity of an anonymous blogger who was accused of having defamed a media starlet, the activists of baywords.com campaigned vigorously for the right to be online anonymously. On the other hand, as far as censorship is concerned, secret Internet censorship lists have been set up by governments in several countries including Thailand, Australia, Finland and Denmark. While the official rationale is to censor pornography, media activists have protested on the grounds that similar forms of invisible censorship could be easily applied to silence political dissent. In these cases, one can appreciate the double facet of the struggle over visibility: substantive visibility, on the one hand, and visibility of visibility management, on the other. Before starting to campaign for free speech, it is necessary to discover the existence of a censorship list.

Constant availability

The thrust inherent in the use of networked media towards constant connectedness makes the distinction between synchronous and asynchronous communication markedly thinner than before. Phenomena like ubiquitous computing, wireless mesh networks and cloud computing actually turn some people's lives into 'always on' ones: these people are variously identified as a mobile *élite*, as digital *bohèmes*, digital nomads, the creative class or, alternatively, the precarious cognitariat. Mark D. Weiser (1991), a scientist at Xerox PARC, introduced the term 'ubiquitous computing' in 1988 to describe the third wave in computing. After the first wave of 'mainframes', huge calculators shared by several users, and the second wave of personal computers, he envisioned a next stage of computing he called ubiquitous computing or 'calm technology', in which technology recedes into the background of people's lives and becomes 'an extension of the unconscious'. Much of the current discussion on information network infrastructures (Graham and Marvin 2001) intersects the process of invisibilisation of ICT described – or better, invoked – by Weiser.

Just like the mass media, networked computer devices, too, tend to become prosthetically hyaline. The trend towards invisibilisation and

that towards constant availability are intertwined. It is also difficult to assess the extent to which the thrust towards constant visibility generated by the new media is determined by pleasure and the extent to which it is determined by social control and social pressures – both coercive and hierarchic. Certainly, though, the mere technical possibility of being in touch shifts to the normative expectation that people should be in touch and even into the negative sanctioning of being ‘out of touch’ as an ‘abnormal’ state (Morley 2000: 178).

The abundant literature on mobile phones illustrates these tensions, from both the techno-enthusiast celebratory perspective and the technophobic moralistic or conspiracist perspective. Techno-enthusiasts tend to stress a number of features of mobile phones, first of all flexibility and ubiquity. The fact that you can now make plans for meetings on the go allegedly allows for a new kind of sociality, essentially an urban sociality that is highly flexible (Kwan 2007) and bears, especially in its earlier stages, an unmistakably blasé flavour (see e.g., Beiguelman et al. 2008). Mobile communication means total accessibility and provides the ultimate form of the network society (Castells et al. 2004). As ANT scholars put it, digital sociality turns us all into cyborgs (Thompson and Cupples 2008). Positive outcomes of enhanced and flexible mobile communication are recorded in the fields of education (Islam and Doyle 2008), healthcare (Maglaveras et al. 2002), and safety (Pain et al. 2005). Mobile phones help families, communities and even alcoholics (Campbell and Kelley 2008).

Just like other new media, mobile phones are not stabilised artefacts: digital convergence constantly reinvents their functions (think of 3G phones and other smartphones to come, GPS, palms, Bluetooth, wi-fi, wi-max networks) and their integration with the body – in other words, mobile phones are ‘machines that become us’ (Katz 2003). At the same time, phones also become domestic or ‘domesticated’ technology (Silverstone 1999; Hjorth 2008) and, as such, part of our everyday cultural economy (May and Hearn 2005): they are what we buy and how we consume it. Another aspect that makes enthusiasts enthusiastic is appropriation: mobile phones are emotionally invested objects (Ito et al. 2005). As such, they turn out to be increasingly central for the maintenance of peer-group friendships (Green and Singleton 2009), family relations (Wajcman et al. 2008) and love (Manghani 2009). Attention must also be given to the fact that mobile phone use is embedded in social sites (Humphreys 2005; Rettie 2009): social interaction goes on not simply on the phone but also around it. Last but not least, mobile phones are a politically enabling technology. They are used by social

movements under dictatorial regimes in order to bypass propaganda (Rafael 2003) as well as in democracies to challenge official sources of information (Gordon 2007): perhaps revolution will not be televised, but it will certainly be twittered (Sullivan 2009).

The representatives of technophobia do not agree with these theses – and not simply because they invite us to consider that, once again, protest has been suffocated in bloodshed (as in 2009 in Iran – *pace* Twitter). On the technophobic side we find at least two inflections. First, the moralists: for them, mobile phones mirror the superficiality of contemporary personal ties; they even pervert social relations, replacing face-to-face communication and leading to social fragmentation. Their alleged regressive impact pushes towards small individual social networks isolated from each other (Geser 2006). They also strengthen small-scale private ‘umbilical cords’ to the detriment of larger associations, and mark a general withdrawal from the public sphere (Ling 2004). Smartphones make people less smart because people now use them just to find someone who is in another corner of the same pub. Phenomena of addiction and compulsion ensue. On top of it all, they can even help evildoers to detonate bombs at a distance (Mitchell 2003: 21)! Among the other charges, the most notable is precisely that the mobile phone makes people constantly accountable. By doing so, it blurs different spheres of everyday life such as business, family and religion, thus giving rise to high levels of anxiety and stress (Ling and Pedersen 2005). From a linguistic point of view, texting is allegedly deteriorating literacy, and results in poor spelling and grammar (reported in Crystal 2008). And privacy is constantly threatened (Gow 2005).

The conspiracist attitude does not content itself with the privacy issue: control, it is argued, is what is really at stake. A dark scenery of neo-panopticism and total control emerges, where mobile phones represent the ultimate personalised surveillance device (Surveillance Camera Players 2003). The technophobic perspective is minoritarian in the literature and could be fruitfully expanded, especially taking into account the role of capitalism and consumerism: reinventing your phone’s functions also means constantly reselling the same product under new guises; similarly, smartphones may represent the big leap forwards towards personalised advertisement strategies. But apart from this, even beyond Big Brother and bling bling capitalism, the ultimate enemy lurks: ourselves – our *nausée* with communication – our boredom. Hence, the humanist’s cry: ‘Alas, it is fast, it is digital: still one gets bored’ (Ciborra 2002: 172).

Ecologies of prolongations

The convergence among different media towards the digital format is simultaneous with the divergence concerning the range of new media uses and spaces. New media give rise to new mobilities (Urry 2007) and new ways of navigating urban and non-urban space. While initial studies on new ICTs emphasised the opposition between virtual and real worlds and the 'parallel geography' created by the virtual world (e.g., Rheingold 2000[1993]; Mitchell 1995), more recent scholarship has described the spatiality that contradistinguishes new media as an augmented or mixed reality (Ohta and Tamura eds. 1999) that gives rise to hybrid spaces (de Souza e Silva 2006), smart or intelligent environments (Thrift 2003), pervasive computing (McCullough 2004), thoughtful territories (Beer 2007), software-sorted geographies (Graham 2005; Dodge et al. 2009) or sentient cities (Crang and Graham 2007). It has been observed that software is located below the threshold of representation, increasingly and seamlessly infused into everyday urban artefacts, including not only laptops and palms, but also cars, houses, streets, and so on, interfaced through displays, sensors and actuators (Hansen 2000).

My argument here is that attention is needed not only for the spatial effects of new media but also for the interplay of such effects with the field of social visibilities. As said, after utopian prophecies à la Barlow (1996) and his 'declaration of the independence of cyberspace', researchers have come to a more mature understanding of virtuality. As argued by Robert Shields (2003: 46), digital technologies are 'virtual' in the sense that they present us with a layer of 'simulation'. In new media we observe that the virtual, far from being confined to an allegedly parallel 'virtual reality', extends everywhere. The virtual is now perfectly experienced *as* real (Galloway 2004) and *in* the real, as a 'real virtuality' (Dodge and Kitchin 2004). New media users constantly behave 'as if...' – thus 'energetically' (Johnston 2008) – and new media geographies are not cut off from places, rather they are overlaid onto them. Just like all other media, new media introduce topological operations upon social territories, shaped as peculiar prolongations introduced in the *plenum* of the here-and-now. What distinguishes digital media is the way, scope and scale of their prolongations, while the necessity to produce proximity and synchronicity (Boden and Molotch 1994; Adey 2009) does not cease. Using Donald Janelle's (1969) notion of spatial reorganisation, it is possible to say that, in introducing significant changes in time/space connectivity, new media reorganise places, whereby both their

'locational structure' and the characteristics of their social, economic and political activities are affected.

Those who described the Internet only in terms of deterritorialisation, uncoupling and free-floating relationships failed to consider all the subsequent processes of reterritorialisation that are inherent in this medium. While the Internet takes its official ideology from unlimited connectionism, it is in fact an extremely territorial phenomenon: it is a territory where all sorts of alliances, cleavages, regulations, rivalries, commercial and political competition, and so on are constantly occurring. More generally, the new media make it easier than the traditional mass media to see that media are not tools but environments. Consequently, an ecological perspective is essential for understanding them. From an ecological point of view, ubiquitous computing can be said to produce hybrid spaces which are composed of heterogeneous *and* coexisting elements. As in every ecology, we find the coexistence of various parts within a shared environment and what we need to understand is their synchronicity – their unique composition in the *plenum*.

And here is precisely where visibility proves to be an essential analytical dimension. As we have observed in Chapter 2, visibility is the element in which the boundaries between the different elements of an ecology are drawn. In the case of embedded computerised systems – such as smart street systems, domotic systems, portable devices etc. – a process of invisibilisation is taking place. In the 1990s, computer engineer Donald Norman (1998) complained that computers were too obtrusive and frustrating because they were too visible. He proposed developing 'information appliances', digital tools designed in such a way as to include the tool as a part of the task itself: the computing process should have been hidden into objects such as walls, car dashboards, dresses, palms and ultimately – in the best cyborg enthusiast MIT tradition – the body. In other words, Norman's dream was one in which objects – as well as their associated object-functions – would simply disappear into the environment.

Such a technocentric view is unrealistic, for at least two crucial reasons. First, there is the important work of maintenance of infrastructures (Graham and Thrift 2007), which requires a group of specialist who expressly take care of them. In Chapter 6, we will observe the functioning of 'calculation centres' in the city (Latour and Hermant 1998), whose work consists in the visibilisation of that which is invisible to the average users of a smart environment. Yet even more widely, there are groups of people who enjoy discussing infrastructures, for after all the infrastructure is not metaphysically invisible, but simply

outside the focal awareness and within the domain of subsidiary awareness (Polanyi 1958). Sometimes people (of course, it is always a minority, never the mainstream) do care about infrastructures, even if it is not their job – think for instance about MacOS fan discussions, in which the debate focuses on the features of the latest update of a computer operating system (which for the large majority of users is just an invisible environment). The second important flaw of information appliances *à la* Norman is that an important infrapolitical effect is overlooked. Norman thought that technology should not be in the foreground, it should be merely ‘functional’. However, understandably, the definition of what is functional is not absolutely objective. In other words, Norman’s argument invisibilises the political issues implied in the design of technology. Empirically, we find that whenever devices become ‘smart’, those who resist them will highlight the fact that ones that are smarter than their users are definitely not good for democracy. The thresholds of visibilisation can thus become a visible issue in themselves. In Chapter 8, we shall return to these types of effects of in/visibility on democracy.

New media motilities visibilised

As we have noted above, there is a rhetoric of revolution at play in new media: each latest technological gadget is heralded as revolutionary. Of course, it is necessary quickly to turn every ‘now’ into a ‘then’ in order to get people to run to buy a new ‘now’. Ubiquitous computing and wearable technologies are said to revolutionise the way in which people carry out their everyday activities. However, when we enumerate these activities, we discover that they mainly include locating shops, allowing for instant payment and enabling restricted access to selected areas and buildings. As critical authors have observed, all this fits within a neo-liberal framework which calls for smooth, seamless, friction-free 24-hour capitalism. Such an outcome can also be described as neo-medieval (on urban ‘medieval modernity’, see Alsayyad and Roy 2006). Indeed, those who cannot buy or those who are not accredited and are therefore systematically banned from ‘secured’ areas because of their ‘risk profile’ will legitimately raise the question as to what kind of revolution we are talking about. Although the metaphor is rarely analysed, such a contemporary narrative of revolution is clearly deeply different from the modern emancipatory, solidarity narrative grounded in the French and American revolutions (Brighenti 2008). In the next chapter, we will try to examine what is at stake in this process, suggesting that

it is fundamentally the issue of the construction, transformation and destruction of the public domain, understood as the bio-political side of visibility.

But before turning to the public domain we have to take into consideration the socio-technical side, which concerns how contemporary new media mobilities interweave with visibility. Urban space in particular will be at the centre of the discussion. Here, again, some advantages can be gained from a territorial perspective on new media. Consequently, my argument is that the new media can be conceptualised and studied as specific territorial *and* visibility regimes in the contemporary city as well as, more generally, in every infrastructurally urbanised territory. While cities become increasingly informational, they do not cease to be material (Amin and Thrift 2002; Crang and Graham 2007). Yet new media transform the sense of distance and proximity in the city, given that distance is radically altered by the fact of connectivity (Galloway 2004; de Souza e Silva 2006). The result is not so much a uniform, seamless and always perfectly networked space, as a heterogeneous ecology of discontinuous configurations, with ebbs, bubbles and spots of various layerings in different combinations (Manovich 2006).

Mobility predates the new media. As Lash and Urry (1994) have argued persuasively, modern society is a society on the move. In particular, Urry (2003) derives travel from the contemporary 'networked' social morphology theorised by Castells (1996), and identifies a characteristic of contemporary social life he calls 'meetingness' (an idea that can originally be found in Georg Simmel). Following Urry, travel, meetings and talk are necessary to sustain the network morphology, transposing it from a virtuality of connections into an actuality of social relationships. However, mobility is always differential, in the double sense of differentiated and differentiating. Substantively, the current situation is one in which radically diverging styles of motility (physical, actual mobility) for different social groups emerge. Not only is the freedom of movement in the city increasingly distributed in differential ways, it also gives birth to specific territorial configurations which turn into self-reproducing patterns, strengthening various forms of borders and enclaves.

Undoubtedly, new media play a role in this trend. Software-sorted geographies enable the carrying-out of detailed tracking and surveillance of subjects and events in open spaces, while the participatory panopticon encourages people actively to engage with and even enjoy the fact of becoming visible (several new media art projects, for instance,

can be allocated to this category). In particular, if we turn to procedures of selection and triage, we see how new media operate in this process: selection of access is increasingly focused upon bodies and 'bodily (re) bordering processes' (Adey 2009; Amoores and Hall 2009), as in the case of profiling algorithms to sort people physically. From this point of view, new media technologies tend to motilise and invisibilise borders themselves: they motilise them in the sense that borders become a virtuality that can be proliferated, replicated, scattered and disseminated, only to be instantly actualised wherever needed; they invisibilise them in the sense that borders come to be inscribed into an apparently naturalised and taken-for-granted environmental montage.

New media motilities possess inherent visibility thresholds. Visibility interweaves with distance in meaningful and non-linear ways. In this respect, Crang and Graham (2007) have highlighted the politics of visibility inscribed in new ICTs as a process of double visibilisation: technology is visible to us and simultaneously we are visible to technology. In our terms, subjects, sites and rhythms of visibility define a field which is socio-technical and bio-political at the same time. In sum, the argument of Chapters 3 and 4 is that understanding the role of visibility in mass media and new media proves relevant to the study of a wide range of social phenomena, including identity and recognition, sense of proximity and intimacy, advocacy and civic-political engagement, secrecy and publicity, global synchronisation of emotions and traumas, minorities (including sexual, social, ethnic, cultural and subcultural ones) and their relation to the mainstream.

The power of the mass media and new media is nothing other than the power of a certain architecture of visibility. As we have observed throughout the last two chapters, media are not only tools but also, crucially, *environments*. An ecological perspective might help us to explain why it is so easy to concede that new media have changed our sociality but so hard to tell whether it was for better or worse. Certainly, from my point of view, the sociological study of new media should include visibility as a fundamental dimension that is present in at least three interlocking ecologies made of heterogeneous prolongations and compositions – the media ecology, the urban ecology and the ecology of attentions – that together constitute the public domain.

Also, an ecological perspective should not prevent us from taking into account power relations. From this point of view, it is important to recall that the notion of control can be interpreted ecologically – as, in a sense, Canetti (1960) did with his vision of power as a prolongation of the act of seizing (Brighenti 2010c). At the same time, as argued in

Chapter 2, we need to integrate the ecological perspective with the phenomenological one: the type of social theory which could most help us nowadays is, in my view, one which overcomes dichotomies between subject and object, between material and immaterial or between visible and articulable. From this point of view, phenomenology allows us to use the notion of 'intentionality' without falling back on a methodologically individualistic epistemology. Only an *ecological phenomenology* would enable social researchers to pay attention to the materiality of a multiplicity of events that occupy that open field whose related flexions are the *percipientes* and the *percepta*.

5

Visibility and the Public

The public as an ecology

This chapter considers three major areas of theorisation and research on the 'public' which are essential to us in terms of their relationship with visibility. First of all, visibility is one of the key aspects *political philosophers* have traditionally associated with the public sphere. Suffice it to say that Habermas' (1989[1962]) original term for the public sphere is *Öffentlichkeit*, which directly refers to the features of openness and visibility of this type of social space. In the first part of this chapter, the literature on the public sphere developed by political philosophers ranging from Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and Norberto Bobbio, to contemporary authors such as Craig Calhoun, Jeff Weintraub, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner, is examined through the lens of a dense conception of visibility. By doing so, my aim is to reveal the structure of 'visibility as publicity' held by normative-proceduralist views of democracy. A second tradition I explore in this context is *interaction sociology*. Interaction sociologists, from Erving Goffman to Lynn Lofland, have devoted much attention to the notion of the public realm, understood as a regime of interaction and an arena for the intervisibility of actors. Their theorisation allows us to understand how reciprocal visibility creates the public realm by facilitating both social rituals and action coordination. As we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4, *media, communication* and *cultural studies* have also focused on the visibilities associated with mediated public communication. Third, *urban studies* literature also offers important insights into the urban environment and its public space as a visible space. In this attempt to bring together contributions from political philosophy, interactionist sociology and urban studies, I introduce the notion of 'public domain' as an integral

regime of visibility, which can be explored on the basis of its subjects, sites, rhythms and effects.

The public domain is, in a sense, an ecology of ecologies. It is composed of a combination of a media ecology, an urban ecology and an ecology of attentions. Each of these ecologies is constituted by social territories together with their visibilities and the prolongations that fill the phenomenal *plenum* of the here-and-now. It is important to stress that these ecologies are non-dichotomic: they cut across the material and the immaterial, and they span urban space and the public sphere. Thus, the public domain exists at the point of *convergence* and in the zone of indistinction between material and immaterial processes, whereby an immaterial meaning is created through acts of material inscription and projection. Several authors have described this phenomenon as the coming together of, on the one hand, the material, the spatial and the corporeal and, on the other, the semiotic, the symbolic and the informational. However, there are good reasons to strive to avoid dualisms. I suggest it could be more profitable to study the visible, the affective, the territorial and the rhythmic as analytical categories of the social: in my view, the challenge is not to define these notions in terms of more conventional Cartesian-dualist, Weberian-individualist or Durkheimian-collectivist epistemologies, but quite the contrary, to imagine how such misleading dualisms could be overcome. Neither individual nor collective, the public domain is in fact a 'singular' creation of circulation and resonance.

As the previous chapters have shown, an enlarged notion of visibility has the advantage of capturing the finest variations of degree between the immediate and the mediated in the social sphere. Once we have climbed over this Wittgenstein's ladder, though, we can set ourselves to demystify the opposition between the immediate and the mediated: on the one hand, the mediated inherently produces immediacy, on the other, the immediate is always hypermediated, that is, mediated through some invisible medium (the ether is not even the thinnest one...). Thus, the process of mediation essentially concerns acts of prolongation which do not have a single direction. In this sense, prolongation is not an evolutionary category, it has no *télos*; quite the contrary, it constantly multiplies the directions of events, determining a constant back-and-forth, a *viavai* of affordances, seizures and montages.

Each locale is porous because it prolongs towards an elsewhere which, although not present in the here-and-now of the locale, becomes part of a single *plenum* (Garfinkel 2002). Objects, spaces, actors, subjects, events and practices not present in the here-and-now of the locale can

be important and even crucial components of the *plenum*. Processes of import and export come about essentially through mediations (Debray 1991), which act as bridges, corridors or thresholds that traverse the *plenum* in multiple directions and connect the various here-and-nows. Portions of elsewhere and at-other-times are constantly imported and inscribed into the locale, just as portions of the here-and-now are constantly exported and projected towards elsewhere and at-other-times. The media that accomplish this import/export task work essentially by prolonging the locale. They can be imagined as ‘projectors’ and ‘inscribers’ that enable the motility – both as extension and compression – of here-and-now. Prolonging, extending and compressing are energetic, or associational (Latour 2005), processes. Finally, this also illuminates the question of power that is inherent in the public. Of course, as media critics *à la* Chomsky have argued, power deploys a set of technologies to reinforce itself, but more interestingly, following Foucault (1982), power *is* itself a technology. Power is a way of associating and dividing, distributing and partitioning, visibilising and invisibilising, affecting and anaesthetising, synchronising and desynchronising – in sum, of territorialising and deterritorialising.

