

From statistics to data: orderings of life in cities^a

Da estatística aos dados: ordenamentos da vida em cidades

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ABSTRACT

We approach the transformations of consumption orderings based on the changes that occurred in the transition from the modern to the postmodern city. We aim to problematize the interrelationships of communication, consumption and city, in the light of the notion of biopolitics, seeking to show how the ways of life emerge in each of the aforementioned socio-historical moments. In order to do so, we analyzed, from the theoretical representations of the *flâneur*, the passerby and the global connected citizen, the ways of life and the constitution of subjects. These reflections allow us to observe the engendering of the logics of capitalism in the orderings of life, especially in the production of subjectivities involved in the transformations of the city.

Keywords: Communication and consumption, city, biopolitics, datafication, constitution of subjectivities

RESUMO

Abordamos as transformações dos ordenamentos do consumo a partir das mudanças ocorridas na passagem da cidade moderna para a pós-moderna. Temos como objetivo problematizar as inter-relações comunicação, consumo e cidade, à luz da noção de biopolítica, buscando evidenciar como emergem os modos de vida em cada um dos referidos momentos sócio-históricos. Para tanto, analisamos, a partir das representações teóricas do *flâneur*, do transeunte e do cidadão conectado global, os modos de vida e a constituição dos sujeitos. Essas reflexões permitem observar o engendramento das lógicas do capitalismo nos ordenamentos da vida, sobretudo na produção de subjetividades implicadas nas transformações da cidade.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação e consumo, cidade, biopolítica, dataficação, constituição de subjetividades

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IN THE SHORT story “The Man of the Crowd,” published in 1840, Poe describes how pleasurable and voracious it was to contemplate the crowd seen from a coffee shop, and even more to plunge into the tumultuous sea of human heads. One can only imagine how Poe would write the passage of the chase after the unknown decrepit old man in current times, since the figure no longer goes about (not only) among passers-by, but in the whirlwind of data of the great global connected network. Would it still be pointless to follow him? Would nothing be known of him or of his actions?

This initial restlessness made us scrutinize living in cities. The clues from “The Man of the Crowd” guided us to this work, in which we approach some aspects of living in metropolises from the transformations that occurred in the passage from modernity to postmodernity, considering the articulations between communication, consumption and city. Thus, we problematize these interrelationships in the light of the notion of *biopolitics*, seeking to show how, in each of the socio-historical moments studied, consumption orderings emerge that shape ways of life and the constitution of subjectivities.

In the transition from modernity to postmodernity, the city becomes the stage for the most varied forays, not only of an architectural and urbanistic nature, but also of all sorts of economic, sociocultural and biopolitical interventions. As the epicenter of human aspirations and inspirations, the city is a living organism that harbors different forms of interaction. The constitution of the subjects that inhabit the city takes place in the use of urban space and in the ways of appropriating places, as well as in the interactions provided by communicational processes, discursive and social practices. In this perspective, unraveling the threads that weave the relationships between city and biopolitics in modernity and postmodernity is a task that requires conceiving communication and consumption as inseparable aspects in the analysis/critique of society.

We understand consumption as a broad and complex sociocultural phenomenon, whose orderings occupy a preponderant place in the conformation of life and the modern and postmodern subject. According to Rocha et al. (2016), consumption has organicities and proceduralities, covering the distinct and dialogical poles of production and reception, which order urban life from social and discursive practices. Consumption, in intricate articulation with media communication processes, is characterized as a locus of interrogations about the biopolitics engendered in the development of capitalism since modernity.

In this article, the notion of biopolitics, developed by Foucault and some of the scholars of his thought who update it, is one of the theoretical veins that we mobilize to reflect on the development of cities, the experience of urban life built

from regulations, practices daily life, communication regimes, forms of interaction, inclusion and exclusion, among many other aspects, that produce and shape the subject in each of the socio-historical periods studied here. Thus, both the *flâneur* and the passerby of modernity and the connected individual of postmodernity represent a kind of ideal/type subject that allows us to unveil the orderings of consumption.