The public as a sphere

In Chapters 3 and 4, observing the mass media and the new media, we have already introduced a distinction between the mainstream, where a large-scale synchronisation of attentions occurs, and the minoritarian, where synchronisation is small-scale. Consequently we have, on the one hand, a dominant attentional and affectional rhythm and, on the other, a multiplicity of variegated rhythms. Our question then becomes: how do these rhythms coexist? How are the public, the communitarian, the subcultural and the oppositional created at the intersection of these different rhythms? We shall seek to address this question from the point of view of the visibility of the public, beginning with the theorisation of the public sphere. The public sphere, as we have hinted above, is constitutively a sphere of communication through visibility and accessibility or ‘collectivity’ (Weintraub and Kumar 1997). Here, the work of social and political philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas and Norberto Bobbio, as well as contemporary authors such as Craig Calhoun, Jeff Weintraub, Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner, proves extremely relevant. Archetypically, the public is by definition what is open and visible to everyone, as opposed to the private, which is restricted, concealed and protected.

Hannah Arendt (1958: § 2) insisted on the existence of a 'world in common' among human beings as the pivotal condition for politics. In Greek and Roman culture, Arendt argued, it is the experience of the *common* that defines the public sphere as the place where things and people can be seen and acquire the status of 'public'. The public sphere is defined by its commonality, in contrast to the private sphere, which is characterised by deprivation and by the fact of the dominance of economic reason. It is only because the world-in-common is subject to more than merely economic rules and the 'scholastics' of private life that a political life in common can emerge. Notably, then, the common is not an undistinguished, totalitarian entity; on the contrary, the world-in-common is created by a plurality of perspectives which are and remain separated. The existence of the public sphere as a world-in-common which joins and separates is, for Arendt, threatened by mass society, which undermines the capacity of the public to articulate meaningful relationships and separations among people. Such 'meaningful separations' speak in fact to the Hegelian theme of recognition, which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, has been taken up by Charles Taylor (Taylor 1989). In particular, he has argued that the sources of the subject as social Self in Western political thought should be conceived by taking into account not merely large-scale social projects (as with the theories of justice for example), but especially the personal desire for recognition as constitutive of life in common.

While disagreeing with Arendt's thesis that modernity is a time of decline of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas (1989[1962]) similarly defined the public sphere as a realm of social life that provides a forum for the articulation of general issues. The public sphere emerged in the modern age, from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth, as a third domain, distinct from both private households and the public power. The public sphere is the space of civil society, as distinct from private association on the one hand, and institutionalised political society on the other. Its specificity consists in providing the infrastructure for the elaboration of public opinion through public debate – that is, debate on matters of general interest and issues of common concern. Such debates are joined by all those citizens potentially affected by the outcomes of political decisions on the issues at stake, and are carried out according to rational rules. Participation and deliberation are the crucial aspects of this sphere of social action. With the sphere's links to institutions such as coffee houses, public libraries and, above all, modern mass media such as the press, its history is one of the consolidation of bourgeois society. Indeed, Habermas depicted discussion as

revolving substantively about the rules that guide economic exchange and economic relationships. The defining features of the public sphere are its essential accessibility to all citizens, who can debate issues critically, and the principle of the public availability of proceedings (*Publizitätsvorschriften*). Habermas also diagnosed a crisis of the public sphere during the course of the twentieth century, in the form of a 'refeudalisation'. On the one hand, new powerful private actors, such as large corporations, started undertaking direct political action through control and manipulation of communication and the media, thus promoting their private interests in a way that is at odds with the original logic of the public sphere; on the other, the Keynesian configuration of the Western welfare state corresponded to a more active engagement of the state in the private sphere and everyday life, leading to an erosion of the distinction between political and civil society which was itself the object of criticism (see e.g., Young 1990). Following the Frankfurt School line of analysis, Habermas described the decline of the public sphere as a process of the transformation of citizens into consumers, which eventually leads to a reduction in interest in the common good and direct participation – although he later acknowledged that the idea of such a linear trajectory was too simplistic (Habermas 1993).

Reflecting on the nature of politics, Norberto Bobbio (1999) similarly identified democracy as a type of power that poses a specific challenge to the older elitist tradition of secret power (the *arcana imperii* which we considered in Chapter 2). The elitist tradition is grounded in a negative anthropology maintaining that there is no cure for the evil of power. In this view, history is reduced to a contingent series of facts that do not alter the basic cupidity for power that inherently characterises the human being. Power is believed to have been, and unavoidably always bound to be, in the hands of a minority, an élite which is not legitimated from below but rather synarchically self-legitimises and rules. Understandably, this bitter reality of power is often kept hidden to avoid contention and political turmoil. This is the classic theme of the Pascalian 'mystical foundations of authority'. Bobbio defines democracy as the opposite of the *arcana*: democracy is 'power in public', power whose inner mechanisms are made visible to all and therefore (at least, ideally) controllable. Modern democracy was born in opposition to the Middle Ages and early modern treaties on the art of government, such as the Machiavellian-styled 'advice to the Prince.' Whereas the precepts-to-the-Prince literature looked at power *ex parte principis*, from the point of view of the prince, modern democracy forms when one starts to look at power *ex parte populi*, from the point of view of

the people. The gaze from below amounts to a vigorous call for openness and visibility of power. Whereas all autocratic regimes are founded upon the conservation of secrecy in proceedings, the crucial democratic challenge is to achieve a deployment of power that is ultimately without secrets. The device of political representation is necessarily public, as recognised even by opponents of this view, such as Carl Schmitt. For his own part, Max Weber (1978[1922]: I, § III, 3–5) saw quite clearly that modern bureaucracy is an ambivalent institution. On the one hand, bureaucracy is necessary to achieve the legal-rational form of power, based on the specialisation of competences and the standardisation of procedures: bureaucratic apparatuses are capable of attaining the highest degrees of efficiency and represent the most rational way to control people because they guarantee a high degree of calculability of outcomes. On the other hand, however, not only does bureaucracy produce conformity and uniform technical competence, it also tends to breed plutocracy and dominance of formalistic impersonality, and, above all, it is constantly tempted to resort to restrictions to open access to government records, through the creation of classified documents (*Amtsgeheimnisse*) and other technicalities. These perils of technocracy have also been remarked more recently by other democratic theorists, such as Robert Dahl (1989).

Publics, counter-publics and non-public publics

In spite of the differences between their views, most social theorists share a concern for the transformations of the public sphere during the twentieth century. Those who see a shrinkage or deterioration of the public sphere – Habermas' 'refeudalisation' or Blumler and Gurevitch's (1995) 'crisis of public communication' – find it threatening to democracy. This is particularly true for what Jeff Weintraub (Weintraub and Kumar 1997) has called the 'republican-virtue' model, in which the public sphere is understood as the polity. In this respect, Craig Calhoun (2005) has observed that democracy constitutively requires both inclusion and connection among citizens; in other words, citizens should be able to access relevant information and communicate with each other in a common world which extends beyond primary, private associations. This is also why, as we shall explore more thoroughly in Chapter 6, the public sphere has historically appeared in the city and was later spread by the media over a wider territory (a process analysed by Foucault as an 'urbanisation of territory'). Like Habermas, Calhoun also finds that transparent and symmetric communication is constitutive of

the public sphere (see also Calhoun 1993). The public sphere, Calhoun claims, cannot be conceived as the mere 'sum' of a set of separate private opinions, for such a conception removes the fundamental process of the formation of public opinion itself, which takes place through discussion and deliberation. Similarly, Luc Boltanski (1999) has finely problematised the view of the public sphere as producing an 'aperspectival objectivity' – the latter idea descending from Rousseau's notion of general will, a will that would not correspond either to the mere will of the majority or to the mean of empirical wills. Contrarily to aperspectivalism, the public sphere is filled with engagements and stances towards action.

In her critique of bourgeois, masculinist and, more generally, status-neutral conceptions of the public sphere, Nancy Fraser (1993) wrote about the existence of a plurality of 'subaltern counterpublics', including, for example, the feminist counter-public. These counter-publics also critically raise the issue of the efficacy of public discussion and deliberation. Legitimacy and efficacy become all the more urgent in a postnational or global context, where issues of inclusiveness and capacitation need to be addressed on an unprecedented scale (Fraser 2007). According to Pellizzoni (2003), today the public sphere seems to be plagued by the incommensurability of languages and the intractability of controversies. These characteristics, Calhoun (2005) has argued, lead to a multiplicity of public spheres. In particular, Michael Warner (2005) has defined as 'counter-publics' those subordinate and historically stigmatised publics that are defined by their tension with, or opposition to, a larger public; for instance GLTBQ (gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual and queer) cultures could be included in this category. A counter-public is not a strict or bounded community: it is always territorially spread and its communications are mediated. It comes into being through an 'address to indefinite strangers' (Warner 2005: 120). At the same time, though, a counter-public is clearly distinct from the general public because people who are part of it are socially marked by their participation in it.

While the attempt to pluralise the notion of public is potentially interesting because it allows the recognition of the diversity of arenas of communication and discussion made possible by the mass media and the new media, three major limits can be found in both classic and contemporary public sphere theories. First of all, there is a tendency to think in dichotomic terms, as if the public and the private were simply two opposed and symmetric entities – or, in Bobbio's words, one of the 'grand dichotomies' of Western political thought. This is a limitation

because it leads us simply to associate the public with the visible and the private with the invisible, hampering our capacity to conceptualise the public in its complex and articulated forms of visibility.

Second, the public sphere is supposed to be a social space for interaction, but in essence Habermas' theorisation remains spatially and materially blind – as does, for that matter, that of his adversary Luhmann. While Habermas focuses on rational and critical communicative processes, one needs no more than a slight ethnographic sensibility to remember that deliberations and communications always entail uncomfortable chairs, noisy rooms, typos, defective antennas, rhetorical tricks, verbal aggressions and all sorts of cultural waste, muck and filth. As Alan McKee (2005) has reminded us in his excellent introduction to the topic, far from being an ideal space, the public sphere is (also) a place of trivialisation, commercialisation, spectacle, fragmentation and apathy – which, let us be clear about this point, does not detract at all from its importance. In other words, as observed by many critics, there is too much ideality in the Habermasian description of how communication occurs, which is in part linked to his explicitly normative commitment. Public communication does not simply occur; it takes place. Therefore, the material constitution of the 'sphere' is hardly irrelevant, as observed by Paolo Carpi gnano (1999). Because the public sphere is inherently mediated, Carpi gnano has argued, it is necessary to scrutinise closely how this media space is materially, technologically and socially shaped.

Third, and even more problematically, is the idea of a plurality of public spheres. If the public sphere is defined by Arendt and Habermas as grounded in the existence of a life in common, what kind of encompassing commonality can a plurality of distinct and separated spheres of communication produce? Once we introduce the idea of a plurality of communicative arenas – whose existence, we should remember is a fact – can we still refer to each of them as 'public'? Or are we, on the contrary, confronting a different configuration? If we can speak of 'public life', how many 'public lives' can exist? Public lives can only be the lives of (private) people in public, but once again that only shifts the question: what is 'public'? Are counter-publics really publics, or are they in fact non-public publics? I believe the latter is the case. The existence of non-public publics, however, should not be understood as something negative. Quite the contrary, these other communicative formations are extremely important for society: they correspond to communitarian, subcultural or oppositional minorities who importantly intervene in the mainstream, fostering change within, and sometimes even

dissolving into, it. In fact, the 'counter-' or 'subaltern-' prefixes refer to a specific relationship these minoritarian arenas of communication entertain with the mainstream. The point is that, just as the public does not belong to the state or any formal institution, it does not belong to any specific social group, either.

The public cannot be either an institution or a specific group of people. There may be some publicness to these subjects, but neither collectives nor individuals can be the public. As James Donald (2003: 52) put it, the public refers not to the *fact* of community but to the *question* of community. One cannot be *the public*, one can only be *in public*: the public, in other words, is 'bridging' rather than 'bonding'. Let us recall that for Tarde (1901) the public is defined by synchronicity of attention *cum* territorial dispersal. In our terms, it is defined by a rhythm of visibility and a scale of association. It is a rippling, anadyomenic phenomenon, a pulsation and a non-collective non-individual singularity. My suggestion is that we should distinguish the dimension of the public – or better, publicity – from any specific social group with which it is associated, which reclaims it or in which some publicity manifests itself. The public is better imagined as a register of interaction, a regime of visibility. It is a regime that runs through the various social territories which have been defined as counter-publics by the theorists considered above. The public runs through them as a single element (the element of visibility) – hence, precisely, its commonality.

Public interaction and communication

I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance. (Edgar Allan Poe, *The Man of the Crowd*)

... a generic face, somehow, a face that would become invisible in any crowd... (Paul Auster, *Invisible*)

In order better to understand how visibility regimes are constitutive of the domain of the public, and how private individuals and collective bodies and objects access this domain, we need to take into account a second tradition of studies. Sociologists have developed the notion of the public realm precisely as a regime of interaction and an arena of visibility and intervisibility of actors. While political philosophers have

insisted on the procedural and deliberative dimension associated with communicative action, sociologists also study the specificities and practicalities of public space through the only apparently mundane details of interaction in public. Richard Sennett (1978), for instance, focused on Western urban space in order to situate the public sphere physically. He argued that it was the very transformation of modern city life that fostered the crisis of the public dimension of society.

During the nineteenth century, Sennett explained, the construction of the public sphere had meant the construction of an impersonal, role-based model of interaction, which enabled people to deal with complex and disordered situations of city life. The fall of this model is due to the rise of a new emotivism and a thirst for authenticity, community, emotional expression of feelings and desires. Indifference, concerns for personal safety, fear of victimisation, and a whole ideology of the 'coldness' of public space caused a general retreat into the private, in search for the 'warm' human relations supposed to be found in the family and the community. Emotivism and communitarianism thus induced a crisis in the dynamism of the public sphere as well as a decrease in 'civility,' understood as the capacity to relate positively to strangers. In other words, the fall of the public man corresponded to an increasing fear of strangers' intervisibility. In the new situation, visibility immediately came to be perceived as intrusive because of a deterioration in the ability to feel protected while dealing with unknown others. Such an incapacity to live with strangers, Sennett observed, is deeply problematic, because intimate relations cannot be successfully projected as a basis for social relations at large.

Sennett's description of the public realm shares similarities with ideas emerging from interactionist sociology. Erving Goffman (1963b; 1971) approached public space from the perspective of the specific type of interaction that goes on in public. This is a sociality made of fleeting encounters among strangers in specific urban locales. Civil inattention, as we have already observed in Chapter 2, entails a precise politics of visibility whereby the stranger is noticed and appreciated but also respected: s/he will not become the target of an intrusive attention or curiosity and his/her territory will not be invaded. For instance, if we consider the case of harassment (Nielsen 2004), we have an encounter with a predatory stranger in a public context, but the act of predation itself is private; it is an act that denies and even disrupts the public realm. Therefore, as also noted by Cooper (2007), for the persecuted and the oppressed, the point is not to preserve their privacy but rather to strengthen the public as a site open to interconnections,

contestations and, in Hirschman's words, 'voice'. As Isaac Joseph (1984) explained, interactionist sociology studies in depth the surface of interaction, as a 'skin of the social' where the oscillations between the public and the private determine interconnections and separations. Working within a Goffmanian framework, and also influenced by classic works by Jane Jacobs (1961), Lyn Lofland (1998) has insisted on the elements of stranger interaction and urban environment as constitutive of the public realm at large. The public realm, according to Lofland, can be conceived primarily as a register of human interaction which differs from other registers, specifically from the private one. Lofland highlights in particular that the realms of the private (or the intimate), the parochial (or communitarian) and the public are social-psychological rather than spatial. The type of realm, in other words, is not defined by the physical space in which it is located but by its predominant relational form. The public realm, in particular, is where forms of categorical recognition – as defined in Chapter 2 – are most common.

Whereas in the private realm the dominant relational form is intimate, and in the parochial realm it is communitarian, in the public realm the dominant form is essentially categorical. A categorical form of relation, which corresponds to the capacity to deal with biographic strangers, stems mainly from the experience of urban life and is based on the only apparently slender capacity to coexist in a civil manner, accepting the existence of social diversity. Thus, Lofland's analysis advances an apology of the public realm on the basis of its social value as an environment for active learning, a site for relief from sometimes oppressively strong ties, a place where both social cooperation and social conflict can be acted out and, ultimately, the only true place for social communication and the practice of politics.

While for political theorists the private/public distinction is mainly based on communicative rationality (more precisely, a normative model of that rationality), for interaction sociologists it entails a properly ritual element. Simply to be observed in public entails assuming postures, ways of behaving and expectations, if not ascribed roles (Joseph 1998). Certainly, from this point of view, being in public entails a degree of disciplinatioin in Foucault's sense. Media studies scholars have extended the issue of public visibility to mediated communications, analysing the complex and subtle ways in which the personal, the private and the political interweave, and how the ritual dimension of publicity is achieved, reproduced and contested (Couldry 2003). As argued for instance by Peter Dahlgren (1995), media organisations in general

and, in particular, public broadcasts have represented themselves as the heralds of the public sphere. While the media, and the press in particular, were also at the centre of Habermas' model, we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4 that research into electronic mass media visibilities and new digital media visibilities has produced a much more nuanced picture of how an audience comes to be shaped, together with the type of practices, rhythms, framing and affections that are inherent in mediated communication.

Public space

Architecture is a powerful way of managing visibilities. Basic architectural artefacts, such as walls, can radically reshape publicness as defined by both social theorists and interaction sociologists, creating specialised, enclosed spaces endowed with affordances that foster a specific grammar and practice of interaction (Brighenti 2009). Just as houses protect individual privacy, offices protect commercial secrets and government buildings classified information. In most cases, walls become naturalised and work invisibly in the lifeworld's horizon. Both political philosophers and interaction sociologists tend to downplay somewhat the importance and scope of the materiality of the public. In contrast, the interweaving and constant prolongations of materialities and immaterialities into each other have been explored by geographers and urbanists. For instance, Nicholas Blomley (2007) has recently shown the ways in which private property was born not simply as a legal relationship, but rather enacted through a variety of material processes of enclosure. While political philosophical reflection on the public sphere is almost exclusively focused on the dimension of political participation and deliberative procedures, interactionist studies of the public realm are mainly concerned with the cognitive frameworks and registers of interpersonal interaction. By doing so, however, both approaches miss the properly spatial and material constraints and capacitations that constitute the public. By contrast, urban studies essentially illuminate how possibilities for publicness and constraints upon the public dimension are embodied.

An important tradition of reflection on public space has been initiated by the classic works of Kevin Lynch (1960) on the mental image of the city and Jane Jacobs (1961) on sidewalks and boroughs in large cities. Jacobs in particular insisted that the built-in equipment of urban open spaces is essential in order to sustain and enhance their very publicness. Contrary to dystopian views, urban public space is made of

more than abandoned concrete islands and other terminal landscapes. More recently, Low, Taplin and Scheld (2006) have argued in this vein that social tolerance and peaceful public coexistence depend on the availability of inclusive and culturally diverse urban public spaces. For all of these authors, social identities engage in mutual relationships, interact and define themselves in public space. Certainly, as we have now repeated perhaps a sufficient number of times, public space is a space of intervisibility of subjects; yet at the same time, as crucially remarked by Isaac Joseph (1998), public interaction is not seamless but always fragmentary. To take one illustration, Michael Bull (2007) has analysed urban retreatism that is associated with the use of iPods. Public space, Bull contends, is impoverished as urban social space and comes to be shaped as independent bubbles. Similar views, on the other hand, trace back to an old anti-urban or urbanophobic tradition represented by a number of notable authors, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Anticipating a large part of twentieth-century critiques of alienation in the metropolis, Rousseau sternly criticised urban public life on the grounds that it produced only passive individuals voyeuristically assembled around a spectacle (Kohn 2008).

But do practices such as ‘iPodding the city’ really amount to a denial of the public, or are they on the contrary a way of actually *performing* public space? Is ‘fragmentation’ really the opposite of ‘togetherness’? In this respect, Luc Lévesque (2008) has interestingly theorised public space as an ‘interstitial constellation’, made of discontinuous and even often left-over spaces in the city. Lévesque suggests exploring the type of movements that are inherent in these spaces through a set of actions that characterise a few important twentieth-century artists: ‘shaking’ (Man Ray), ‘perforating’ (Lucio Fontana) and ‘impregnating’ (Yves Klein). If we start looking at public spaces as encounters, acts and configurations, no physical determinism is tenable. No urban planning, urban design or architecture can dictate a single use of a given space; they can only provide a set of affordances, and, as architects and planners increasingly recognise, public space is constantly appropriated in a number of unforeseen ways. Thus, urban scholars have increasingly turned to studying the practices that occur in public space – a topic which was traditionally the domain of interaction sociologists.

Ethnographic observation of public practices should be integrated within larger reflections. In an important piece of research on public territorialities in two Swedish cities, Mattias Kärrholm (2005; 2007) has distinguished the phenomena of territorial production and territorial stabilisation. In turn, both production and stabilisation can be either

strategic – that is, planned and delegated – or tactical – that is, practical and implicit. Public places thus appear as complex territorially stratified entities, in which the various territorialities correspond to series of acts of appropriation and territorialisation, while the distinction between strategic and tactical ways of action is essentially relative to the degree of visibility of a certain productive or stabilising/associative – as well as, to introduce another relevant notion, destabilising/dissociative – act. Kärholm also reflects on how the process of commercialisation of public space necessarily entails an issue of rhythm, concerning the synchronisation of visibilities and attentions.

Intervening in public space is thus an affective endeavour. The case of skateboarders (Borden 2001) is noteworthy. Like other urban sports, skateboarding provides a performative critique and a situational appropriation of open areas. Skaters bodily engage in an unconventional way of crossing urban environments, materially questioning urban design and architecture. In a similar vein, Sophie Watson (2006) has studied a series of invisible practices that define forms of appropriation of public space in the city, like the Jewish *eruv*, street markets, pond swimming, public bathing facilities, allotments and so on. For his part, Stéphane Tonnelat (2008) has shown how publicity, visibility and interstitiality interweave even in what planners regard as residual spaces. They are commonly described as no-man's lands and social vacuums, although they are populated by a finely modulated scenery of visibility, ranging from people who find shelter there to people who are 'just passing'. Similarly, Blomley (2004) has described the clashes between different conceptions of private property and dwelling. Appropriations are almost always met with reactions, which include competition, complaints, quarrels and discussions, in short, communication – and this is what the public realm is about. While several of these small-scale processes may pass unnoticed by planners and administrators, in fact they represent what makes public space on the ground. The public is constantly crossed by acts of territorialisation, and the territorialising process is a way of visibly – publicly – carving the environment through certain acts of boundary-drawing, which concurrently help to stabilise the set of relationships that take place in the environment.

Thus, acts, affections, attitudes and institutions are all crucial components. Isaac Joseph (1998) observed that public space originates in two types of requirements: on the one hand, a series of institutional devices including official definitions and legal regulations, on the other, a series of attitudes that subjects hold about how they should behave and

orient themselves in public. For Joseph, the public has a critical potential in so far as it reveals the fragmentation and Balkanisation of communities by constantly submitting them to a public judgement. Public space is dispersed and circulatory but through these very characteristics it constantly produces copresence and encounters.

The public cannot be sociologically defined on the basis of either its ideal normative diagram or its official legal framework. It has often been observed that some publicly owned places are in fact difficult to access, while conversely privately owned spaces can function as public places. Between the formal property of a space and its actual use there is often a cleavage. Accessibility is therefore an essential component. Basically, public space has low entry thresholds, which does not mean that they are completely absent but that they are relatively lower or practically less enforced. Many authors have insisted on the quality of 'meetingness' that is supposed to be inherent in public space. However, placing social interaction at the centre of the definition of the public should not lead to our overlooking the material qualities of places. Analysis should focus on the affordances that are actualised in various circumstances in order to understand the visibilising processes associated with such actualisations of the public. The zone of convergence between the material qualities of places and the immaterial relationships that are inscribed in them constitutes what could be called the 'public domain'.

The public domain

Now the car is moving, you reach calmly into your wallet and pay the fare. If you happen to be sitting reasonably far from the conductor, the money travels from hand to hand among the passengers; the well-dressed lady takes it from the workingman in the blue jacket and passes it on. (Eduard Devrient, *Briefe aus Paris* (1840))

What made me feel best was when you sometimes undressed first and I was able to stay behind in the hut alone and put off the disgrace of showing myself in public... (Franz Kafka, *Letter to his Father*)

The public is not only what is open to sight, but also what is touched by many. Its visibility is often excessive because it is also haptic. The public is an inhabited vision, an ecology whose parts belong to all and to nobody in particular: it can be, and in fact often is, easily appropriated

and easily discarded because it tends to be unprotected. The public is what is constantly appropriated, yet constantly resists appropriation. Contrary to what monotone celebratory views of the public sphere or public space have held, the public is not necessarily harmonious and, above all, it is not necessarily a comfortable place. Franz Kafka's literary work powerfully reveals the violent and unpleasant nature of the public. In Kafka, the public is always a deep experience, never a relaxing one. Kafka visibilises the public as a field of gazes and as haptic forces which abolish distance. It is, in a sense, a tough view and, to my mind, a tough lesson to learn. The point here is not to detract or diminish the importance of the public, rather to understand its nature, as not just a mere space of ideas, communication and representations, but as a territory of forces that shape bodies, by acting upon them.

The richness of insights that can be found in the approaches outlined above, such as those of political philosophers, interaction and communication sociologists and urban studies scholars is extremely advantageous. At the same time, as indicated for instance by comparative works (Goodsell 2003; Staeheli and Mitchell 2007), an attempt to overcome the partial limitations inherent in separate disciplinary conceptualisations could also prove useful. To this end, I suggest that we adopt the label 'public domain' as an encompassing and general term to address issues traditionally associated in various ways with the public sphere, the public realm and public space. In the public domain, both visibility and territoriality emerge as key analytical points, first of all because, as we have seen, the public domain is open and visible. But not simply this: accessing the public domain also means accepting that one becomes a *subject* of visibility, someone who is, in his or her turn, visible to others. Of course, such an acceptance is never unconditional, and a number of problems with the public precisely concern the management of visibility thresholds. As remarked by Joseph (1984), the public is inherently a phenomenon of thresholds. The case we have already considered of harassment is poignant in this respect. Another crucial process that is currently reshaping the boundaries of the public domain in significant ways is the emergence of visibility asymmetries fostered by contemporary surveillance practices. Not only is access to many spaces becoming more and more restricted through the use of checkpoints and passwords, but the very type of categories produced by professional surveillance knowledge is intersecting with, and even colonising, lay knowledge in the public domain. In the next chapter, we shall turn to this case more in details.

Because configuring intervisibilities amounts to the practice of introducing and managing qualitative thresholds between different types of events, the public domain is doubly articulated: socio-technically and bio-politically. From this point of view, the public domain is eminently relational. To an important degree, it is not the subject who engages in or refrains from relationships, but the relationships that constitute the subject. Bringing into our discussion Dewey's notion of the public as a collective which will be affected by the undertaking of certain acts, while leaving aside his insistence of the public as a specific group or circle of people, we can say that the public is a *territory of affection*. As with every other territory, the public domain is bounded, but its boundaries are constantly worked upon. The public domain has both a material side – defined by bodily experience, density, circulation and urban dromology – and a social-relational, affective side – referring to the capacity of actors to affect each other, almost by contagion (as in fashion etc.). In short, the public domain is a specific modalisation of situated and materially constrained interaction. Territories are acts or events that unfold in time, creating determinations, trajectories and rhythms on the basis of threshold-making and boundary-drawing acts that introduce discontinuities in the field – the flesh – of visibility.

The issue of the effectiveness of the public sphere raised by Nancy Fraser cannot be adequately tackled unless we first consider the issue of its *affectiveness*, in other words the ways in which the public is affected as it resonates with certain themes and moods. The public is put into resonance by the circulation of words and gazes. It is a phenomenon of diffusion and even contagion which must be conceptualised precisely as a movement, or event. If Warner (2005) accredits the rather dubious and probably erroneous etymology of 'public' from 'pubic', it is still certainly true that the public and the sexual have an impersonal, de-individuated aspect in common – which, of course, they share with money. Visibility concurs crucially in the demarcation of the public domain as a relational field of attentions and affections. But it is not a general type of visibility which defines the public domain, rather a regime of categorical recognition and a dynamic of subsequent acts of appropriation and resistance against appropriation. Otherwise we would not understand, for instance, the heated debates raised by civil rights activists against surveillance and in support of the right to anonymity in the public domain.

Visibility is not merely a free-floating aspect of social interaction. Rather, it is structured as the result of the activities and practices of all the different actors who aim to plan it or, on the contrary, to

resist planning. Visibility asymmetries are arranged into structured complexes, which we call *regimes*. Contemporary society is organised around regimes of visibility that concur in the definition and management of power, representations, public opinion, conflict and social control. Whereas potential ambivalences are inherent to all visibility effects, actual regimes contribute to the specification and activation of contextual determinations of the visible. Thus, what selects the actual effects of visibility is the whole territorial arrangement in which social relationships are embedded.

Addressing the city public

As we shall explore in the next chapter, the cityscape is integrally a site of visibility. Indeed, debates, controversies and contests over urban transformations are framed as debates, controversies and contests over the visible boundaries of public space. Such boundaries are often associated with some continuous physical space within the city where genuine urban encounters can take place. But, as remarked by Kurt Iveson (2009), the city should not be seen as the opposite of the media. The idea that the genuineness of urban encounters is uniquely tied to immediate face-to-face interaction is a mythical one. On the contrary, our urban spaces – even our spaces of intimacy – are saturated with mediations and prolongations. Elsewhere, Iveson (2007) has highlighted the limitations inherent in both ‘topographical’ and ‘procedural’ approaches to public space. Contrary to these essentially static (either physicalist or structuralist) models of the public, Iveson has noted that the public always unfolds as a ‘public address’. The public appears when a certain urban site is turned into a venue of a ‘public address’, as an attempt to reach a dispersed public of personally unknown yet significant recipients. Every form of address to a public thus entails imagining a public to be addressed. Building on Iveson’s point, we can add that such an imagination concretely proceeds through acts of projection and inscription into the visible of a diagram of association and/or sociality.

The prolongations of the public possess rhythms and inhere to motilities. The contemporary situation is one in which, following Appadurai (1996), due to the combination of global media and mass migrations, both viewers and images are simultaneously on the move. Such motilities are qualitatively and quantitatively differential, in the double sense of differentiated and differentiating. Today, the control over motilities – made possible by sorting the visibilities of subjects, events and rhythms – leads to a new form of social stratification. In

light of this, Jacques Rancière (1998) has contrasted 'politics' to 'police' and has attributed the quality of 'circulation' to the latter: policing is the activity of controlling public space, governing the appearance of subjects in it and their disappearance from it, through having them 'circulate'.

However, what Rancière overlooks in his description of politics as 'settled' and opposite to the circulation of policing is that public space in its full political significance is precisely a space of circulation. As indicated by Joseph (1998), it is at the same time a space of *circulation* and a space of *communication*. On the contrary, settledness is arguably a characteristic not only of politics but also of private property. The public consists of a coefficient of deterritorialisation and motilisation of local territories, through their constraints and affordances, in order to set in motion an address characterised by categorical recognition. A nice illustration of this is an old tradition in Naples known as the 'paid coffee'. It is a peculiar form of charity and solidarity, whereby after having a coffee in a bar one can pay for one more, which is left as a bonus for an unknown future customer who may be experiencing economic troubles. In another important case, Blomley (2004) has focused on how different conceptions of property are enacted both practically and discursively in the city. Here, we find different conceptions of property and appropriation of the land. Arguably, while there is scope for invisible practices of resistance, the public domain emerges in those zones of discontinuity between different practices and different legal framings of those practices. Such discontinuities can be highlighted or concealed, as Cresswell (1996) has observed, by different expectations, aspirations and contestations about what (normatively) is in place and what is out of place in a given locale. The public thus emerges in the space between invisible resistance and normative hegemony.

The public domain derives, as we have seen, from the intersection of three ecologies: a media ecology, an urban ecology and an ecology of attentions. The peculiar visibility regimes of these ecologies, and their changing configurations, are constitutive of the domain of the public and how bodies, subjects and events enter this domain according to certain rhythms and producing certain effects. The public domain is a territory of affection defined by its being visible and accessible, with the two latter elements tightly knitted together. In the following chapters, we will turn to considering more closely how public regimes of visibility intersect the city, surveillance and democracy.

6

Urban Visibilities

This chapter extends the analysis of the interplay between visibility and publicity, delving into the city as a site of intersecting visibilities, motilities and stratifications. Urban studies literature is immense; in this instance, I choose as interlocutors Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift and their recent call to ‘reimagine’ the urban dimension. Inspired by a Deleuzian perspective, Amin and Thrift (2002) have argued against the priority given to a phenomenological approach to the city and in favour of a machinic one. However, here I seek to point out that, in the attempt to understand urban visibilities, the phenomenological and the machinic perspectives can and, indeed, should be kept together. The matrix view of flows and fluxes in the city, that is, of the city as a pattern of traces and trajectories, is important and enlightening, but rather than being opposite, as claimed by Amin and Thrift, it is complementary to the phenomenological experience of urban circulation. Urban circulation is located precisely at the intersection between top-down and bottom-up perspectives.

Consequently, in this chapter I propose to extend to urban visibility the perspective outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, which I have called ‘ecological phenomenology’. In other words, my suggestion is that urban machines can and should be analysed as prolongations and events that take place in an ecology of local *plena* unfolding in the element of visibility. Consequently, while Amin and Thrift contend that it is necessary to overcome the image of the city as a ‘territorial economic engine’, I support a territoriological analysis of the urban environment as carved in an element of visibility. Amin and Thrift rightly describe the city as a ‘means to engineer encounters’, however they do not seem to agree that such an engineering integrally unfolds through territorialisations in a field of visibility of events, subjects and rhythms – which is precisely

what I suggest. Their critique, it seems to me, is applicable only to a narrow notion of visibility as visibility, but misses what is at stake in the more general phenomenon of visibility as an element of the social. A particularly revealing case, as we shall see, is the theme of the urban crowd or, better, crowd states as they manifest themselves in the city. Where can such crowd states be found? Where do they originate? What precisely do they reveal?

Motilisation

Modernity has set the city, this space of settlement *par excellence*, in motion. Richard Sennett (1994) singled out the significant parallel between the medical discovery of blood circulation in the seventeenth century and the emergence of a new urban model. The image of the fluidity of blood pumped around the human body by the heart, as described by the English physician William Harvey, is at the root of the type of social organicism that inaugurated the discipline of sociology. The emergence of such an idea is part of a process that had already begun in the sixteenth century with Humanism and its vision of an Ideal City that transcended the medieval walled town. However, the modern urbanisation process introduces into the urban pattern not simply a quantitative difference, but also a qualitative one.

As the city becomes a site of flows and circulation, it turns into a complex territorial composition of vectors, trajectories, paths and directions that are both sustained top-down, through planning, and shaped bottom-up, through interaction. If the modern city emerges as a site of circulation, this process is in part problematic and contradictory, given that, as Tim Cresswell (2006) has shown, due to a dominant social scientific 'sedentarist metaphysics', mobility has been always feared as a 'social pathology'. At the beginning of the twentieth century, especially in early American sociology, the city is seen from the perspective of natural history as a diagram of zones (Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1967[1925]). Urban zones are the product of both short-term and long-term flows, but each movement of resettlement is associated with forms of social disorganisation, which can be recovered only through a gradual process (Park used to call this process the 'race relations cycle').

On the other hand, in the 1920s and 1930s rationalist and functionalist architects enthusiastically embraced the ideal of circulation as a necessary means to clean up 'rotten' urban centres. The latter term recurs in Le Corbusier (1924), who famously opposed the 'stagnation'

and 'putrefaction' of the immobility to the project of an urban street conceived of as a 'factory in length' for sorting traffic according to speed, liberating the fastest automobiles from the 'congestion' caused by the slowest vehicles and pedestrians. While there may certainly be some psychoanalytic explanation of *père* Corbu's *Angst* with *embouteillage* in the traffic and the ensuing need for 'fresh air', the image of the straight street as a speed-generating machine remains the perfect urbanistic *péendant* of his architectural depiction of the house as a *machine à habiter*. Far from being uniform, urban motility is composed of highly differential rhythms and speeds. With respect to this, it is amply recognised today that functionalist urbanism significantly overlooked urban experience and its affects created at the intersection of differential motilities.

Among the harshest critics of functionalist urbanism, in the 1950s the Lettrists and the Situationists – tracing from the Surrealist *promenade*, as illustrated by Francesco Careri (2002) – heralded by contrast the playful possibilities associated with free, non-rationalised and even random movement in the city. Traffic circulation, in particular, was seen by them as the opposite of human encounter, that is, as an organised universal isolation. The Formulary for a New Urbanism (Ivain 1953) and Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism (Kotányi and Vaneigem 1961) – which included urban practices such as the *dérive* ('drifting') and the *possible rendez-vous* ('unarranged meeting') – constituted the Lettrists' and early Situationists' response to what they perceived as the 'frigid architecture' of modernism that bred the fragmentation of the human being into a series of functionally defined, cut off spheres of existence.

Against the functional circulation of city inhabitants, imposed upon them by the imperatives of spatial separation of the various dimensions of life (production, consumption, rest, etc.) the Lettrists and more extensively the Situationists sought to reconstruct the unity of human existence through the free construction of situations and an alternative use of space and urban motility, often inspired by unsettled minorities such as the Roma people. From Constant Nieuwenhuys's project of a mobile city, *New Babylon* (1959–1974; see in particular the beautiful documentation by Careri 2001), through Isaac Joseph's (1984) *Le passant considérable* and David Le Breton's (2000) *Eloge de la marche*, to Rebecca Solnit's (2001) *Wanderlust*, the idea of wandering in the city through a type of movement that exceeds territorial fixations, constantly re-emerges as a vital reaction against the planned, merely functional aspect of urban movement. Importantly, the different motilisations in the city produce

social territories through subsequent chains of deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations of the urban environment: such a production is eminently practical.

Vision in motion

Around 1840 for some time it was considered fashionable to take a tortoise out walking in the galleries. (Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*)

Another crucial author in this thread, Michel de Certeau (1990 [1980–1985]: 142–146), argued for a theoretical shift in the imagination of the city, from the idea of a single ‘urban system’ to the visibilisation of a multitude of ‘microbic practices’ within urban space. Possibly the most microbic practice is the mere act of walking in the street, a public performance that actualises and appropriates urban space in a variety of ways (and styles). It has been noted since the early years of cinema that, phenomenologically, the combination of vision and motion in urban space creates an effect that is similar to *montage* or editing. The moving observer meets unfolding vistas, with sudden changes in the visual field, cuts and new appearances. Transit becomes transience and transformation. Yet while the idea of a linear and progressive ‘liberation through speed’ was celebrated by modernist urbanists à la Le Corbusier in their attempt to ameliorate the urban performance, the kinematics of urban movement is usually related not so much to work and production, as it is to leisure and consumption.

Visual consumption of goods displayed in various guises has played an important role in urban strolling and urban promenades since the late eighteenth century. The Jardins du Palais Royal in Paris served as the prototype for the arcades, which in turn served as the prototype for the shopping mall; and in the 1880s Émile Zola represented these seductions of the *grands magasins* – together with the ruthless exploitation of its employees, to be sure – in his *Au Bonheur Des dames* (see Flam 2010). From its inception, urban visual enjoyment was linked to the elements of light, fashion and design. Throughout a wide array of visible practices, the city is enjoyed as a spectacle. In a critical vein, Henri Lefebvre (1991[1974]: 99) observed that city inhabitants are constantly caught up in a web of what he called ‘analogons’, that is ‘doubles of themselves in prettified, smiling and happy poses’. Advertising, which we encountered at the beginning of this book in our attempt to

understand the social ontology of visibility, stands here as the epitome of the seductive nature of the urban spectacle.

All sorts of spectacular fascinations can be imagined, including the (in-)famous 'wretchedness tours'. In a track by the French *banlieue*-based group Saïan Supa Crew, entitled *Zonarisk*, a mock safari bus escorts tourists through the urban wasteland of the French *banlieue*. Tourist tours of this type are actually organised to the *favelas* in Brazil (Freire-Medeiros 2009), the shantytowns in Africa and (post-)conflict cities such as Belfast. As John Urry (1990) explained magnificently, the tourist gaze amounts to a specific form of visual enjoyment and visual consumption of places. Tourism spectacularly emphasises and monumentalises what is officially recognised as a place's major attractions. While the city is a living complex, always caught in a struggle between past and future and, more precisely, between the assertion of its different pasts and differing futures in its multiple presents, the tourist gaze freezes all sorts of transformations and processes, looking only for those fixed, 'authentic' monuments officialised by the accredited authority of tourist guides. This is not a uniquely contemporary phenomenon. Let us not forget that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century city was probably even more spectacular than today's: tours were given not only to the usual monuments, but also to places that today are subject to very restricted access, including the morgue in Paris, which attracted an unbelievable one million visitors per year (eventually, it was closed to the public in 1907).

Urban experience then appears as a spectacular, cinematographic experience (AlSayyad 2009). In this sense, Walter Benjamin (2003 [1935–1939]) first argued that cinema is the medium that best corresponds to modern urban perception: an entertainment or distraction (*Zerstreuung*) which embodies a specific sensibility and, through 'tactical reception', breeds and reinforces certain urban habits. Cinema changes perception just like the city does. If the city is cinematic, simultaneously cinema is a deeply urban medium – it is imbued in urban culture. Ultimately, in Benjamin's view, urbanites enjoyed cinema as a homeopathic shock that enabled them to recover from the fluster of urban vision in motion.

Urban *aisthesis*

She sliced like a knife through everything; at the same time was outside, looking on. She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she

always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. (Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*)

Each time he took a walk, he felt as though he were leaving himself behind, and by giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within. (Paul Auster, *City of Glass*)

Urban perception or *aisthesis* is cinematic and fragmentary. German social theorists Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer shared this fundamental insight, describing the modern metropolis as sensorially dense, powerful, shocking. As highlighted by David Frisby (2001) and Stéphane Füzesséry and Philippe Simay (2008), Simmel, Benjamin and Kracauer provide us with a deeply sensorialised theory of social experience. Of course, much has been written about the alleged dominance of the visual in the city and it would not make much sense to reiterate the argument for its own sake. What I am interested in analysing here is not so much the cultural impact of such a dominance of the visual as the properly epistemological consequences of conceptualising the urban environment as a *lieu* of visibility thresholds. As we shall see, such a relational conception is not limited to the key concern of early urban theorists of the metropolis, that is, the phenomenological experience of the city. On the contrary, a relational view on visibility also spans the ecological prolongations of the phenomenal *plenum*.