Classical biopower, as formulated by Foucault (1985, 2001, 2002, 2008), comprises a double form: (1) an anatomo-politics of the body, that is, a corporal discipline; and (2) a biopolitics of populations (biological quality of populations), linked to the strengthening of the State, medicalization and the normalization of society.

The term “biopolitics” designates the way in which power tends to transform itself, between the late 18th and the early 19th century, in order to govern not only individuals through a certain number of disciplinary procedures, but a set of living beings constituted as a population: biopolitics – through local biopowers – will therefore deal with the management of health, hygiene, food, sexuality, birth, etc., insofar as they have become political concerns. (Revel, 2005, p. 26)

In this way, biopolitics organizes the events of life and promotes ways of living on a massive scale, that is, it consists, from its conception, in the way institutionalized power, through governmental projects aimed at the entire population, defines rationalizing proceduralities, which regulate and order the lives of populations.

The mode of action of the disciplinary government requires a set of techniques that exercise a systematic scrutiny of time, space and the movement of individuals, and operate interstitially in the lives of populations, so that the mass media, the instrumental reason of capitalism and the logics of consumption form a complex set of strategies for the disclosure and dissemination of biopolitics.

As regards the constitution of life in the modern metropolis, the spreading of consumption orderings in society takes place concomitantly with massive production and communication processes, which, as meta-narratives of consumption, propagate the values of capitalism and, accordingly, the biopolitics. From the point of view of the production logics of the consumption system, it is also necessary to consider that media communication disseminates narratives that promote the biopolitical orderings of consumption.

Rabinow and Rose (2006) argue that it would be “misguided simply to project Foucauldian analyses as a future guide for our present context and its possibilities” (p. 38), since contemporary society harbors significant transformations, operated during the second half of the twentieth century, which distinguish it from that society from which the philosopher would have formulated his concept of biopolitics:

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Foucault studied the emergence of forms of power in the 18th century, their transformation in the 19th century, and in some – limited – measure an examination of the forms that took shape in the late 19th century. The rationalities, strategies and technologies of biopower changed over the 20th century, as the management of health and collective life became a key objective of governmentalized states, and new configurations of truth, power and subjectivity emerged to support the rationalities of well-being and safety, as well as those of health and hygiene. (Rabinow & Rose, 2006, p. 38)

The authors emphasize the importance of analyzing what biopolitics means today, in a scenario of biotechnologies and of paying attention to “the peculiarities, the small differences, the moments in which changes in truth, authority, spatiality or ethics make a difference today as compared to yesterday” (Rabinow & Rose, 2006, p. 39). Lemke (2018) argues along the same lines: “current biopolitical processes are based on knowledge about the body and about the transformed and expanded biological processes” (p. 165), so that it becomes necessary to problematize the capitalization of contemporary life.

Thus, we mobilize scholars of communication, consumption and cities, as well as of history, geography and philosophy to support the debates based on the proposed articulations. Therefore, we limit our reflections to some aspects of the theoretical representations of the Parisian *flâneur*, the Brazilian passerby and the global connected citizen that reveal the biopolitical dimension of consumption orderings.

THE *FLÂNEUR* AND THE PASSERBY IN THE MODERN CITY

Around 1840 it was briefly fashionable to take turtles for a walk in the arcades.

The *flâneurs* liked to have the turtles set the pace for them.

– W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*

The epigraph of this section shows a form of protest against the rhythm imposed by capital in the full development of modernity. In retrospect, Benjamin identified, in the Paris of the belle époque, the manifestation of a new sense of consumer society, in which the subject is mediated by the merchandise and its material/symbolic consumption is covered by narratives. The author envisioned a city undergoing transformation towards modernity, in which commercial houses were the last refuge of the *flâneur*, who “roamed through the labyrinth of merchandise as he had once roamed through the labyrinth of the city” (Benjamin, 1991, p. 82). The dramatically changing urban landscape aroused the curiosity of the *flâneur* and the crowds.