The city is motilisation visibilised as much as it is visibility motilised. The urban surface becomes a new immediate, meaningful anthropological space. The inception of Simmel's (1950[1903]) reflection on these topics lies precisely in the excavation of such 'surfaces of sociality'. Just as for other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelists, for Simmel sight is the most excited sense in urban life, in that cities are characterised by a rapid accumulation of changing images: the city hypertrophies the eye to the detriment of the other senses. Seeing is intertwined with stimulation and restlessness, given that seeing without understanding definitely leaves one more tired than understanding without seeing. City life thus shapes its own peculiar socio-psychological type, a personality that is defined by reaction and adaptation to the intensification of all sorts of stimulations. Here, we find the image of a metropolis that is put into a state of vibration by chains of shocks

that incessantly cut across it. Notably, such a Simmelian idea of urban shocks is later widely echoed, including in Freud's (1920) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Half a century later we find a biologist, Henri Laborit (1971), who attempted to found a discipline he called 'aggressology', which would have been devoted to the study of the impact of urban shocks upon humans.

In this context, gazing and, above all, glancing acquire a crucial role in the navigation of city space. Indeed, the 'flow' that marks the life in the streets makes staring impossible: the city dweller must develop a competence in watching while 'keeping the flow'. Also, as we observed in Chapter 5, it is improper to stare at people as this might be received as intrusive behaviour. Consequently, there is an issue of the *rhythms of visibility* in the city. Simmel insisted upon the sociological function of immediate reciprocal eye-to-eye contact. Our gaze is an essential tool of knowledge, but this same field of gazes, as a field of intervisibilities, makes us constantly visible to the others. Recognition is in most cases of a categorical type. In one passage, for instance, Benjamin describes two fundamental human figures: the shopkeeper, the public citizen par excellence indifferent to being seen, and the collector, the private buyer intent on hiding the object with himself, to transform it from a commodity into a personal fetish which would enable him to disappear. Because of the incompleteness of categorical recognition, the urban glance is the site of a wide range of feelings, so wide that it is doomed to remain always ambiguous. What is in a gaze: complicity, threat, disgust or seduction ...? Perhaps, ambiguity is not even enough to capture what is at stake here. At first, the eye-to-eye contact seems to be the most intimate and personal type of contact. But, especially in the crowd, the glance is also always very close to being impersonal and deindividuated. So, for instance, Edgar Allan Poe's 'man of the crowd' is almost at the edge of himself: he is on the verge of becoming a mere crowd detector. Actually, here is where we have a phenomenal experience which is at the same time an ecological event.

The visible is the field in which city and subject mutually interpenetrate and constitute each other. Of course, we have arrived *in limine* at the figure of the *flâneur* and the space of the arcades. Benjamin (1999[1927–1940]) collected thousands of pages of material for his unfinished *Passagenwerk*, a project in which he delved into the peculiar, mixed, hypnotic and oneiric nature of the urban architecture of the glass-roofed shopping arcade, 'the most important architecture of the nineteenth century'. It is a project in which, as is crucially

recounted by Buck-Morss (1989), the natural history of the fossil, the mythic history of the fetish, the mythic nature of the wish image and the historical nature of the ruin encounter each other. Because of the deep mutual interpenetrations of architecture and the subject, the human types inhabiting the arcades mirror the hybrid nature of in-betweenness that characterises these architectures: prototypes of the shopping mall and 'original temples of commodity capitalism', the passages were at the same time for Benjamin places protected against noise and the weather, separated from the ordinary and the prosaic: places in which the distinction between inside and outside, between daytime and night, became uncertain – enigmatic places in which to rethink or recast the modern urban human figure. Like the architectural *passage*, the *flâneur* is in a state of transit and receptivity to urban visibilities.

Although often criticised as a male bourgeois loiterer, whose movements in the streets are ultimately dictated by the pursuit of voyeurism, adventure, entertainment and pleasure (e.g., Bruno 1993), the *flâneur* should not be seen in this way, at least, not primarily – and not simply, because in fact Benjamin insists on the ascetic qualities of the *flâneur* who walks all day without stopping and without even eating. In my view, seeing in the *flâneur* only a psychosocial type means missing its real theoretical import. The *flâneur* is not a person but a diagram of affections, a recorder of the territorialities, combinations, variations and stratifications in the urban environment. It is a script of everyday urban experience dictated by stimuli on the ground, strained between those two contradictory – both 'sick' – tendencies that are *hyperaesthesia* on the one hand and *anaesthesia* on the other. As a moment of urban sociality, the *flâneur* is a peculiarly urban visibility regime that takes place in a context of public circulation, and in a state of tension between the necessity of reacting to ever-changing stimulations and the hollowing out of personal experiences.

There are some ecological similarities but also a fundamental difference between the *flâneur* and money. As described by Simmel (1900), the impersonality, abstractness and calculability of money as the universal medium of exchange dominates city life. As soon as money substitutes the unique goods produced by craftsmen (and craftswomen!), industrial production becomes anonymous and invisible to citizens 'in the street'. In other words, the reciprocal invisibility between producer and consumer is due to an increased number of intermediate passages in the production chain. Monetary economy, which is essentially symbolic, mobilises goods and allows for large numbers

of transactions to take place very rapidly. Hence, we get the restlessness of modern urban life, and the acceleration of speeds and tempos. The theme of alienation, which begins with Marx in the sphere of production, extends with Simmel to the streets. As later described by Elias Canetti (1999) in his memoirs, money – especially as revealed in the condition of inflation – is a crowd state. In Poe, Baudelaire and Marx, as observed by Benjamin, the crowd assumes the coloration of the demonic. All of these dimensions increase the precariousness of urban aisthesis, a precariousness that can be summarised, following the crucial observations by Joseph (1984: 64), as being composed of: the *effects of motility*, the *fluctuations of opinions* and the *segmentation of situated interaction* – to which we should now add a fourth ingredient, the *circulation of money*.

The *flâneur* is the anthropological reaction to this precariousness of the experience of money and the volatility of urban aisthesis. The *flâneur* is not so much a ‘man in the crowd’, as it is a reagent that illuminates the crowd as a multiplicity, a precarious composition, that is, the urban aisthesis. While for Poe and Baudelaire the issue at stake in the crowd was mainly aesthetic and affective (how to give a soul to the crowd), for Marx and Engels, as well as later for figures such as Le Bon, it became explicitly political (how to forge the crowd). To these dimensions, Benjamin added the ethical one (how to be in the crowd). Throughout all of these reflections, I think, there lurks the ultimate question, which is one of social epistemology: what is the constitution of urban aisthesis? Visibility is everywhere an element of sensibility, the element where *percipiens* and *perceptum* coexist.

Streets as strata

The precariousness of urban aisthesis, at the intersection between motilisation and visibility, ultimately leads to the discovery of the third dimension: depth. The city is not only a place of motility but also of stratification. Perhaps, to recognise the work of stratification, it is not even necessary to endorse Spengler’s (1926 [1918]) dictum that history is an urban invention. In an image that may not yet have been sufficiently analysed, Benjamin speaks of urban crowd as a ‘veil’. What does it mean that the crowd is the veil through which the *flâneur* sees the city? What kind of perception of the environment are we confronting here? What kind of intervisibility exists in a crowd? A crowd, we have argued, is neither a subject nor an object. A crowd is a multiplicity in a state of thriving and indistinction; it is a population *in vivo*. Of course, the thresholds of crowd states are relative to an assumed point of

view and they can be acted upon through techniques. Action upon a multiplicity is essentially action from the outside: for instance, architecture can be, and historically has been, designed to manage crowds. As such, architecture is one out of many different techniques developed to break down the crowd. Foucault called this endeavour to break down confused multiplicities and turn them into more manageable pieces, such as individual bodies, 'discipline'. It is not by chance, then, that Foucault's analysis of enclosed institutions began by considering the architectural project of the panopticon.

There is another important consequence of a thriving state. The urban event occurs in the mode of the 'problematic': in other words, the intelligibility of the city is problematic. Because different events, phenomena and processes unfold at different degrees of visibility, the problem of reading the city emerges as the problem of deciphering and investigating it (Frisby 2001). As in Paul Auster's novels, the city is a city of signs. These signs are often mere hints, but sometimes they can be blood stains. Similarly, the 'pearl diver', as Hannah Arendt called Benjamin in her 1968 essay, kept on puzzling about the intricate, multiple and floating relationships between the city, history, modernity, change, vision and imagination. Here, the 'werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness' (one of Benjamin's aliases for the *flâneur*) behaves as an urban excavator. Excavation presupposes superposition, like the stratification of different times in every single place. Perhaps, the prototypical superposition analysed by Benjamin is the one between the street and the interior, between outdoor and indoor. The street is where superpositions and overlays become most complex. From this point of view, Simmel's and Benjamin's interest in the topic of the street, as well as that of other early sociologists, is understandable. The street is the most visible urban environment. As a social space endowed with its dynamics, organisation, norms and representations (Fyfe 1998), the street entails an entry threshold (one can always be charged with 'unruly behaviour' and removed from the street), yet such thresholds are very low compared to other social spaces like shops, offices and factories.

The street represents an essential testing point for publicness. Visibilities in the street are problematic when they are set to test civilised and uncivilised behaviour. To decide what is 'in place' and what is 'out of place' (Cresswell 1996) in a place like the street entails a street-level politics of visibility. The example of eating in the street can be helpful. In a vehement pamphlet against eating in the street, the conservative intellectual Leon Kass (1994) paralleled that to animal-like

behaviour. For Kass, public eating is out of place and should be regarded as a shameful and embarrassing spectacle, etc. At first, one might suspect a class prejudice here, because the urban poor are those who perform most of their activities on the street. However, there is also a paradox, which speaks more to the psychoanalytic side of this *pruderie*: indeed, according to Kass the most obscene form of public eating is not an activity that characterises the poor, but rather one that accompanies the typical middle-class *promenade*, namely licking an ice cream.

Similar moralistic controversies can be better understood through Benjamin's notion of porosity, which concerns the reciprocal articulation of internal and external spaces and their respective visibility. The life of a city like Naples, Benjamin (1979[1929–1937]: 174) observes, reflects its architecture: both are 'dispersed, porous and commingled'. Here, porosity inheres in a relational space-time structure of the city, where intermediary and mediating places emerge. These pores are passages, or, in Simmel's (1994[1909]) words, 'thresholds', zones or junctions that, like pivots, simultaneously connect and separate. In porous urban situations – which should be taken as a phenomenon present to various degrees in every city – spatial and physical elements do not determine perception; rather, they offer it a series of affordances that can be activated, that is, made visible, in interaction. For instance, surprise, desire and memory are modalisations of the gaze which rearticulate stratified visibilities, establishing new lines of discontinuity and new thresholds. The relationship between urban underground cultures and the mainstream can be similarly imagined as a porous zone, whereby underground and counter-cultural practices enact forms of creative resistance, initially conceived of as acts of subversion, which, through a phenomenon the Situationists dubbed '*récupération*', end up being reintegrated into the mainstream in the commodified form of 'fashion', defusing the critical and subversive qualities of the original project.

The glass and the grand vista

Compared to the medieval city, the modern city enacts a large-scale conquest of visibility. While in the medieval walled settlements, walls were boundaries *of* the city, in the modern age they are turned into boundaries *in* the city. The walls that surrounded medieval towns were walls of protection, aimed at blocking flows. In his classic history of urban culture, Lewis Mumford (1996[1938]) remarked that the capitalist economy overcame medieval restrictions pushing towards an unprecedented

spatial expansion of urban space. As cities deterritorialised and spread in every direction into the mainland, as well as overseas, the walls that surrounded the medieval town centres were demolished both practically and symbolically. The modern boulevards and *prospekts* such as the magnificent boulevard Haussmann in Paris and Nevsky Prospekt in Saint Petersburg are the logical endpoint of this process, through which, as we observed at the beginning of this chapter, the modern city is set in motion. Once removed as boundaries of the city, walls took on the function of separating and segregating devices. Such an enclosing function is present for instance in the late medieval Jewish ghetto and prolongs into modern ghettos which, while not literally walled, are nonetheless removed from the official urban visibility. Concurrently, since the creation of modern states the appearance of the city – and, more specifically, of the capital city – has been architecturally reshaped according to the imperatives of political celebration. The architecture of urban visibility is thus architecture in the most literal sense, in so far as architecture, together with urban planning and urban design, determines concrete boundaries and flows of visibility.

In this regard, the utopian glass architectures of visionaries like Paul Scheerbarth and Moholy-Nagy exhibit a singular convergence between technological elements (the new construction materials available since mid nineteenth century) and ideal ones (the desire to imagine a new form of life for the mass society). In particular, Moholy-Nagy (1947: 62) identified a revolutionary potential in glass architecture precisely because it made it impossible to separate the inside of a building from the outside: in his view, by eliminating the traditional habitative distinction between interior and exterior, transparency would have given rise to new ways of seeing the world and a new horizon by which the polity could be imagined. Not dissimilar ideas can be found in the ‘unitary urbanism’ theorised by the Situationists in the 1950s. In the late eighteenth century, the architectural production of relations of transparency had already been imagined by architects such as Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, who deemed it central to the human and social reforming project of the Enlightenment (Vidler 1990). Ledoux understood that intervisibility can be arranged in either a hierarchical or, conversely, a symmetrical way, and that these different ways of organising it correspond to different types of projected human interaction.

As hinted above, in the twentieth century Le Corbusier and other CIAM (Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne) architects envisaged a dream of transparency of urban space as a means to exert control

upon it and organise it in a 'rational' and 'functional' way. While such control was imaged by the French modernist architect as fostering social emancipation, the step from utopia to dystopia is always short: actually, utopia and dystopia are the same phenomenon observed from different perspectives. So, in Eugene Zamiatin's novel *We* (1920), One State, the city of the future where the novel is set, is a city of glass where walls are transparent in order to ensure that everybody is constantly visible, except – in a typical instance of *arcana imperii* – the Well-Doer (or Great Benefactor), who governs without being seen. Interestingly, in *One State* highly visible exemplary, expressive punishment coexists with invisible, 'dull' disciplinary practices. The novel was prescient, for this is precisely what we find in the totalitarian city, whether fascist, national-socialist or Stalinist. Let us remember that large urban regeneration projects are not born neo-liberal, they are born totalitarian. In the Italian case, for instance, from 1927 Rome was subject to extensive clearances, with swathes of old buildings being demolished, their inhabitants evicted and the majestic Via dei Fori Imperiali built in their place (Atkinson 1998: 20). The fascist parade assumed a central function of spectacular propaganda, and urban propaganda was massively employed, for instance in the 1934 plebiscite (Ghirardo 1996). On this and other occasions, the fascist regime revived, and tailored upon the Duce's figure, the Renaissance tradition of the *apparati effimeri*, temporary installations and triumphal arches constructed in honour of the occasion. Similar strategies were enthusiastically adopted in planning new towns, coupled with a nationalist policy of demographic increase (Caprotti 2007).

Similarly, Hitler and his architect Albert Speer had long conversations about how the future architecture of the Third Reich would physically incarnate the ambitions of the national-socialist political regime. Destruction of cities (not simply through urban projects but eventually through the war) and construction were to be adjacent if not entangled with each other: new buildings had to be erected for 'crowd cults' that enabled crowds to be reassembled and repeated. Through a series of finely calculated spatial arrangements, in huge stadiums the crowd doubles itself, while in the main streets it is slowly set in motion, to parade or march (Canetti 1979[1976]). Perhaps then, it is not by chance that in the early post-World War Two conference 'Building dwelling thinking', Martin Heidegger (1951) himself associated architecture with dictatorial rule. After the war, the philosopher of the Black Forest – now no longer a Nazi, but anti-urban in mood

as always – decried spectacular architectural devices, contrasting to them a type of building which was more modest and had at its core the practice of dwelling.

Punctuation

As the cab drove across O’Connell Bridge Miss O’Callaghan said:

– They say you never cross O’Connell Bridge without seeing a white horse.

– I see a white man this time, said Gabriel.

– Where? asked Mr Bartell D’Arcy.

Gabriel pointed to the statue, on which lay patches of snow. Then he nodded familiarly to it and waved his hand.

– Good-night, Dan, he said gaily. (James Joyce, *The Dead*)

If urban experience is an experience in motion, there are nonetheless all sorts of discontinuities in a cityscape. Some of these discontinuities function as punctuation marks in the landscape. For instance, monuments are among these punctuation marks, and illustrate how they function as visibility devices. The term ‘monument’ derives from the Latin verb *admōnĕo*, *-ĕre*, ‘to admonish’; as such, the monument is the visible inscription of a public mnemonics. Monuments are landmarks which are projected in order to be looked at. They usually function as attractors to be seen at a distance; sometimes, they also allow the possibility of entering them and enjoying panoramic sightseeing vantage points for contemplating the city. A particularly interesting project for a monument to be built in London for the 2012 Olympics is called *The Cloud* and represents at best the visibility diagram of the new media, a ‘tribute to a digital age of bits and atoms’. In a sense, it represents the coming age of interactive ‘monuments 2.0’. Yet the function of punctuation remains essential. Visibility analysis, which was originally a concern of military science and is now used in landscape and urban planning, addresses, in a sense, precisely the measurement of the effects of punctuation. In visibility analysis, the notion of ‘viewshed’ is used to indicate a region of intervisibility, that is, the extent of an area that is visible from a fixed vantage point, or viewpoint (Rana

2003). A viewshed is shaped as a cone or a series of cones that stem from the viewpoint and whose extremities are varying because they depend on the aspect of the terrain. The cone's edges are lines of sight, that is, lines that connect the observation point to the observed region and discriminate between visible and invisible regions. What planners are most interested in is not only the distinction between visible and invisible zones (the shape of the viewshed) but also the assessment of visual dominance.

The visual dominance of a building or another object in the landscape corresponds to the kind of impact that a building has in terms of visibility – in other words, how effectively it punctuates the landscape. The various forms of landscape punctuation mark have a crucial impact on the experience of navigating and perceiving the city and its vistas. In respect of this, Kevin Lynch (1960) – a figure who, from a certain point of view, did for architecture what Charles Wright Mills did for sociology – identified a quality in the city which he called indifferently 'legibility' or 'visibility'. A cityscape is legible-visible if the organisation of its parts can be recognised as forming a coherent pattern. Legibility-visibility depends on the opportunity given to the observer to use the punctuation marks in the landscape to organise his/her experience of movement. For Lynch, the image of the city is the result of a two-way process between the observer and his/her environment. The urban environment, as already remarked, is filled with affordances which suggest a number of possible relationships, but such possibilities need to be activated and rendered meaningful by the observer to achieve certain practical aims. When the outcome amounts to a distinctive, vivid and powerful set of features, the city is, according to Lynch, imageable, or visible. A highly imageable city is much more inviting and pleasurable for the observer than a moderately imageable one, and it is correspondingly more sensorially engaging and gratifying.

It is doubtful – and contested – whether twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century high-rises and skyscraper constructions made cities more imageable or not. Certainly, besides its obvious economic meaning, the vertical race has been a contest for visibility and for the imposition of landmarks, often interpreted as trademarks. The era of towers, inaugurated by Eiffel, clearly pushed the activity of punctuation towards extreme spectacularisation. But urban spectacle through punctuation also includes other forms. For instance, the comparative reflection by Tony Bennett (1995) on museums and amusement parks highlighted the role of these architectures as crowd attractors and pacifiers. More

diffusely, the contemporary city is increasingly covered with screens, whereby the walls of stations, metros and similar places of transit and high traffic become surfaces of projection that rhythmically claim public attention. Admittedly, these are minor forms of punctuation mark, yet they are notable for their proliferation and capillarity. Display for advertising purposes is the epitome of a secularised visibility. The historical antecedent of contemporary screens was outdoor billboard advertising, which struck and elicited important observations from Walter Benjamin and Sergei Eisenstein. While the German intellectual famously evoked the larger than life effect of billboards selling 'toothpaste for giants', the Russian director pointed out the loss of all sense of proportion and realistic depth created by electric advertising (Eisenstein 1942). Neon outlines became famous punctuators of the city in novels and movies, and the red light of neon signs reflected in a 'fiery pool' on the asphalt was described by Benjamin (1979[1929–1937]) as what made advertisement 'so superior' to all criticism.

Governing space

Not only is urban space stratified and punctuated, it is also partitioned. The literature on the spaces of flows has often overlooked the fact that wherever an urban boundary is passed through, it does not mean at all that that boundary is removed; quite the contrary, it testifies to its enduring existence. Michel Foucault explored various facets of this boundary-flow duality. In his study on disciplinary rationality (Foucault 1977: 172) he remarked that disciplinary architecture was not built to be observed, but to make observable those who were to be kept inside it. Concurrently, the wall of the enclosed institution became a 'familiar presence' in the city – and, in the sense we have adopted above, almost a monument ('admonishment'). Later, in his study on the birth of bio-politics, Foucault (2004b[1978–1979]) carried out an extensive investigation into how the government of events in urban spaces is enacted. He described it as a type of action on the environment rather than on bodies or conduct. One of his most important points was that liberalism, insisting upon the necessity of circulation of flows of goods, is not the opposite of government; instead, it is a precise governmental rationality, one that is not focused on issuing direct orders or norms but rather on controlling aggregate trends and establishing margins within which events may take place in the city.

Today, a situation of multiplication of urban enclosures is consolidating. Since the 1970s new spatial divisions within cities have been

emerging (Marcuse and van Kempen 2000). A pattern of separate residential and productive clusters, of protective citadels and militarised consumption areas, shapes the geography of the 'partitioned city' (Marcuse 1995). In its most extreme forms this is a dual city (Caldeira 2001), which rigidly sets as opposites, on the one hand, a new urban poverty abandoned to itself and 'shut off' from the advantages of urban life and, on the other, the global business of finance capital to be protected with military means. In both cases, the context is that of the neo-liberal city (Harvey 2007; 2008), in which the Lefebvrian 'right to the city' is deeply compromised by the spatial action of private corporate interests (Marcuse 2009). Social stratification becomes a stratification of mobilities, in which each mobility correlates to a series of immobilities, so that these sorted and differentiated immobilities organise and regulate the partitioning of the city. While urban society is increasingly structured through networks, a massive 'databaseisation' (Urry 2007) of networked individuals takes place.

A segregated city is also a city of cut off visibilities, hampered or incapacitated perception. For instance, Northern American suburbanisation stands out as a model of retreatist and anti-political lifestyle, characterised by anxiety and paranoia. As already noted by Virilio (1993[1976]), the application of sanitary ideology is functional to the enactment of the triple process of segregation, ghettoisation and suburbanisation. Such a process is also a perceptual process and a politics of visibility, whereby the *cloisonnement* of space corresponds to the production of dead zones and other territories to be hidden or even denied (Franck and Stevens 2006). Lefebvre (1996) famously described the urban form as a phenomenon that is physical, psychological and social at the same time. The urban form consists of the simultaneity of events and their perception, a zone of convergence and indistinction between *percipiens* and the *perceptum*. I have tried to show that the characteristics of concentration and encounter that define the urban form are also the elected object of the government of space. This confirms our initial claim that urban machines as ecologies of assemblages and montages cannot be analysed independently from the phenomenology of encounters that take place in local *plena*. Urban stratification, punctuation and partitioning are all ecological *and* phenomenological events of visibility.

The urban infravisible

Before concluding, we should turn to the specific relationship that is forged between the visible and the invisible in the city. Above, we

observed that discipline, as conceptualised by Foucault, is a sort of anti-spectacle. Yet there is another opposite to the visibility of spectacle, namely the invisibility of urban infrastructures. Among classic urban theorists, Lewis Mumford (1996[1938]) used to call the underground sewage system 'the invisible city'. Sewers are but one example of a number of prosaic, networked infrastructures, upon which cities rely so heavily. Graham and Marvin (2001) have explored in detail the form of this 'splintering urbanism', which is built and managed largely invisibly but which provides essential socio-technical support to urban existence. For most city inhabitants, networked infrastructures are like black boxes which are never unpacked. Infrastructures are managed technocratically by a few specialised professionals in invisible 'calculation centres' (Latour and Hermant 1998), each of which selectively focuses on its single domain of competence (for instance, water pipes, electric wires, etc.). Each of these invisible networks is heterogeneous, as it spans control rooms, administrative offices and manual workers performing maintenance; yet it remains distinct from other parallel networks, specialised in a different 'selective gaze' on the city. Latour and Hermant define them as 'oligopticons', because rather than seeing everything they actually focus on a very small range of phenomena.

Networked infrastructures also sustain an invisible infusion of software and computing devices into contemporary urban space. Nigel Thrift (2005) has argued that wherever we go we are increasingly not only assisted, but also almost directed, by software. This entails an increasing and perhaps unprecedented mediatisation of the city. For Thrift, it becomes almost impossible to get lost or to be 'out of touch'. As hinted in Chapter 5, Stephen Graham (2005) has defined these spaces 'software-sorted geographies'. Far from being mere personal empowering tools, ubiquitous and pervasive computing devices are part of the new governmental morphology of the contemporary city. Increasingly, urban space is disseminated with fixed and mobile devices that are connected in a network and work incessantly to detect events and subjects in specific local contexts, classify and sort them according to the programmed instructions in their operating codes and, whenever necessary, to the relevant information stored in central databases.

After the medieval walled settlements and the urban wall of the enclosed institution, a further trend towards pluralisation and dispersal of walls takes place. It is a process which can be understood through the Foucaultian notion of 'capillarisation' of power. New forms of segregation emerge, based on networked infrastructures that manage individual access to certain places. Walls become virtual: they

are invisible, pluralised and potentially everywhere. Once the technological infrastructure is implemented, it takes no more than an instant to actualise an ad hoc wall. A double invisibility can be highlighted in this process: first, as just said, the performance of computing systems is encoded in their software, which users can access only through external interfaces but cannot question beyond the possibilities made available to them by the interface itself. Second, in most cases computing processes are not in the foreground, instead, they are subsidiary to other tasks; consequently, they are mixed and merged within larger processes, thus passing completely unnoticed.

The extensiveness and embeddedness of computational processes also mean invisibility, which in turn means reliance and dependence. Not only do we rely on the functioning of these systems, but we also depend upon their correct functioning. Graham and Thrift (2007) have drawn attention to the activity of maintenance as invisible but crucial work that allows infrastructures to work and perform correctly. In a sense, the invisibility of infrastructures represents the immotility that makes motilities possible. However, routinary motilities, too, can easily become invisible. In this sense, knowledge can play a paradoxical role here. On the one hand, knowledge enables the visibilisation of sites and subjects, on the other, the same knowledge, in so far as it becomes implicit and pre-packed, can produce an inability to see – just as in the invisible city of Phyllis described by Italo Calvino, which becomes visible only to the eye that is able to revert expertise into inexperience, catching the city ‘by surprise’.

The peculiar politics of visibility in the contemporary city has an important impact upon the public domain. As observed in Chapter 5, the distinction between a city’s public and private spaces archetypically used to correspond to a distinction between visible public spaces and invisible private spaces, due to a different degree of accessibility of those spaces. Today, spatial partitioning also corresponds to a polarisation between supravisibility and infravisibility or invisibility. On the one hand, public areas become subjected to intense surveillance and/or heavy policing, while on the other the infrastructures, including informational infrastructures and calculation centres recede into invisibility and operate infrapolitically. While Amin and Thrift have claimed the priority of invisible, networked, disseminated infrastructural assemblages over the immediate phenomenological experience of the city, I have argued that this relationship should not be thought of as dialectical, but rather as a constant copresence in a distributed field of visibilities. The encounter, or event, can be engineered, but can

never be fully predetermined: it can only be calculated within a certain range of variations in given dimensions. But such a calculation will never exhaust the full ecology of the *plenum* of the here-and-now – not only because calculations are approximated, but above all because calculations are referred to a small number of predetermined dimensions, while the event qua phenomenological here-and-now always contains more than what is taking place: it contains the encounter as a potency which can only be charted on that element of sensibility which is visibility itself.

In conclusion, in this chapter we have seen how motility, stratification, punctuation and partitioning generate urban visibilities. The spatial, political and cultural materiality of cities is shaped in this sensible field of visibilities which, in a sense, represents its proper 'flesh'. Technological infrastructures and motilised visions thus operate within the same social territory. The cityscape can be appreciated as a territory of visibilities that are governmental but are also always contested and refuted. Planning the city means planning new diagrams of visibility, while reclaiming the city means setting the visible boundaries of the public domain.

7

Surveillant Visibility

The management of visibilities lies at the core of all forms of social control, whether formal or informal. More precisely, as we will come to see, control consists of a purposeful and contextual asymmetrisation and hierarchisation of visibilities. In Chapter 2, we described recognition and control as two opposite poles of visibility. From this perspective, recognition – together with its alias, emancipation – can at first appear as the opposite of control. However, in practice as well as in theory, these two poles should not be regarded in simply dichotomic terms. To begin with, both are intrinsically modern creations. One could say that while human emancipation through the achievement of egalitarian recognition (the ideal of human dignity) is the political undertaking of modernity, control is its omnipresent socio-technical counterpart. Consequently, some forms of control are implied and required by the very aspiration to emancipation.

But besides that, control also has a properly political dimension – or, better, a bio-political one. As we observed in Chapter 6, the government of the modern city is enacted through the partitioning of space and the exercise of control over the spatial repartitions where events unfold – which concurrently means control over the dynamics of flows and circulation across repartitions. In a similar way, the project of human emancipation through recognition is destined to remain a mere utopia if imagined without reference to the socio-technical and material-technological configurations through which it would be enforced. Not only is technology a political problem, but politics itself is a technology. The Foucaultian notion of bio-politics illustrates precisely this technological equation in which life becomes a substantive factor of politics. While the modern political project was one of democracy, the modern bio-political project was one of government. Consequently,

it is absolutely necessary to detect all of the reciprocal ‘implicit openings’ of the two poles of recognition and control towards each other, analysing their zones of commingling, copresence and indistinction within the field of visibility, as well as the peculiar affective compositions that this copresence entails. Rather than boundaries, such zones are pores, or frontiers.

The case of the modern practice of surveillance helps to illustrate the complex ambivalences of visibility. While, as we observed in Chapter 2, modern democracy advances the challenge of a power made entirely visible, the practices of surveillance reintroduce, for various purposes, structural asymmetries of visibility, thus posing a potential threat to democratic life. Never-ending issues concerning privacy, trust and suspicion derive from this fact. Surveillance is predicated upon the effort to achieve and subsequently manage, in a routine way, the visibility of various identities, conducts and events to the advantage of the specific agent or agency that promotes the activity of surveillance. From such a minimal definition, both quantitative and qualitative issues follow. Quantitatively, what increasingly characterises contemporary society is, as we shall see, a multiplication of the agents, agencies and sites of surveillance. Qualitatively, the meaning of surveillance is extremely ambiguous. David Lyon (1994: 219), in particular, has stressed its Janus-like nature: surveillance produces simultaneously ‘control *and* care’, ‘proscription *and* protection’, watching over and looking after. Suffice it to recall here that, as Michel Foucault (1963a; 1975) first observed, the modern notion of surveillance was born in the context of modern medicine, where it was clearly meant to be a diagnostic task in support of nurturing therapeutic practices.

A number of pressing questions derive from the qualitative ambiguity of surveillance: is it possible to strike a correct balance between the two poles of visibility implied in it? Is it possible to establish a virtuous rather than vicious circularity between them? And how is this balance achievable in a context of pluralisation of surveillance agents, agencies and sites – a context, in other words, in which there is no simple opt-out from the visibility regime in place? In an attempt to answer these questions, the horizon of enquiry should be enlarged from merely technical or merely ideological issues to include the articulation of visibilities as a pivotal *problématique*. This chapter tackles two bodies of literature on social control: democratic theory, on the one hand, and governmentality, on the other. More specifically, the notions of disciplinary society and society of control are analysed as two models of social control over,

respectively, enclosed and open spaces. The society of control model introduces a new way of managing visibility, which is expressed, for instance, by actuarial criminologies and risk theory.

Surveillance as visibility

Let us restate the point: as an applied form of social control, surveillance entails a purposeful and contextual asymmetrisation of visibilities, which enables the hierarchisation of different gazes. Importantly, asymmetrisation is always selective. Just like the other forms of mediation considered in Chapters 3 and 4, surveillance entails processes of framing something and affecting someone through specific rhythmic prolongations of the here-and-now. As described by most scholars in the field, the process of surveillance entails keeping under observation a group of subjects or a population through the exercise of an attention focused on their bodies and personal data and details, in order to extract information that is presumed to be useful. In order to do so, such details are systematically monitored, recorded, controlled, archived, consulted and compared (Lyon 1994; 2002; 2007). Of crucial importance here is the fact that details are, to various degrees, transformed into 'information' either through basic forms of recording and counting or through more sophisticated encoding procedures. Thus, surveillance requires that a certain form of visibility comes to count as a datum. In the terms we have introduced in Chapter 2, in order to have surveillance there must be a process of inscription of visibility and inscription into the visible made possible by a procedure of visibilisation.

As hinted above, surveillance can be carried out by a plurality of different organisations (for instance, military, police, intelligence, commercial or medical organisations), in a plurality of social sites (for instance, streets, homes or retail stores), for a plurality of aims (for instance, to control employees, clients or deviants). Christopher Dandeker (1990: 37) has highlighted the fact that the activities of collection and storage of information proceed hand in hand with the issuing of instructions or the design of an environment that is supposed to facilitate certain tasks. Therefore, surveillance also provides the feedback from the instructed to the instructors that enables the latter to verify compliance, or lack thereof (in this sense, for instance, one could say that in Christian culture angels acted traditional agents of surveillance).

It is important to stress that surveillance processes and practices can be observed as forms of manipulation of intervisibilities only if we adopt an enlarged notion of visibility, one that is not limited to the merely optical or visual dimension. Indeed, just like the public domain, surveillance inheres to distributions and patterns that emerge in an ecology of attentions. Surveillance is a procedure for visibilising certain subjects and certain sites. As with every other mediated process, surveillance is based upon the framing of certain acts, conducts and statuses which are deemed to be relevant (and, accordingly, should be visibilised) and the simultaneous framing out of other acts, conducts and statuses which are not deemed to be interesting. Surveillance practices are played out through visibility thresholds in a process that entails policies of visibility. In turn, these determine, shape and transform the thresholds of visibility, thus ultimately contributing to defining the general politics of visibility. As we have seen in the previous chapters, managing visibilities is an unfinished social work: subjects who act in and on the field of visibility are defined in a relational way; they are not visible or invisible in an absolute way, but rather always visible in a given context, to someone, and in comparison to someone else.

Surveillance thus reproduces the Janus-face character and the double significance of visibility, both socio-technical and bio-political. As a socio-technical process, surveillance concerns social interaction that takes place materially and contextually in given ecological locales. Just like other apparatuses for managing visibilities, surveillance is a socio-technological complex that determines the scope and meaning of specific visibilities and intervisibilities. All sorts of actors and aggregates are involved in these chains of action, which appear as a continuity of discontinuous human and non-human actors (Latour 2005). Also, as observed by Lyon (2007), contemporary surveillance relies heavily on new ICTs. As a bio-political governmental process, on the other hand, surveillance concerns the creation of normative presuppositions and effects regarding visibility distributions and, more specifically, about how population and crowd processes articulate these presuppositions and effects: surveillance separates what can or should be seen from what cannot and should not be seen, and establishes who can see whom. A visibility regime is created precisely to establish who has the right, or the duty, to protect, or reveal, certain information collected through surveillance practices. Recently, Gary Marx (2006) has insisted upon this process of normative shaping of visibility. Ultimately, a visibility

regime can be normatively acted upon in two essentially different ways: one can, on the one hand, set general rules of visibility which are subsequently supposed to be applied uniformly, during the very routine surveillance activity. On the other, one can instead act directly and in specific, contingent situations in favour of certain visibility diagrams and to the detriment of others.

Visibility and policing

It is well known that in its earlier modern use the term 'police' used to cover a much broader range of meanings than it does today. For instance, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century absolutist France, the birth of the apparatus of the police was conceived as a tool for the total government of society, as clearly expressed in Nicolas Delamare's classic *Traité de la police* (1705) (see Napoli 2003). While the stated aims of this institution were social order and harmony – as such, hardly new ideals – from a legal point of view the institution of the police appeared as an anomaly, in that it comprised and combined in novel ways a set of legal-political and political-administrative devices introduced to ensure the 'good order' of the polity and, more specifically, urban space. It is interesting to observe that the totalising Delamarian dream of the police as an encompassing system of government failed when it was, in a sense, exploded by the joint forces of, on the one hand, capitalism with its classical liberalist ideology and, on the other, the development of civil society and public opinion as an arena of political discussion independent from the state.

These two trends were not unrelated given that, as we observed in Chapter 5, the development of the public domain coincided with the process through which, from the late eighteenth century, attentions and opinions began to form an ecology of their own and acquired an economic value – which, since then, has but increased. The police thus represented the original blueprint of bio-political governmentality, which contained discourses of both legal-political self-legitimation and administrative governmental efficiency. The general aim of policing is to make society and, more precisely, a given population 'legible' (as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, visibility is not opposite to but interwoven with legibility). It is a large-scale process, whose extreme consequences are well captured by James C. Scott (1998) in his analysis of the rise of a gaze of the state. Far from biologically visual, such a gaze is in fact a schematised abstraction of ongoing material social processes: the technical devices of legibility forged by

the state include for instance, as Scott has shown, uniform measurement systems, cadastral maps, surnames, the establishment of official languages (together with technical legal and bureaucratic vocabularies) and the construction of national centralised traffic patterns of roads. The development of biometric techniques which extends from footprints, through facial recognition systems (Gray 2003) to DNA sequences and which today we find applied in all forms of surveillance is also part of the same process.

Not only does the state attempt to make its own population legible through the collection of aggregated, standardised and documentary facts, it also tries to shape that population concretely according to those same imperatives. In other words, policing is not confined to recording and encoding information about social processes, but extends to the social engineering of those processes. From a sonic point of view, Jacques Attali (1977) has similarly described the modern state as a 'generalised eavesdropping device' and, simultaneously, a 'gigantic noise emitter'. Of course, the nightmare of such policing methods has been well expressed in dystopian literature since the early twentieth century, and I would like to recall here Ingmar Bergman's striking movie, *The Serpent's Egg*, where the lives of the protagonists turn out to have been a behavioural experiment conducted by a team of scientists.

At its outset, capitalism appeared as a historical force that put the original rationality of 'total policing' in crisis; however, not long after this, in many practical fields, and particularly in the spatial management of colonial and urban territories, both in the colonies and the homeland, capitalism and the police found themselves allied. In this respect, Karl Marx first analysed the bills that criminalised 'vagrants' and their subsistence activities in early modern Europe as legislation that was functional to capitalism (Bensaïd 2007); simultaneously, such a control of motilities (including migration and movements within the city) was a quintessential activity of policing. Foucault (2004a [1977–1978]) called these forms of control *dispositifs* of security and reconstructed the way in which, thanks to the logic of security, the discourse of liberalism did not fall in contradiction to but could rather ally itself with governmental practices: far from being anti-governmental, liberalism represented a governmental rationality.

Consequently, whereas in the disciplinary and policing model of the *ancien régime* the emphasis was put on the unseen seeing eye of the guardian, as well as that of the police, present everywhere without being seen (an image which clearly traces back to the *arcana imperii*

imagery), in security practices the ideal shifted towards policing as the activity of seeing the invisible, of visibilising social processes and making them legible. Policing transformed into the activity of penetrating and analysing the 'confused multiplicity' that is the population in order to enhance its visibility (and, a fortiori, its order). While disciplinary techniques such as the Panopticon were aimed at employing visibility as a tool of social control, security *dispositifs* aimed precisely at turning social control itself into a form of visibility (visibility as legibility). The aim of both discipline and security can be interpreted as a means to disaggregate multiplicities, such as (and in particular) urban crowds. Yet their strategies are different and, to a large extent, complementary: while discipline breaks multiplicities down into individual bodies to subject to specific training, security breaks multiplicities down into 'dividuals' (Deleuze 1990), that is, sums of traits and analytical dimensions which can be filled by various individuals.

During the shift from its original 'totalitarian' meaning of encompassing government of the polity to its circumscribed, specified and narrowed-down contemporary understanding, policing retained its ambiguity in dealing with both dividuals and individuals, populations and people. The police system is not simply an unseen seeing eye; it also exercises an exemplary visibility through its own visibility (we should recall that, interestingly, the same term 'police' refers to both the whole organisation and its single representatives who are, in essence, people wearing a uniform). Embodying security and discipline, the police represent the visible face of government. Ethnographic research illustrates the point well. For example, while, as described in the classic research into undercover investigation by Gary Marx (1988), the police continues to 'invisibly see', police officers also try to achieve a ubiquitous presence across urban space: as illustrated by Herbert (1996) and, as highlighted by Paperman (2003), they use their uniforms to create and stabilise a certain definition of contextual situations.

The classic surveillant visibility regime

As we have argued in previous chapters, social visibilities do not float freely; on the contrary, they are distributed and articulated in and through specific regimes or diagrams. As far as surveillance is concerned, Jeremy Bentham's (1787) *Panopticon*, as described and interpreted by Michel Foucault (1975) in particular, is possibly the most famous among

such diagrams. Foucault associated the regime of panoptic visibility with a type of power he called 'disciplinary', at the core of which he placed the practices of examination and inspection. As we have noted above, disciplinary power is predicated upon the most basic form of visibility asymmetry: power becomes invisible and imposes mandatory visibility upon its subjects. In short, the powerful watches the powerless. Historically, this fact is in stark contrast to the pre-modern Western model, where political power was fundamentally uninterested in private citizens and where society was largely left to self-organisation – of course, with the notable exception of religious pastoral power. While ancient power illuminates only itself as it displays itself, modern disciplinary power imposes illumination, at least upon certain social sites that it decides to organise and shape actively. In a disciplinary society visibility turns into a 'trap' in which subjects are caught and through which they are subjected to power.