However, *flânerie* soon had to change its pace, since the acceleration of the pace of life is one of the characteristic features of modernity. According to Koselleck (2006), even before the drastic increase in the reach of the media, acceleration had already become a way of experiencing time. In his critical reflections, Berman (1986) argues that modernity is characterized by an abundance of possibilities for transforming oneself and the world in the midst of a great absence of values and loss of roots.

Douglas and Isherwood, from an anthropological perspective, also approach this process of engendering a society whose centrality lies in the possibilities of consumption, when they describe that decisions to consume become a vital source of cultural transformations. So,

... people raised in a particular culture see it change during their lives: new words, new ideas and ways. Culture evolves and people play a role in change. Consumption is the very arena in which culture is the object of struggles that give it shape. (Douglas & Isherwood, 2006, pp. 102-103)

When reflecting on modern life, Simmel (2005) points out the individual's struggle not to be just a number, a manual labor. This is what the author defines as the predominance and distancing of the objective culture from the subjective one. In this view, the subject as a cultural being that constitutes the subjective spirit becomes small in the face of what the author calls "a monstrous organization of things and powers," whose scenario is the big city and which

... feeds almost entirely on production for the market, that is, for completely unknown customers, who will never come face to face with the real producers. With this, the interests of both parties gain a ruthless objectivity, their economic selfishness, which they calculate with understanding, is not afraid of any dispersion due to the imponderables of personal relationships. (Simmel, 2005, p. 579)

Human relations in large cities with a monetary economy (Simmel, 2005) are reified, with an objective and impersonal character, in a fetishistic process in which the reference of who produced a certain good is lost. Once inserted in the capitalist system, individuals, particularly salaried workers, are demanded as consumers.

This is derived, among other factors, from the Industrial Revolution, which promoted a reorganization of the productive base, generating "a profound transformation in ways of life and in social relations. ... The 'market' becomes one of the central axes through which activities of the metropolis gravitate" (Rocha et al., 2013, p. 44). The formation of the globalized market (Berman, 1986)

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makes production and consumption increasingly international and cosmopolitan. In this sprawl of the market to become global, there were, consequently, reverberations on the other side of the Atlantic, felt mainly in large cities.

This time, the main Brazilian urban centers also experienced their *belle époque*: a period not only of economic strength, but also of social changes and cultural innovations. Habits imported from Europe became popular among city dwellers – or not so much. For example, at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, one of the main meeting points for the São Paulo residents was Café Guarany, which, in 1900, expanded its facilities to accommodate another European novelty, the restaurant. Opening communicated through posters and advertisement in the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper (Restaurante e Café Guarany, 1900) of a typically European delicacy of the time: turtle fillet soup (Figure 1). This case of importation of customs from a city that was projected as cosmopolitan did not prevent the unusual fact, for São Paulo residents who wandered around the establishment, of coming across the lively and healthy main dish in the coffee shop window days before it was transformed into soup. (Loureiro, 2015).

Figure 1

Correio Paulistano advertisement, edition 13.201, of June 3, 1900



Note. Brazilian Digital Newspaper Library.

The advent of modernity in Brazil can be conceived from the perspective of the city of São Paulo, which spearheaded the production and export of coffee, driving changes – albeit slow – in the modes of agrarian and urban production, expanding the networks of transport and engendering new sociabilities. In order to sell increasingly larger crops and bring in products demanded by the wealthy bourgeoisie of the “coffee metropolis,” as it was known, the slow trotting of the drovers was no longer enough. Thus, a certain technical rationality of modernity arrived in Brazil because of coffee. By the tracks of the São Paulo Railway, the Serra do Mar was crossed. It was man overcoming the

obstacles of nature through technology and science: the machine – the steam engine – was the main innovation of the 19th century (Hobsbawm, 2009), transforming the imagination, communication and cities, as well as promoting the representation of a man-made world. The circulation of people, information and goods, which previously took place at the pace of animal traction, accelerated. For Hobsbawm, before the steam revolution, most people lived and died in the town or village where they were born. And so they had the impression that the world was “incalculably big”.