In the disciplinary regime, the simple fact of being aware of one's own visibility *status* – and not the fact of being under actual surveillance – effectively influences conduct. For this visibility regime to work correctly it is necessary that the possibility of inspection is felt and interiorised by people – that it becomes their constant pre-occupation. Disciplinary power can thus be said to be a 'soft' power whose core mission is not punishment – although it may constantly proceed through punishments – but rather the shaping of bodies and actions through correction of habits, dispositions and volitions. Therefore, such a power acts from the outside of the individual but always in an attempt to breed discipline from within the individual. Tracing the origin of the term 'surveillance' back to clinical language and in the context of the development of a modern 'medical gaze', Foucault shows how being observed determines subjection which, as noted by Deleuze (1986), is instrumental to the imposition of certain conducts – although it would probably be better to speak of 'generation' of conducts given that, as we have seen, surveillance works essentially as self-surveillance.

Inspired by the organisation of a French military school Bentham had heard about, the Panopticon is an architectural model designed to serve a plurality of closed institutions, including factories, work-houses, poor-houses, lazarettos, manufacturers, hospitals, asylums and schools, and finds its prototype in the prison and the penitentiary (all these institutions, on the other hand, as shown by Melossi and Pavarini 1977, share a common genealogy). We have already observed that the architectonic structure of the Panopticon supports a star-shaped diagram of

visibility which cuts off the centre from the periphery and where the centre can surveil the peripheries; crucially, as well as this first-order asymmetry of visibilities, a second-order asymmetry is added, which cuts off those who are aware of the relationship between the panoptic visibility diagram and its aims from those who are unaware of them and are consequently simply subject to its effects.

There has been a debate to ascertain whether or not the panoptic regime of visibility can be applied to study surveillance in contemporary society. Both qualitative and quantitative issues are at stake. Surveillance studies have engaged a critical reading of Foucault's theory of disciplinary society and have claimed that we have moved 'beyond the panopticon', or 'after the Big Brother' (Boyne 2000). In particular, Lyon (2006) seems to suggest that contemporary society is 'beyond' panopticism and is characterised by new regimes of visibility: contemporary surveillance is pluralised, decentred and 'disorganised' (Lyon 1994), a fact which does not entail its demise at all, but rather a complexification of its nature, which becomes far more difficult to trace than centralised state surveillance. As observed by Ball and Webster (2003), pluralisation comes with intensification, especially in politically tense periods. But even apart from the contingent political climate, the new technologies of surveillance and data collection, pattern recognition, data mining and identity management increase exponentially the scope for the surveillance of individuals well beyond what Bentham could have imagined (Whitaker 1999: 140).

New surveillant visibility regimes

He's written a good thing in that manuscript, Verhovensky went on. He suggests a system of spying. Every member of the society spies on the others, and it's his duty to inform against them. Every one belongs to all and all to every one. All are slaves and equal in their slavery. In extreme cases he advocates slander and murder, but the great thing about it is equality... (Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed*)

In the following, I review synthetically a series of visibility regimes that represent contemporary developments or variants of the classic panoptic regime. These include the superpanopticon (Poster 1990), the synopticon (Mathiesen 1997), the periopticon (Lianos 2001), the partopticon or participatory panopticon (Whitaker 1999), the banopticon (Bigo 2006; 2007) and the oligopticon (Latour and Hermant 1998).

According to Poster (1990), the development of relational information archives and databases has made it possible to apply the panoptic model no longer only to specific enclosed institutions or subsystems (typically, the penal subsystem) but in a much more extensive way, and tendentially to the whole of society. The use of new ICTs including mobile phones, GPS systems, electronic economic transactions and all the other devices that produce traceable identities, Poster argued, practically co-opts the whole population into its own surveillance. It is a superpanopticon where surveillance becomes participatory, erasing the difference between disciplinary resorts and public open spaces. More recently, Gary Marx (2006) has returned to the issue of cooperative surveillance, revealing that side by side with the traditional 'hard' forms of state surveillance, new allegedly 'soft' forms are appearing. The latter are often spelled out in (pseudo) contracts, such as in a famous example: 'No passengers are obliged to submit to a search of persons or goods if they choose not to board our aircraft'. The type of surveillance addressed by Gary Marx is also soft because it requires less punitive intervention from the state and relies much more on collaboration and denunciation or, in other words, on informal social control, which is much more widespread and no less vigilant than the formal type.

A diagram that is quantitatively similar to the superpanopticon, but at the same time is qualitatively different because of its vectors of visibility, has been identified by Thomas Mathiesen (1997) as the synopticon. According to Mathiesen, in order to understand the full range of contemporary disciplinarian, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that, besides the (super-)panoptic diagram where one or few guardians control many inmates, another regime is in place, in which, on the contrary, the many watch the few. The modern mass media, with their broadcast diffusion (one-to-many), create a situation in which, as we have already considered in Chapter 3, a large number of spectators who form the audience watch – and admire – the small number of media people, including political leaders and stars. Mathiesen stresses that the outcomes of synopticism are no less disciplinary than panopticism: the experience of 'watching with' or 'at the same time as' (*syn-*) determines a partial return to the older diagram of the spectacle of power, but with a stronger emphasis on the normative dimension of the exemplar visibility of the watched. In short, 'synopticon' is another name for spectacle: the synopticon is part of Bennett's (1995) 'exhibitionary complex', which can be found for instance in all sorts of 'media ceremonies' as described by Dayan and Katz (1992), whose ultimate purpose is the

creation of a synchronisation of affections that breeds shared values, norms and beliefs.

On the contrary, according to Michalis Lianos (2001) today's dominant regime of visibility – which he dubs 'postindustrial' – is better specified as a periopticon. In order to guarantee effective social control, Lianos has argued, it is no longer necessary to induce people to share values, norms and beliefs. Indeed, the life of the contemporary individual presents itself as being fragmented into an articulated and pluralised network of institutions that span the metropolitan transport system and large economic organisations. It is the ways in which such institutions 'think', to use Mary Douglas' (1986) phrase, that determine, in an absolutely impersonal guise, the thresholds of access and the conditions of permanence in certain sites. Conformity is produced, not by creating shared habits but rather by transforming value issues into merely technical issues of action coordination and passage through established checkpoints. Thus, for Lianos contemporary institutional control is acentric and acephalic, perioptical rather than panoptical: it is aimed not at surveillance on the part of a single central authority, but rather at the creation of differential individual positions of selective and progressive inclusion/exclusion as well as at the promotion of individualist active competition for inclusion. In a condition that somehow recalls Marx's soft surveillance, the periopticon externalises the work of generating social conformity, which disciplinary power used to carry out, and creates the conditions through which private citizens themselves strive to be conformist in the pursuit of their own private goals.

The element of voluntary participation in the new processes of surveillance has been called partopticon by Whitaker (1999). Not only is the contemporary panopticon quantitatively amplified by ICTs, but its real strength lies in the fact that people actively engage in it: there is a systematic distortion in favour of the perception of the advantages of becoming part of new media visibility, to the detriment of the perception of its disadvantages and specifically the dimension of social control that is implied by them. Also, as we have discussed in Chapter 4, a large majority of people enjoy becoming visible in networked visibility regimes, despite the fact that these regimes produce ubiquitous surveillance at the same time.

Didier Bigo (2006; 2007) has focused on a complementary dynamic of contemporary visibility regimes, employing the term 'banopticon' to reveal how disciplinary society does in fact work only for a small, privileged minority of people in the world, those living in rich countries or rich neighbourhoods within rich and poor countries, while

the rest of the planet's inhabitants are subject to a 'ban' that invisibilises and places them in a condition of 'exception', that is, a condition of neither inclusion nor exclusion from a legal order, but rather a suspension where there are no legal consequences for the practical treatment to which they are subjected. This is what happens in work and detention camps, whose ultimate model remains the concentration camp (Agamben 2003). In this respect, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2005) has described the contemporary world bio-political scenario as an 'empire of camps' where various detention facilities have replaced disciplinary surveillance. Indeed, the camp, as opposed to the prison, has no aim of correction or rehabilitation; its only function is containment of its inmates and their tendentious exclusion from society. While Bentham's panopticon strove to reform inmates by making them constantly visible to the eye of power, the camp works on the contrary to make them definitively invisible through radical exclusion. For this reason, Mirzoeff compares the camp's inmates to 'the undead', who are deprived of any ratified social existence.

A final surveillant visibility regime that I would like to consider is linked to the technical and technological set-up of control practices. In their book on Paris, Latour and Hermant (1998) have coined the term oligopticon to address a situation that is almost the opposite of the panoptic one. While the panoptic guardian surveilled all behavioural irregularities in inmates, that is, all of those conducts that did not conform to the norm (in order to report to the inmates themselves that all their unlawful deeds had been noted), most specialised information and management services today observe only tiny and highly selected portions of reality. Latour and Hermant have described the technical control rooms located in those 'centres of calculation' that manage urban networked infrastructures such as water pipes, electricity and telephone cables and traffic, as oligopticons that are endowed with only a highly segmented vision and observe only 'a little bit' of the 'world out there'. The oligoptic vision allows for a selective synopsis of the various territorially dispersed events that inhere to a single process to be kept under surveillance (say, e.g., the level of water in a river) but the fault lines of the field of observation are rigidly defined a priori so that from a wide array of oligoptic centres no single panopsis emerges at any time.

Virtual control and actual control: Discipline and security

You could never predict security: sometimes it was non-existent, sometimes – usually at the most inconvenient times – it was

everywhere around you; obstructive, tedious, intrusive, rude. No explanations were given for it: the authorities seemed to take a sadistic pleasure in keeping the public in the dark. (Jonathan Raban, *Surveillance*)

Most critiques of Foucault's description of the panoptic model are, to my mind, grounded in an insufficient examination of Foucault's overall theoretical project. In Foucault's oeuvre, the panopticon is only a part of a more general analytics of technologies of power, which includes at least four different ideal-types: sovereignty, discipline, security and Self. Even if we confine ourselves to the difference between the second and third types, it becomes apparent that while the panopticon corresponds to the visibility diagram of disciplinary power, the *dispositifs* of security follow a different diagram (Foucault 2004a[1977–1978]). Whereas the former diagram aims to control enclosed places and single bodies, the latter aims to control open spaces and irreducible multiplicities: with Foucault, while discipline is 'anatomy-political', given that its point of application is the single body, security is 'bio-political', given that its point of application is a whole population. Ultimately, the individual itself is transformed by the *dispositifs* of security into an aggregate of parametrical ranges, trends of values within those ranges, and ensuing thresholds of risk calculated through dedicated algorithms.

Far from excluding each other, discipline and security coexist as analytical forms of power and as practical ways of managing visibilities: whereas bio-political control is essentially statistic and is grounded in aggregated trends, means and standard deviations, disciplinary control comes into play each time is necessary to act directly upon individual bodies. Discipline conforms and uniforms, security selects and sorts. For instance, the management of visibility regimes in an airport (Adey 2004; Klauser 2009) illustrates the coexistence of securitarian devices (typically, management of flows through oligoptic control rooms, security checkpoints, video surveillance, etc.) and disciplinary devices (typically, queuing at security checkpoints and submitting to body searches as an activity that induces conformism through self-awareness of one's own behaviour). A second and related instance is Daniel Neyland's (2006) study on the creation of patterns of accountability of action in public places in CCTV monitoring, which also reveals how the policing of space is a policing of flows as much as of fixities ('Why are those kids standing still?') (see also Norris and Armstrong 1999). Another important contemporary example is the management of psychiatric units in

hospitals, where traditional disciplinary practices (primarily, enclosing people) are accompanied and supplemented by securitarian practices, essentially through the centrality accorded to pharmacological treatment of psychic disease. A fourth case, analysed by Ericson and Haggerty (1997), is the transformation of the police under security imperatives (that are risk-oriented) from secretive governmental and disciplinary agents into information brokers who provide data to be passed on to other institutions such as health, welfare and insurance agencies.

A distinction which could help to illustrate the difference between disciplinary and securitarian social control is the distinction between virtual and actual control. Today, the activity of surveillance is not only systematic but also almost seamless and endless. Rather than discontinuous, as envisaged by Foucault for disciplinary surveillance, contemporary surveillance is continuous, in most cases due to automation and its 'meticulous' application (Staples 2000). Jacques Ellul (1965) first remarked that the technological society systematically over-spreads surveillance, because of the self-replicating and monist character of technique: the technical instrument is applied everywhere it can be applied, simply because it is possible to apply it. Hence, we have not only *virtual* control (the constant but unverifiable possibility of inspection) but also *actual* control, made possible by the new ICTs' capacity to record, archive and retrieve almost instantly huge quantities of indexed and relational data. Lyon (2002: 2) has stressed that such a routinisation of surveillance, which has led to an unprecedented infusion of surveillance into everyday life, has also transformed surveillance into a crucial political issue.

While discipline is always embodied, security essentially has a statistical nature. Bureaucratic devices, including passports, database files, risk assessment tables and biometric profiles, provide precisely the link between the bio-political and the anatomo-political, between a statistical coefficient of deviance and a single body to apprehend and, whenever necessary, to confine. Such considerations also strengthen our argument against regarding surveillance as a merely visual regime. Surveillance represents an enlarged field of visibility, which corresponds to a whole ecology of attentions and thus includes what Scott (1998) calls 'legibility', made of a vast array of forms that compose a 'surveillant assemblage' (Ericson and Haggerty 2000). The assemblage is polycentric and made of 'dataveillance' (Mitchell 1995: 157), that is, surveillance of information. Dataveillance is pivoted not so much around observing or even eavesdropping, but rather around activities such tracking and tracing, following electronic trails. A particularly

important aspect thus concerns the emergence of zones of indistinction between the virtuality of control and its actualisations. The more we move from visual surveillance towards dataveillance, the more such a zone of indistinction widens.

Tracking and tracing digital data flows is crucial in contemporary surveillance, decentred in a multiplicity of networks (Whitaker 1999; Lyon 2001; 2003; Marx 2005): just consider how online internet activities are routinely and systematically tracked through logs, crawlers and retrospective data mining. It is the condition of the 'society of control', quickly but insightfully outlined by Deleuze (1990) in his famous postscript on Foucault. The crisis of the disciplinary diagram lets new formations and assemblages emerge: the corporation overcomes the factory, the password overcomes the motto and the dividual overcomes the individual. From this perspective, surveillant visibility is no longer directly applied mainly to individuals, rather to flows and movements. Such flows and movements are not only, and not so much, material but concern primarily money, choices, attentions and habits, all projected into the monist dimension of information. The aim is to enable surveillant agencies to sort access and denial of access to specific spaces and specific services for specific subjects, reproducing inequalities and further amplifying them.

The whole process is no longer pivoted around persons but rather codes. Simultaneously, as argued by Lyon (2007), control ceases to be the exclusive prerogative of the state and becomes scattered and disseminated throughout a plurality of social sites and locales. As hinted above, tracing from Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) notion of assemblage, Ericson and Haggerty (2000) have described such a situation of demultiplication of surveillance modes and sites as a surveillant assemblage. An assemblage has a composite nature, partly centralistic and star-like, partly polycentric and network-like. It functions simultaneously from above and from below. In principle, as noted by Rose (2000), the multiplication of forms of control would make it difficult to achieve some strategic coherence. However, the notion of assemblage thus accounts for the existence of contiguous heterogeneous organisations, each of which is endowed with its own priorities and codes, but which assemble into a single and uninterrupted chain of operations.

However, the panoptic diagram is far from superseded in the contemporary world. On the contrary, one can even find some large-scale applications of the panoptic principle in contexts that could hardly be more dissimilar from the enclosed institutions described by Foucault and, a fortiori, certainly from those dreamt of by Bentham. This is not

only because enclosed institutions have not disappeared at all but have instead evolved into new types of 'digital enclosures' (Andrejevic 2004; 2007). Most notably, panoptic *dispositifs* are being applied to open spaces, too. For instance, Eyal Weizman (2007) has described how the Israeli model of control over the Palestinian occupied territories, developed from 1967, includes panoptic visibility strategies. In particular, the Sharon-Wachman plan led Israeli military and civilian settlements to occupy the top of the hills, in order to set up a strategic visual form of control over the Palestinians. The adopted model of control was based on the principles of inspection and constant awareness of visibility on the part of the colonised, to foster the very interiorisation of such domination, together with the strict prohibition of looking back (actually, as Weizman explains, looking towards the settlements is treated as a security threat). In similar contexts, clearly the panoptic diagram is not enacted in a pure form, rather it is mixed with other regimes of visibility and control, such as those of the gated community. The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, known as *mitzpe* (literally, 'the gaze'), placed on hilltops that dominate the Palestinian valleys, are articulated around a double regime and an associated hierarchy of visibility. On the one hand, visibility follows a vector directed outwards and downwards, that transforms the settlers into willing or unwilling guardians and systematic informants for the Israeli army. On the other, visibility follows a vector directed inwards and upwards, toward the centre of the *mitzpe*, that promotes and strengthens the sense of community, identity and informal social control of the settlement. In conclusion, discipline and security should be regarded as two complementary and interacting surveillant regimes.

Preserving and destroying visibility boundaries

Within every regime of surveillant visibility there exists an axis of publicity–privacy – or, better, divulgence–secrecy. Along such an axis, as first noted by Simmel (1906), the distribution of information and knowledge is differential and selective. As such, this axis creates both social bonds that join together and power that sets apart. As we observed in Chapter 2, Simmel regards the secret as a visibility device that widens social life by introducing a sense of potential doubling of reality or, in other words, that for everything that is public there could be something that is kept secret. Now, it is possible to extend Simmel's analysis to surveillance, understood as an activity devoted to managing information placed at some point along the axis divulgence–secrecy, a management

which inherently generates power effects. Recently, Gary Marx (2005) has argued that surveillance is essentially concerned with managing boundaries along the publicity–privacy axis: indeed, on the one hand surveillance institutes and secures boundaries by creating and sorting dividual profiles (of suspects, clients, workers, consumer habits, etc.) that are functional to a differential treatment and sorting of subjects, yet on the other, and at the same time, surveillance overcomes and erases boundaries, in so far as it systematically requires the obtaining of information that was initially intended as private or secret. A dystopian movie like Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997) captures the looming ghost of eugenics as the ultimate form of the surveillance-social sorting nexus.

Surveillance thus reveals the complex relationships that exist between the various forms of recognition we introduced in Chapter 2. Again, it should be observed that, contrary to Honneth's (2003) view, recognition is not an inherently positive and value-conferring act. Rather, recognition consists of the specific affect, or range of affects, created by a certain diagram of visibility, with its morphology and its way of framing and territorialising relationships. Risk profiles and, more generally, coarse social sorting according to visible somatic features and attire correspond to forms of categorical recognition, whereby aggregations of dividual traits and properties are created. On the contrary, the gaze of the state and traditional disciplinary practices aim to attain individual recognition of subjects, who can subsequently be positioned within a field of visibility, and made visible and legible. In the synoptic diagram, then, we have an instance of spectacular recognition, where it is the visibility of power that supports its claim to legitimacy, although in a sense quite different from the one described by Bobbio in his theory of democracy. Lastly, personal recognition is the type of recognition that seems to be weaker in surveillant visibility; however, it is possible to find some elements of personal recognition in a visibility diagram that relies on the differential motivation of people, such as the partopticon. The same 'managerial self' described by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) and the various forms of branding of the self through the new media, which we reviewed in Chapter 4, fall under the same heading.

The fundamental ambiguity of surveillance that is found between care and control, highlighted by Lyon (1994), can be connected to the difference between, on the one hand, the *arcana imperii*, where power means secrecy – or, better, visible external effects *cum* an invisible internal core and, on the other, the spectacle of power, where the powerful enjoys

visibility, is strengthened by the very fact of being constantly visible and is even uninterested in looking at the powerless. In both cases, uni-directional vision qualitatively transforms vision. In this respect, Lyon speaks of a 'vision without gaze'; similarly, Paul Virilio (1994[1988]) has described a process of 'industrialisation of vision' that 'synthetises perception'. As we observed in Chapters 1 and 2, synthetised perception produces the sense of *Unheimlichkeit* associated with the experience of an object that stares back, radically questioning the place of the subject. One can recall for instance the 'maps that watch' described by Mark Monmonier (2002). Virilio has linked such a synthetised perception to a phenomenon of 'optical mass denunciation' (*délation optique*).

In political history, optical denunciation has a long tradition and a wide geography: in the last half century alone, it includes for instance East Germany's Ministry for State Security (better known as the Stasi) and its secret police, through the already considered Israeli architecture of occupation of the Palestinian territories, to the US Department of Homeland Security created in 2002. For Virilio, optical denunciation is a tendency that is inscribed in technical apparatuses of surveillance themselves, and represents the ultimate destination of a trend that has progressively constituted the pair 'vision-speed', that is, total or totalitarian vision, as inescapably claustrophobic and paranoid. From this perspective, the panopticon and the synopticon are not opposite (Virilio 2000): through the optical denunciation – made possible by real-time uniform, perfect illumination without shadows or blind spots – private exhibitionism and collective surveillance work extremely well together. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2005: 160–161) reports one example that perfectly illustrates this dynamic: it is the case of an American entrepreneur who wanted to sell to Homeland Security a system that would turn masses of internet users into surveillance camera operators to monitor the targets of security threats, while at the same time, in the best Benthamian tradition, surveilling the guardians themselves.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have proposed that we interpret surveillance as a specific way of managing social visibilities. By doing so, it is possible to recognise that a narrow focus on privacy issues misses what is really at stake in the control of visibilities through the organisation of encompassing regimes, or diagrams. Overall, then, the chapter has made the argument that the adequate sociological object of the study of surveillance practices is the socio-technical and bio-political field of visibility, with its affective or haptic dimension on the one hand, and its framing and cognitive effects on the other. Ultimately, retrieving the haptic dimension of surveillant visibility is important if we are to

reconcile the phenomenological and ecological perspectives, which have uncoupled in the domain of surveillance, in particular, separating the analysis of the experience of pleasure, fear and anxiety linked to being visible in the public domain from the analysis of the ecological prolongations and reverberations of that experience.

8

Visibility and Democracy

Democracy and government

From Chapter 3 onwards, we analysed a series of situations in which visibility assumes a more or less direct political significance. In this final chapter, an invitation is made to social and political theory to engage visibility more thoroughly. This invitation calls for the consideration of a larger historical horizon. A historical parallel can be established: from the late eighteenth century, with the French and the American revolutions, it became increasingly clear to political philosophers, theorists and analysts (in this respect, Tocqueville's position is revealing) that it was impossible to imagine the project of modern democracy without taking into account the processes of mediation, diffusion of information and formation of opinions. Similarly, today it is impossible to (re-) imagine the project of democracy without taking into account visibility as an essential phenomenological and ecological element in which the thresholds of the social are shaped and drawn. Admittedly, during the last 15 years or so, there have been important attempts by political and social theorists to conceptualise some aspects of visibility, which variously include Axel Honneth's (1996[1992]; 2003; 2007) normative theory of recognition and John Thompson's (1995; 2000) interpretation of the relationship between media and society.

However, the effects of the politics of visibility on the democratic project still need to be fully addressed and we still need a theory of democracy that organically incorporates and articulates the notion of visibility. As we have already considered in previous chapters, visibility calls into play not only democratic theory but also the relationship between democratic practices and political-governmental and political-administrative power. Thus, in order to understand the real share of the

management and transformation of social visibilities we need to adopt and confront those two opposing, or at least complementary, points of view on the public domain, namely the democratic and the governmental. In a sense, democracy and government are two different perspectives on the same type of process, namely, the political process or, in other words, that aspect of the social shaped by the gigantic but also elusive phenomenon synthetically – but most often enigmatically – referred to as ‘power’.

The easiest way to make sense of the idea that democracy and government are perspectives on the same process is to distinguish the two notions rather classically, on the basis of the fact that democracy proposes a bottom-up view on power, whereas government proposes a top-down one. Norberto Bobbio (1999) has phrased this difference by describing democracy as the view *ex parte populi*, the view from below (the people) *vis-à-vis* government as the view *ex parte principii*, the view from above (the prince). In other words, democracy would be concerned with those who are governed, the people, whereas government would be concerned with those who govern, the elite. In this vein, one of the most ambitious dreams of modern Western political thought would consist in the creation of a set of political institutions that seek to bring the democratic and the governmental perspectives together, creating what would otherwise be – and indeed, in many historical periods was – the oxymoron of a ‘democratic government’.

However, this dichotomy provides us with what is in fact an inaccurate picture of the political. First of all, Michel Foucault’s oeuvre reminds us that government is not simply exercised from the top down, that is, from without a multiplicity such as the people, but rather essentially in two other directions: (a) from within a multiplicity, in the form of discipline, disciplination and self-disciplination (‘positive’, corrective power), and (b) in-between the people composing a multiplicity, through the creation of a field of positionings, that is, through the definition of subject-positions (organisational power as control over the aleatory evental field). For Foucault (1982), power is different from both a function of consent and a function of violence. Indeed, whereas the latter acts upon bodies and things, the former acts upon actions. In order to exist, power requires an acting subject who remains ‘other’ and who positions him/herself in various ways in a predetermined ‘field of responses’. The subject is subject to power but never wholly subsumed by it, never vanishes into it.

Consequently, power is a type of relationship which is neither complete ‘victory’ nor open ‘struggle’: power and struggle, Foucault says,

constitute a 'permanent limit' for each other and a 'point of possible reversal' of one another. The practice of government creates a relational space, a territory wherein people position themselves: whether they comply or object and resist, the essential point is that they define themselves in reaction to the subject-position they occupy. This means that, far from being a pre-existing element that enters the political relation by freely consenting to its own subjugation, as the philosophers of social contract conceived it, the political subject is the outcome of the whole political process that positions it and, one might add with Bourdieu, shapes its dispositions. The activity of government thus does not reside in imposition but in disposition (Foucault 1991[1978]: 95). The act of governing defines subject positions inside a field made of strategically disposed things. With this definition Foucault completely severs the activity of government from state apparatuses: what characterises the period from the sixteenth century to the twentieth is not so much the subordination of society to a central state apparatus (*étatistation de la société*), as it is a governmentalisation of the State itself (*gouvernementalisation de l'État*).

Secondly, political philosophers such as Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and more recently Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Jacques Rancière, all of whom are radical critics of the dominant liberal Western model of democracy, have warned us against the reassuring belief that democracy can be guaranteed simply by a set of official political institutions. In various ways, these theorists have highlighted that the very fact of that democracy is identified with formal democratic institutions reduces the political process to a specific functional social sub-system, losing its quintessential quality. A constitutional legal framework is not sufficient *per se* to establish democracy. Interpreting democracy simply as democratic institutions endowed with rules and procedures erases the very challenge posed by the modern democratic endeavour: in the terms proposed by Castoriadis (1975), such an endeavour is the creation of politics – in so far as politics implies the full deployment of a societal 'radical imaginary' which corresponds to its instituting power – rather than merely the political, which is the domain of instituted power. Castoriadis (1997) has also stressed that there is no ultimate guarantee for democracy, but only contingent guarantees. *Paideia*, or 'education' in a very broad sense of the term, is one such guarantee that consists in the creation of political subjects aware of both the necessity of regulation and the possibility of discussing, criticising and changing the rules of coexistence. This insight can, to some extent, be traced back to the Proudhonian anarchist claim that

no government qua government can be democratic, or, in other words, that democracy can never reside in a mere juridico-political form.

The techno-political element

In Chapter 7 I pointed out that the modern democratic project of human emancipation through egalitarian recognition is destined to remain utopian if imagined without reference to the socio-technical and material-technological configurations in which it would be embedded. As Peter Wagner (2008) has shown, the modern commitment to autonomy has been the ally of a commitment to rationality and technical mastery. Thus, in my view, we need, both theoretically and politically, to tackle the political process in the very materiality of its social practices. Once the governmental and the democratic perspectives are radically contextualised in the material and discursive practices that constitute the political process, the problem of political subjectivity, or agency, emerges in all its complexity. Not only do we face here the classic dichotomy of emancipation and regulation, which cuts across the bulk of modern political theory – how to obtain emancipation out of an exercise in regulation, how to strike the balance between them – but a further crucial dimension is added: the technological, which leads us to the recognition of the techno-social as a proper domain of action and practice. In this respect, Frédéric Vandenberghe (2007) has identified, following a series of French authors including the anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan, the philosophers Gilbert Simondon and Michel Serres, the mediologist Régis Debray and the actor-network theorist Bruno Latour, the crucial (already Marxian and Althusserian) question: ‘How does an idea become a material force?’

The techno-social is conceived by all of these authors as a constitutive middle realm where the technical-material and the ideational-immaterial layers of the social process coexist in a zone of indistinction, prior to the appearance of familiar dichotomies and paired couples such as subject versus object. Leroi-Gourhan (1964) wrote, almost aphoristically, that every anthropogenesis is a technogenesis; Régis Debray (1991) elaborated on this point arguing that the dynamic of our thinking is intimately linked to the physics of our tracing. The human being cannot be a political animal without being also a technical animal – in short, it is a techno-political animal. Politically, and legally, humans shape the architecture of their own interaction. The consequence of such a view is twofold. On the one hand, technology is a political problem, which cannot be left aside in any attempt to understand the nature

of the political process – and the interweaving of capitalism and technology in a neo-liberal epoch reminds us of the most striking and worrying examples of the political problem of technology. The activities of tracking, sorting and surveilling through the infusion and embedding of ‘smart objects’ and encrypted software in everyday spaces are part of this picture. On the other hand, however, politics itself is a technological problem field, and in order to address it as such we absolutely need more fine-grained conceptual tools than those we have inherited from classical political tradition. It is not even a matter of enlarging the parliament to include nature in it, as suggested by Bruno Latour (1999), in so far as the challenge is not to extend the parliamentary model of liberal democracy to the whole universe, but rather, precisely to question that model through notions that may open up novel sensibilities. In this context, I suggest that the notion of ‘technologies of power’ elaborated by Foucault proves extremely relevant. If power is the product of techno-social complexes, government and democracy should be studied precisely as two such technologies of power. Yet democracy, as I shall try to show, also includes more than that.

To speak of a zone of indistinction between the material and the immaterial does not simply mean that politics and technology are flatly uniform, or one-dimensional. Frankfurt theorists formulated rather absolutist theses about technology. For instance, Marcuse (1964: § 5) held quite straightforwardly that the ‘totalitarian universe’ of technological rationality was the last incarnation of a despotic Reason that, embodying the repressive and mystifying logic of class domination, had ultimately achieved a ruling position in the industrial civilisation. Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979[1947]) had chased the ‘irrationality of rationalism’ to its ultimate conclusion, that is, the point where the project of modern freedom and autonomy turned into objectification and destruction. Perhaps paradoxically, such analyses were meant to be liberating but they have proved themselves to be rather one-dimensional, for they essentially neglect the various dimensions in which the technological articulates and is in turn articulated in the social. It is precisely in this process of articulation – indeed, a process of incessant prolongation – that visibility plays a crucial role. Both phenomenologically and ecologically, visibility is the receptive and perceptive element for the socio-technical inscription and projection of social relations and, concurrently, for their bio-political governance.

All types of mediation, as we have seen, can enhance visibility asymmetries. As far as the media and new media are concerned, we have considered how a number of authors from Lippmann on warned that

refinements of manipulation techniques could easily lead to a 'manufacture of consent'. Classical critical analyses have stressed that the production of consent proceeds through the construction of spectacles – spectacles that, in turn, can be described as a dispositif of visibility based on the radical separation of senders from receivers, sealed in their respective locales. *Prima facie*, new media overcome such a condition, with an architecture that is inherently symmetric, reticular and participatory. But, at that point, the new critical question becomes, 'participation in precisely what?' The expressive, phatic visibility propelled by the new media fosters a type of participation that is quite far from the ideal speech situation of the public sphere described by Habermas or the democratic *paideia* advocated by Castoriadis.

The transformations of that arena of interaction that is the public domain are linked to the changing nature of urban public space, increasingly infused with new digital media and devices that sort access and enable flows but also intensify surveillance. This fact adds yet another dimension to the political significance of visibility, and it interrogates the scope for various forms and tactics of resistance. In general, while modern democracy is understood as the political project of a type of power made entirely visible, practices of surveillance and social sorting build structural asymmetries of visibility, thus posing a potential threat to the health of democratic life. In recent years, critics have raised well-founded concerns about extent to which surveillance may be affecting the health of democratic life: practices of data collection and retention, as well as the unprecedented development of traceability through digital relational databases, have recently been addressed as sensitive topics. Even without resorting to conspiracy theories or 'Big Brotherist' visions, concerns about a growing tension between the requirements for democratic life and the surveillant activities carried out by a series of governmental and private agencies appear to be well founded. At the horizon, ultimately there looms the huge and never settled question concerning the relationship between the two historical projects of capitalism and democracy, and the extent to which they can hope to coexist rather than clash – in which case today democracy, *ceteris paribus*, would represent the weaker party.

The security factor

The discourse of security and securitisation appears as a specific and determinate type of answer to the question raised above. Following Foucault (2004a[1977–1978]; 2004b[1978–1979]), security comprises

a set of technologies whose general aim is to govern multiplicities in open spaces on the basis of actuarial and statistical devices. Such multiplicities cannot be pinned down to the individual level; consequently security cannot be applied to individuals. Rather, security organises space according to a series of possible events that are to be managed and kept under control. It aims to control events that are temporary and even aleatory to a degree. In order to do so, it conceives and organises the space as an environment, a system of possibilities, of virtualities, that do or do not become actual. Whereas discipline aims to govern a multiplicity of subjects by impacting directly, singulatum, upon individual bodies – in order to control them, sort them, train them and get them accustomed to the norm (Foucault 1999; see Gilman 1995 on the imagery of health) – security governs the multiplicity as an *omnes*, an undivided whole. Whereas the norm works by ‘normation’, security works by ‘normalisation.’ In other words, while within the disciplinarian framework people are classified by reference to a norm, setting apart the normal from the abnormal, in the securitarian framework people are treated as an undivided whole and the issue becomes that of operating through an aggregate, statistical or average normalised management of biological processes – such as nutrition, health and so on – that are inherent in the mass and cut across its members.

Consequently, whereas the object of the application of discipline is the body, the object upon which security is exercised is an entity called population. Population is not an individual but a global mass, a collective and statistical concept. As such, it exists only as a pattern within a grid of dimensions and variables, which include ‘impersonal’ events such as birth, death, production, reproduction, nutrition and illness. The population has no will, it is neither ‘a people’ according to the classical political-philosophical meaning of the term, nor an actor in the sociological sense of the word. It just shows certain tendencies that must be normalised. From this point of view, technologies of security define a bio-politics, which is different from anatomo-politics, or the technology of disciplinary power exercised on individual bodies. If the latter aims to shape individual habits and drives, the former can ‘only’ control aggregate tendencies, without shaping them from within. Discipline individualises; bio-politics massifies. Bio-politics is a politics of life, but not of individuals; rather, it addresses a global mass that is affected by its overall processes of life (Foucault 1997[1975–1976]).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, waves of securitarian panic stirred up by moral and political entrepreneurs, and amplified by the mass media, have led to increasing racial targeting and racial

profiling of groups seen as 'posing a threat' to the public. Besides its socio-technical aspects, a politics of visibility lies at the core of the discourse of security, one that produces effects of supravisibilisation of issues of crime and the enemy, and the concurrent invisibilisation of issues of inequality and exclusion. While accepting the other as unknown, different from oneself, represents a crucial component of civility and a crucial democratic capacity, whenever security turns into a driving motive in urban design the unknown is immediately banned. Thus, a peculiar conception of 'public' is presupposed by the practices of security, one that is certainly at odds with much of what public sphere theorists have tried to safeguard. Throughout his work, Foucault depicted security as a much more efficient technology of power than discipline, in so far as it is able to turn not only action but also non-action into governance. Yet, although security is not as strictly interventionist as discipline, my argument is that, in its self-sustaining pattern, it ultimately creates a context that is inherently hostile to democratic politics.

Increasingly, a series of paradoxes of security are becoming evident: surveillance, which is systematically called forth in order to secure security, produces only insecurity, not least because security itself, as noted by Ericson and Haggerty (1997: 85), transforms into 'an insatiable quest'. So while empirically the deterrence effect created by surveillance is at best questionable, the spread of surveillance systems has been faster than any possible proof of their effectiveness or of successful crime reduction. The trend towards omnipresence recalls Ellul's dictum on technique: it is applied simply because it can be applied. As the paranoid pole of visibility triumphs, questions about effectiveness (such as the well known 'displacement effect', whereby crime, far from being reduced by surveillance, is simply moved around the corner), technical mistakes and privacy concerns are trumped by the regime of optical denunciation that characterises what some have seen as a coming 'blackmail society' (Gray 2003).

Certainly, 'security' is always 'lack of security': structurally, the notion of security is designed to never be satisfactorily achieved or assured. It cannot be thought of except in the negative. In my view, a point which Foucault did not consider enough is precisely this hypertrophic pathos. Technically, security is grounded in the calculation of distributions and overall processes of life. However, affectively, it spreads as a 'myth of increase' (I borrow the term from Canetti 1960). As with every obsession, security paranoia is self-replicating, in the sense that each stage of security implementation can only expose the weaknesses of the lack of implementation of a further stage. Security is in fact a threat and the

threat ranks as one amongst the most ambiguous and ill-defined social conditions. Precisely for this reason, it can be stretched in various directions at once: as in a serial or sequel, to completely tame a threat proves an impossible task; it is only possible to postpone it indefinitely. The political consequences of this fact have already been lucidly pointed out by Hall et al. (1978) in their analysis of moral panic as a governmental tool and a fruitful way to reconcile economic deregulation with law and order policies (see also De Giorgi 2008). The management and synchronisation of public attentions and public affection have played a crucial role in rendering the discourse of security and securitisation effective.

Blinding and seizing

The exercise of political and bio-political power consists in displacing and replacing the boundaries and, consequently, the balance between the visible and the invisible. Put the other way around, this means that the visible is a fully entitled political and social battlefield, crossed by divergent visibility strategies and tactics. What we have called 'regimes of visibility' may therefore be likened to what Antonio Gramsci used to call hegemony, the 'war of position' in a power struggle that takes place in the civil society. Gramsci's (1971[1929–1935]) notion of hegemony – as it emerges gradually and diachronically through various loci of his prison notebooks – is crucial to understanding the core debate in the literature on political resistance. For Gramsci, hegemony is not mere coercion, but the expression of the intellectual and moral leadership exercised by a dominant class, in a spontaneous, molecular and organic way, so as to generate a widely accepted and shared framework of consent in which even conflict and dissent can be accommodated. Hegemony determines the features of any specific historic bloc, in that it exists, in Gramscian terms, not only at the 'economic-corporative' level but also and especially at the 'ethic-political' one, in the long 'war of position' – as opposed to the classical revolutionary 'war of movement' – for conquest of the state. In liberal-democratic parliamentary regimes, characterised by the 'modern prince' that is the political party, hegemony is exercised in 'normal forms' through the division of powers, the articulations of civil society and the expression of public opinion. It works through the co-opting of consensus around a set of values and a worldview, because the struggle for hegemony is a struggle of ideologies.

From this perspective, visibility strategies and tactics can be imagined as consisting of a series of selective 'blindings' that determine what

cannot be seen in a given situation, setting the horizons of the social lifeworld in its innumerable locales. Whereas Hannah Arendt imagined public space as a site of action made possible by a shared world among humans, and Habermas imagined the public sphere as an open social space of communication, instituted power inherently functions through a dynamic of secrets, information leaks and propaganda. At the end of the nineteenth century, Le Bon (1895) claimed that the crowd thinks only through images; from this, the corollary follows that what is invisible simply does not exist, in the sense that it has no political relevance. A few years later, Sorel (1990[1908]) added that what actually matters about the revolutionary myth is not its truth, but its effectiveness in mobilising the masses. This lesson was learned by heart by those who utilised twentieth-century propaganda techniques. Indeed, as we already observed in Chapter 3, propaganda is a systematic, strategic manipulation of visibilities of narratives, myths, representations and facts – a mass-scale delusion and a mass-scale blinding. The reflection on the status of the image and visibility, which we dealt with in Chapter 1, is an attempt to come to terms with the spectacular regime of visibility that characterises propaganda and advertising (in particular, on the political issues concerning the manipulation of digital images see Mitchell 1994; Griffiths 2003).

Surveillance consists of various forms of blinding: while surveillance as discipline addresses clearly defined groups of inmates of different enclosed institutions, surveillance as security addresses a generalised population scattered around and circulating in open spaces. As Foucault (2004a[1977–1978]) explained, the dispositifs of security that support instituted power are exercised upon confused multiplicities – consider for instance police forces that create order through controlling flows and fixities in space. Deleuze (1990) then distinguished enclosure from encryption as two ways of exercising instituted power. In both cases, the internal and the external are not visible to each other: while in the former case we have a blinding of the enclosed who cannot look outside of the enclosure, in the latter it is more those who are external who cannot look into what is encrypted into a given object. For instance, in Chapter 6 we observed the extensiveness and embeddedness of computational processes in contemporary urban space.

Pushed to its extremes, this relationship between visibility and blinding assumes a paranoid twist, such as in conspiracy theories. At the basis of every conspiracy theory is the idea that power and invisibility are intimately connected. Conspiracy theorists envisage a society in which the invisible ‘few’ endowed with secret knowledge (freemasons,

illuminati, reptilians or extraterrestrials) stand at the apex of a pyramid from which they control and direct the many living in ignorance. Viewed from within this visibility regime, no event can be random or accidental, and the most visible interpretation of an event will always be deliberately deceitful. However, the powerful do not necessarily hide themselves; quite the contrary, they often celebrate themselves, for instance, in the form of monuments. The powerful are therefore akin to monuments or admonishments; but they are always monuments to themselves. This paradox is well illustrated by the final scene of Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), when the boss has the curtain of his car drawn back just after he has ordered the slaughter of the entire village ('it is no longer necessary'): the boss will now be visible, but there will be nobody alive to see him. In effect, following Freud, the boss embodies the paradox of an utterly antisocial individual placed atop the social hierarchy (Moscovici 1985: 331). In this instance, the spectacle reveals the totalitarian nature of its regime of visibility.