In this perspective, the advent of modernity in São Paulo – its transformation from a colonial city into a modern/capitalist one – coincided with the intensification of world trade, immigration movements (arrival of foreigners for skilled labor, albeit for the agricultural sector, monocultural), expansion of the railroads, rural exodus of both the population newly released from slavery and part of the immigrants who, deluded by the idea of the promised land that had not been fulfilled in the countryside of the interior of Brazil, without knowledge of the language, resources or conditions to return to the country of origin, tried their luck in the big cities (Sevcenko, 1992).

This time, the transition from a rural and slave society to an industrial and wage-earning one was not smooth in a city that, according to Sevcenko, grew by 5,479% between 1872 and 1934.

The estrangement was imposed and diffused in such a way that it involved the very identity of the city. After all, São Paulo was not a city of blacks, whites or mestizos; neither foreigners nor Brazilians; neither American, nor European, nor Native; it was neither industrial, despite the growing volume of factories, nor an agricultural warehouse, despite the crucial importance of coffee. . . . This city that sprang up suddenly and inexplicably, like a colossal mushroom after rain, was an enigma to its own perplexed inhabitants, trying to understand it the best they could, as they struggled not to be devoured. (Sevcenko, 1992, p. 31)

This dilemma that the city’s inhabitants faced portrays, according to Berman (1986), the dichotomy of modernity, the feeling of living in two worlds. According to Carone (2002), the strangeness was such that the children were scared to see that the foreigners also had five fingers on each of their hands.

Again, we resort to Benjamin’s (1991) reading of Paris, capital of the 19th century, which, with the urban reform led by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, gained large avenues that rationalized and sanitized the space and reduced the strength of barricades and popular uprisings, “meanwhile he estranges the Parisians from their city. They no longer feel at home there, and start to

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become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis” (Benjamin, 1991, pp. 41-42). Changing the city’s public roads has profound consequences, whether in Europe or the New World. Sevckenko (1992) reports that, in São Paulo, when the city hall paved Avenida Paulista at the early 20th century, the city’s first uniform and continuous street was created. This was used as a racetrack by the wealthy, who already owned cars. As there were no traffic regulations, pedestrians being run over without punishment were common – a true “hunt for the pedestrian,” for the cornered passerby. According to the author, it was in the 1920s that the automobile boom took place, “blocking the narrow circulation spaces of the central area with its volume and transforming the city into a veritable hell” (Sevckenko, 1992, p. 74).

According to Frehse (2011), the street is not just a component, but a central element of modern cities, the stage for the ways of life of nations, a metonymy of the city, a space for the consolidation of capitalism in Brazil – and also for social exclusions. Whether walking at a frenetic pace, or using road transport and receiving visual information from billboards¹ along the way, the passerby had already incorporated the dynamics of the metropolis – unlike the *flâneur*, who experienced the estrangement in the enjoyment of the city.

“On his peregrinations the man of the crowd lands at a late hour in a department store where there still are many customers. He moves about like someone who knows his way around the place” (Benjamin, 1991, p. 82). As in Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Man of the Crowd,” the *flâneur* and the passers-by meet in semi-public spaces of consumption, in which there is some privacy and at the same time the unfolding of urban life can be observed. “Poe’s text makes us understand the true connection between wildness and discipline. His pedestrians act as if they had adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically. Their behavior is a reaction to shocks” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 126). It is the view of the human tides at dusk that makes the narrator of the tale lose interest in what was going on in the café and instead contemplate the street scene.

The scenario that is built shows how modernity penetrates the interstices of everyday life and makes disciplinary techniques emerge, which, directed to the population counted through statistics, act in a continuous exercise of training and coordinating bodies, the crowd. In this sense, the development of metropolises, in confluence with the engendering of the consumer society, dissipated the bases of stable identities due to the stimulus to mobility, to the instrumental rationality of production processes, to the technical reproducibility of goods, among other transformations.

¹ Harvey (2009) comments that Raban, contrary to critical and oppositional writings on urban life that speak of the city as an “encyclopedia” or “style emporium” (homogeneous), responds with the idea of the city as “a book of scribbles,” full of colorful items and without any relation to each other and even less to a determining, rational or economic (heterogeneous) scheme.