While conceptually distinct, spectacle is not the opposite of surveillance. On the contrary, totalitarian systems in the twentieth century coupled the two. Here, the mask functioned as the most ambiguous device of visibility: the totalitarian ruler, as we recalled in Chapter 6, makes himself constantly visible, and he multiplies his own visibility, but what can be seen is not his face, rather only his mask, a standard, unidimensional image which cannot be interrogated but rather constantly interrogates the beholder. The mask is looked at but it also surveils, in that it elicits the slogan. While totalitarian regimes employed a rather simple binary algorithm of consent and repression, delirium, omnipotence and terror, in contemporary capitalist systems we observe a much more sophisticated intertwining of the entertainment business with the surveillance practices of 'customer care'.

But, if power is a form of blinding, it is crucially also a form of seizing, as Elias Canetti (1960) suggested. According to Canetti, every type of power is essentially a prolongation of the primal act of seizing: there is a continuum ranging from the prehensile organs of the hand, to the digestive organs of the mouth, the throat and the entrails. This whole bodily apparatus for gripping and eating, for incorporating and expelling, is replicated from the most primordial, 'dirty' forms in the exercise of power to the most institutionalised and 'polished' ones: even the most sophisticated forms of power are but prolongations of the clutch of the hand. Spying on prey is part of the same prolongation and reveals that the visible, as the basic movement of power, is the haptic – the gesture that seizes. While in Foucault's view there is no outside to power

(given that even struggle, recalcitrance and, possibly, resistance, are constituent parts of power), Canetti believes that there is an outside to power. Resistance is precisely this movement towards the outside. Thus, the challenge advanced by Canetti is the idea that there can be human relations outside power. Unlike for Foucault, for Canetti power is not omnipresent: resistance is not part of a struggle for power, but part of a movement of liberation from power. Resistance implies the search for a way out; it is a movement of liberation from the grasp of the hand in all its different versions and in all its possible prolongations. As a type of relationship, resistance addresses those situations where the subject seeks to avoid being crushed.

Democracy is not only a way of organising power, as the classic liberal model held, but also a way of resisting power as forms of blinding and seizing. Democracy entails imagining both power and the possible alternatives that envisage an exit from the field of power. Thus, the task of democracy today is not confined to finding the ways in which control can be limited and privacy protected, but necessarily extends to the active shaping of the dominant regimes of visibility in order to leave social locales open to this movement of resistance.

Resistance to visibility

Today, at a time when liberal representative democracy is subject to 'disenchantment' (Rosanvallon 2006), 'motivational deficit' (Critchley 2007) and a series of 'eroding tendencies' (Blokker 2009) that have been surfacing since at least 1989, the project of democracy calls, to my mind, for a general public discussion about the regimes of visibility, that is, a discussion of the ways and conditions in which subjects become visible, intervisible and invisible, in which sites and with what effects (the types of recognition described in Chapter 2). In turn, rethinking the regimes of visibility entails reflecting on the constitution of political agency at a time when advanced neo-liberalism and networked sociality are facing the symptoms of a coming crisis. Accordingly, the question that spans the governmental and the democratic perspectives is the following: how can a population become a political agent? How can a population make politics? One of the major threats to democracy resides in the fact that the regime of visibility of the public domain is increasingly blurred and out of control. Indeed, one of the crucial and most striking characteristics of contemporary surveillant visibility regimes seems to be their uncertainty. It becomes more and more difficult for lay people to know the specific knowledge that will be applied to scrutinising them.

Sometimes it may even be hard to determine which types of behaviour would cause one to be profiled as posing a threat. This means that the constitution of the public domain through the affection of a multiplicity, such as the civil society, has a crucial import to democracy, and here is where resistance and open dissent come into play as phenomena of the civil society itself.

In the present context, a threat to democracy comes from the rise of arbitrary and discriminatory forms of governance. Surveillance regimes make more things more visible, and bring more practices to the attention of surveillance agencies, but they do so in ways that are not openly accountable, based as they are on professional savoirs that are themselves invisible. Thus, there exists a greater threat than the fact that people are profiled by (relatively) invisible agencies: this is the fact that the profiling criteria themselves are invisible. Such criteria may not necessarily be designed for evil purposes, such as for instance overt racial discrimination; on the contrary, they may simply mirror pragmatic short-term concerns that are linked to the organisational logic of the surveillance agency and its economic imperatives. But their unintended consequences can nonetheless be quite harmful to people, even fatal at times. Whether we decide to call these outcomes errors or not, or whether we decide to locate them in an Orwellian or in a Kafkaesque atmosphere, we should not overlook that overall they draw a bleak picture for the democratic project and, at the very least, problematise liberal democratic triumphalism.

Yet participation, resistance, dissent and struggle themselves need to be analysed more closely. Deleuze famously claimed that our society lacks resistance and creation. Indeed, an important question concerns for instance why today people do not react more actively against the phenomena of the intensification and pervasiveness of surveillance. Meyrowitz (2009) has recently suggested that the high level of tolerance towards surveillance is linked to the fact that, since large parts of the population are 'avid TV watchers', they understand the impulses and motivations that lead to watching a spectacle, even in a surveillant format. He has even contended that people would feel more valued by the fact of being under surveillance. While there might be some elements of truth in this 'stars of CCTV' scenario, Meyrowitz's thesis is overall not convincing. Pleasure seems to be linked to show and play, but not to being seen while unaware, that is, being spied upon, or to the uncanny feeling of being observed without knowing how and for what purpose. The idea that having watched for a long time reconciles one with the idea of being watched is a bit like the idea that having once had power

reconciles one with the fact of losing it – and power, as Canetti (1960) insightfully indicated, is a matter of increase only.

On the other hand, twentieth-century totalitarian political regimes have been regimes of total visibility, in which the boundaries between publicity and privacy were systematically breached. Recall that in Zamyatin's novel *We* voting is public, and unsurprisingly the Great Benefactor is re-elected each year. In this context, Virilio's notion of *délation optique* finds a most literal application. But resistance to visibility cannot be reduced to a mere defence of privacy. Both Gilles Deleuze and Michel de Certeau have shown that a wide range of tactics of resistance are generated within instituted power itself. Each form of instituted power, with all its strategies and governmental tabulations of spaces, is crossed by a tendency – or, better, a series of tendencies – towards perversion. In the folds of dominant technocratic strategies there emerges a number of transverse tactics, which operate slantwise, by diversion of the system (interestingly, the Latin verb *dīverto*, *-ĕre* means both to differ and to have fun). If Foucault is the analyst of the capillarisation of power – and certainly today we face a capillarisation of surveillant activities and other visibility asymmetries – he also recognised that resistance is likewise capillary. In this sense, resistance to strategic visibility is invisible resistance. James C. Scott (1990) importantly revealed from an ethnographic perspective that the official story of the relationship between dominant and dominated should be distinguished from the unofficial one. The official 'public transcript' of subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant one does not tell the whole story of the relationship, as there is also a 'hidden transcript' taking place offstage behind the scenes.

Revolts and revolutions are characterised by bursts of collective outright defiance. But the absence of direct confrontation does not mean that hegemony goes unchallenged. Rather, resistance should be looked for in the everyday constellation of the 'weapons of the weak', which include dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, foot dragging, slander, arson and sabotage. Most of these actions are motivated by utilitarian aims – in Gramscian terms, they are located at the economic-corporative level, rather than at the ethic-political one – and they are unplanned and uncoordinated, tactical rather than strategic. However, the fact that they are externally compliant – or, when non-compliant, maintain a low profile and do not engage in any symbolic confrontation with instituted power and its ideology – does not at all mean that they are co-opted into cultural domination. For subordinate people, the only effective

resistance may be invisible resistance, because whenever resistance becomes visible it also provokes ferocious repression and retaliation from above. The discourse of resistance that constructs the hidden transcripts is developed mainly in places outside the dominant discourse's direct control, such as the alehouse, the pub, the tavern, the inn, the cabaret, the beer cellar or the gin mill.

Resistance through visibility

If classic resistance tactics made (and still make) their way invisibly, and are therefore inherently forms of resistance to visibility, the project of democracy in the context of contemporary socio-technological regimes of visibility necessarily also requires a discussion of resistance through visibility. From this perspective, it is not a matter of finding ways to protect oneself from becoming visible to power, nor to develop tactical hidden transcripts of hegemonic power relations, but rather to reclaim visibility as a form of resistance to governmental capillary dispositifs such as surveillance. A series of contemporary civic practices can be allocated to this form of resistance. However, as we shall see, this process is not without its own shadows. To take one important example, recently the term 'sousveillance', or surveillance from below, has been introduced to account for the new nature of surveillance in a networked morphology. Also called 'civic watch' by its advocates (e.g., Häyhtiö and Rinne 2009), sousveillance reverses the idea of oppressive self-regulation that characterises surveillance and seeks to enable people to monitor elites and economic organisations in order to make their actions more transparent, fair and accountable. The idea is to counter the *arcana imperii* by exposing to the people what power does.

But, in fact, sousveillance can expose to the people not only what the power does but also what each of us does. In a non-fiction book entitled *The Transparent Society*, science fiction author David Brin (1998) describes two cities. In the former, total control is realised in the classic top-down Big-Brotherist fashion. A small governmental apparatus controls its own population through surveillance. In the latter, by contrast, visibility is high but very much redistributed. Here the solution is a radical sousveillant one: everyone can see everybody else at will; the new hegemonic principle becomes reciprocal transparency. Perhaps, the sousveillance literature is somewhat confused and torn apart by the conflict between supporters (as Brin himself) and sceptics. However, it may help us to illuminate a crucial problem about the political effects of networked social intervisibility. In a different technological context,

the problem was very acutely noted by Gabriel Tarde (1901): what effect do members of a public have upon one another? As we considered in Chapter 3 in examining publics and audiences, traditional communications research has long puzzled over the social effects of media, classically in terms of the effect of television content over the viewers. Even the astute reversal of this image, which urged scholars to study which effects the viewers have on television, does not capture the essential: indeed, the essential affection of mediated visibility is the effect that the members of a public have on each other.

New media have increased the ability of civic watch dogs over power to publish the information regarding the alleged unethical behaviour of, or mishandling by, governments, civil servants, public office holders, the police and corporate actors. In many cases, this has had important consequences and healthy effects. There is a wide range of forms of communication activism, adopted for instance by anti-war movements, activists denouncing and exposing police brutalities and new producers challenging dominant copyright laws. However, it is important to recognise the more complex and problematic aspects of *sousveillance*. The latter is becoming part of the new morphology of the public domain: *sousveillant* topics are not always engaged ones; rather, they include gossiping politicians and celebrities. These forms, in turn, easily slip into populism and may even lead to moral panics, scapegoating and new forms of witch hunt. There may be an oppressive regime, on the one hand, and an activist network fighting for the freedom of speech, on the other, but there may also be, on the one hand, a democratic regime and, on the other, fundamentalist, populist, xenophobic groups and even lynch mobs. The point then is that neither as recognition, nor as control, is visibility linearly associated with empowerment or disempowerment. At times, resistance may aim to bring back into visibility (the political) that which has receded into invisibility (the governmental, the economic, etc.), as the struggle for the democratisation of the media and, more broadly, of global institutions reveals. In other instances, resistance takes the path towards hidden practices. Secrecy lies not only at the core of power, but also at the core of the possibility of escaping and opposing it. Scott's work reminds us that many forms of resistance actually avoid open confrontation with the instituted structures and the official organisations being resisted, but can nonetheless turn out to be effective and important. Resistance to surveillant visibility regimes is not confined to being reactive or merely oppositional, though. Resistance is not simply a struggle against visibility per se. On the contrary, resistance involves a transformative drive that actively

rearticulates social-technological complexes and their respective visibility regimes. But resistance also needs to be resisted in its turn as soon as it becomes a new form of power which blinds and seizes.

Conclusion

The notion of 'visibility regimes' allows us to explain governmental and surveillant practices not as mere external intrusions into privacy, but rather, more radically, as the emergent internal organisation of social relations increasingly by means of visibility arrangements. Critically, we can observe that the notion of privacy inherits the same old problems as the classic liberal concept of the social contract: both concepts presuppose a state of nature where property and/or privacy should exist before any subsequently intervening political dimension and social restraint. This view does not hold, simply because social restraints are not subsequent but rather inherent to the concepts of property and privacy. Therefore the usual liberal dichotomy of private as opposed to public cannot explain the fact that visibility relationships effectively shape the domains of both the private and the public. Visibility is the element where the territories that make political subjects are drawn. Space can be controlled dividually through dispositifs of security, for instance through boundary or network policing. But whenever some redrawing of boundaries takes place, other technologies will eventually intervene, leading to re-subjectification and re-individualisation. These could be, for instance, repressive measures against single trespassers, but at the same time they work as corrective and even exemplary demonstrations for non-trespassers, for the law-abiding majority. In these cases, the institutional, the administrative, the sovereign and the expressive dimensions of control intermingle.

Elias Canetti's (1960) work on power provides us with an important notion of resistance, a sort of 'counter-image' based on his notion of human transformation (Brighenti forthcoming). Resistance begins in the concrete. For Canetti, resistance is neither a discourse nor a political symbol, but rather something one does with one's own body, something one engages one's body in. It is not a matter of opinions, doctrines or ideologies. It is a corporeal act which like all other gestures can be observed through a dromology, an affectology and a rhythmanalysis. Besides that, and most importantly, resistance is different from opposition because the relation it entertains with power is 'dissymmetric'. Understanding resistance through the lens of transformation means stressing its non-oppositional nature. The specific relation between

resistance and power is not resistance as a struggle against power, but resistance as a movement of subtraction from power. From this point of view, resistance is much akin to democracy as conceptualised by Arendt, Castoriadis, Lefort and Rancière. In particular, Rancière (2006) has recently argued that democracy is formed by all those practices that constantly oppose themselves to the shrinkage of the public qua common, a shrinkage that is inherently brought about by the activity of governing. Keeping the public domain public, as we described in Chapter 5, rescuing its quality of appropriability and allowing local, always reversible, appropriations would be at the centre of a new understanding of the democratic project informed by the recognition of the crucial role played by visibility in the formation of social territories. Indeed, two major pathologies of contemporary visibility regimes can be said to be, on the one hand, the informing regime of control and surveillance, on the other, the 'express yourself' networked individuality with its exhibitionist attitude always on the verge of transforming into collective emotional and even paranoid *sousveillant* denunciation and its (in-)securitarian outcomes. Such regressive tendencies can only be counterbalanced by a collective *paideia*, which is neither inculcated education nor merely expressive participation, but rather a public act of unfolding and reconstructing the problems that arise in the social dimension of visibility.

To conclude, some crucial dynamics in contemporary society, ranging from the most immediate micro-interaction in public places to the very redefinition of the boundaries of the public in social-technological complexes, can be explained as concerning, and fundamentally consisting of, visibility and territorial relations. In this context, a Foucaultian analytics of power forms can be quite important. Sovereignty, discipline and security do not represent successive historic eras. To think so is to make the mistake of taking the part for the whole. We do not live in a post-panoptic society. Discipline has not disappeared from our political horizon because of a new emphasis on security, just as sovereignty and law have not disappeared because of the appearance of disciplinary power during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Power formations such as sovereignty, discipline, control and subjectivity constantly interact with each other and the relative balance of emphasis in a contingent situation should not lead us to overlook the compound nature of socio-technological complexes and the plurality of power forms they entail.

Visibility is not an accidental side-effect linked to possible distortions that might arise in communication and power; rather, it is a constitutive

element of the social. Its peculiarity, when we compare it to notions such as the actor, the subject and the artefact, is that visibility is an inherently relational element, the open field in which the relationships between the *percipiens* and the perceptum are inscribed and projected. Through receptivity and perceptivity, socio-technical inscription and projection create territories in which bio-politics is played out, given that subjects are the outcome of such relations. As we have described them throughout this book, visibility relationships are not homogeneous; rather, visibility consists of a multiplicity of articulations in a multiplicity of sites. Because such articulations tend to become structured into regimes of visibility, the project of democracy cannot but include resistance, a practice, or series of practices, that does not aim to seize power but rather (re-)discuss and reveal possibilities of sociality that are outside power. If democracy needs resistance, resistance needs visibility, although it does not identify with it; it needs it in order to ground itself, not in abstract conceptions, but in a phenomenology of inhabited vision which prolongs into an ecology of (or ecologies of) spaces and attentions that mould the public domain. Today, the challenge of democracy – the realisation of politics in the most complete and radical sense of the word – consists in making new territories through new visibilities.

9

Conclusions

In this book, we have analysed a series of social phenomena from the perspective of a relational ontology of visibility. Visibility has proved to be a useful category for theorising and studying phenomena that are inherent, for instance, in mass media and social representations, new media and networked social morphology, the public domain, recognition, surveillance, social control and the life of democratic societies. Throughout the book an attempt has been made to make our understanding of visibility more complex than simply a physical or dichotomic phenomenon; rather, visibility has been described as a social dimension that is inherently ambiguous and highly dependent upon contextual social, technical and political complexes or regimes.

At the same time, we have made an argument for rejecting the view that the visible is split between a literal meaning, pertaining to the immediate sensory sphere, and a metaphorical one, pertaining to the set of symbolic meanings attached to particular phenomena communicated via the media. The notion of visibility, as we have seen, constitutes a general threshold of the social, a dimension or an element (the 'flesh') of the social that is crucially used to separate the perceptible or noticeable from the imperceptible or unnoticeable in social fields and in social life at large. The social presents itself as translucent to an observing subject, and the thresholds between the visible and the invisible correspond to various coefficients within the same hyaline element of visibility.

Visibility is a social dimension, or a social element, in which thresholds between different social forces are introduced. Consequently, I have proposed a conceptualisation of the visible as a field of inscription and projection of social action, a field which can be explored as a territory. As such, visibility defines territories of action. To explore them

we need a territorology of the social. A territorology can be defined as a relational social theory that describes the *percipiens* and the *perceptum* as flexions of the same perceptive phenomenon, event or act, which constitutes, reproduces, transforms or destroys a territory within a sociative environment. Territories are acts or events that unfold in time, creating determinations, trajectories and rhythms on the basis of threshold-making and boundary-drawing acts that introduce discontinuities in the field of visibility.

We have also explored the field of visibility as relational, strategic and evental: it is relational because it determines subject-making relationships between seeing and being seen or, more generally, between noticing and being noticed, and recognising/being recognised; it is strategic because it can be, and indeed is manipulated by subjects themselves in order to obtain real social effects; it is evental because it contains intrinsic margins of indeterminacy as to the outcomes of the various compositions of visibility relationships. Therefore, visibility can be attributed to sites, subjects, events and rhythms while the social effects of visibility are not linearly correlated to visibility per se, but rather depend on the interplay of certain sites, certain subjects and certain rhythms. In particular, phenomena of visibility and invisibility are intrinsically anadyomenic; they possess a back-and-forth rhythm.

In its very constitution, visibility is neither simply political nor simply technological; rather, it is at the same time socio-technical and bio-political. It is socio-technical because it concerns linkages and mediations which occur in the middle realm where ideas and material forces coexist, and where thought – properly understood – presents itself as being embodied in material connections and linkages. The socio-technical realm is the place where thought comes to be inscribed and projected into materials, and concurrently materials become thoughtful. At the same time, visibility is bio-political because it concerns populations. It is exercised within a multiplicity, in which subject positions are created on the basis of the place they occupy within the relationship itself, the paths they are allowed to follow in an open space and the possible events that are envisaged. Consequently, the fundamental ambivalences of visibility are linked to the fact that bio-politically visibility oscillates between recognition and control, between an enabling and a disabling pole, while socio-technically it oscillates between the convergence and the divergence of different processes of inscription.

Our exploration has been guided by the attempt to keep together an ecological, relational understanding of the field of the visible with a phenomenological sensibility towards the *praesentia* of social lifeworlds.

The lifeworld is the here-and-now in which the lived experience of the social unfolds; it is a locale, a *plenum*, or a region or bloc of space-time that exists without mediations. The lifeworld is endowed with endo-consistency and synchronicity of components enveloped together. Yet the lifeworld also constantly prolongs towards some other locales. Such prolongations are spatial mediations and temporal transmissions.

An ecology is constituted by social territories together with their visibilities and the prolongations that fill the phenomenal plenum of the here-and-now. Notably, the ecologies of attention that constitute what we have called the public domain cut across the material and the immaterial, they span urban space and the public sphere. Thus, the public domain exists at the point of convergence and in the zone of indistinction between material and immaterial processes, whereby an immaterial meaning is created through acts of material inscription and projection. The public domain is a territory of affection and a specific modalisation of situated and materially constrained interaction: it is bounded, but its boundaries are constantly worked upon: these boundaries are thresholds of visibility.

In exploring the media, the public, the city and surveillance processes, our aim has been in part analytical and in part critical, but above all constructive. Indeed, in the last part of the book we have made the case that today the project of democracy can no longer be imagined without taking into account visibility and its outcomes. If, on the one hand, visibility is the element where relationships of recognition and the shaping of political subjects takes place in a shared world, on the other, power is also grounded in the management of reciprocal intervisibilities, as it is made clear in surveillance processes. Because visibility relationships are not homogeneous, a multiplicity of articulations in a multiplicity of sites is structured into a regime of visibility. The project of democracy includes resistance to visibility and resistance through visibility, a practice or series of practices that do not aim to seize power but rather to (re-)discuss and reveal possibilities of sociality that are outside and beyond power.

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