THE POSTMODERN CITY AND THE EMERGENCY OF THE CONNECTED MAN

Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or “totalizing” discourses are the hallmarks of postmodernist thought.
 –D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*

Smart cities attract smart citizens, and smart citizens attract smart money.
 –E. Morozov & F. Bria, *Rethinking the Smart City – Democratizing Urban Technology*

The rhythm of the streets accelerates in postmodernity. David Harvey (2009), a geographer who focused on the condition of changes in social, cultural and political-economic practices that somehow no longer found support in the concept of modernity, points out that this abyssal change is linked to the emergence of new dominant ways in which we experience time and space. The rise of postmodern cultural forms is related to at least two factors: (1) the emergence of more flexible modes of capital accumulation; and (2) a new cycle of “time-space compression” in the organization of capitalism. However, from the point of view of capitalist accumulation, according to the author, these changes appear more as superficial appearance transformations than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new post-industrial society.

Harvey (2009) emphasizes architecture and the arts, understanding them as the main articulators of this postmodern movement. The process begins with the post-war golden age (1950s), goes through the disenchantment of the world, with the emergence of dictatorships and all forms of worker and mercantile oppression (1960s), until reaching the following decade (1970s), in which we have an indication of change, with movements that stop being anti-modernist and start to be called postmodernist.

Soft City, a book written by Jonathan Raban in 1974, is an exponent of this movement by rejecting “the thesis of a city tightly stratified by occupation and class, depicting instead the spread of individualism and entrepreneurialism², where social distinction was broadly conferred by possessions and appearance” (Harvey, 2009, p. 15).

The city conceived by Raban is too complex a place to be disciplined:

... The city as we imagine it, then, soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration, and nightmare, is as real, maybe more real, than the hard city one can locate on maps in

² According to Pinto and Oliveira (2007), Nestlé, with Leite Ninho, was the pioneer advertiser in Brazil of billboards made by the printing process called gigantography (32 sheets, which provides the dimension of a mural) in the 1960s.



statistics, in monographs on urban sociology and demography and architecture. (Harvey, 2009, pp. 9-10)

In contrast to this image of the city of discipline and imagination, we observe the rise of data or “social datafication” (Couldry, 2019), that is, the pressure currently felt to convert all aspects of life into data, from which economic values, in particular, can be extracted.

Postmodernism, in this context, contrasts with the (modernist) idea of the universal – identified with the belief in linear progress, in absolute truths, in the rational planning of ideal social orders and with the standardization of knowledge and production – by privileging the heterogeneity and difference as liberating forces in the redefinition of cultural discourses. Nevertheless, if modernism was perceived as positivist, technocentric and rationalist, it does not seem to us that this narrative has changed in the way data infrastructure has guided the new contemporary social order.

The new productive technologies and the intensification of the processes of rationalization and optimization of work have a direct influence on post-modern ways of thinking, feeling and acting. The volatility that takes shape in postmodernity and makes any long-term planning difficult, which requires adaptation and the ability to move quickly in response to market changes, takes on new contours from the incidence of algorithms, and we are progressively facing “predictive” futures. In other words, if “all that is solid melts into air” (Berman, 1986) – alluding to the theoretical perspective that considers the modern imagination capable of infinite renewal and transformation – what emerges in the contemporary world is the formation of a “fog” (Wisnik, 2018) of data in which the prevalence of digital and genetic information modulate our sensitivity and affect our perception of the world.

However, all this movement imposed by the acceleration of time and the fragmentation of space does not imply a decrease in the significance of the territory. The production of places endowed with values (special qualities) becomes an important asset in the competition between localities, cities, regions and nations. Corporate forms of government can flourish in these spaces, they themselves assuming developmental roles in producing business-friendly climates. In this context, we can better situate the efforts of cities to forge a distinctive image and create an atmosphere of place and tradition that is attractive to capital.

In these urban spaces of the postmodern metropolis, new social dynamics are formed: the subject of statistics that emerges in modernity is reified by the data of postmodernity, constituting a subject of “a time without time” (Crary, 2014), a time without material or identifiable demarcation, a time without sequence or recurrence.

In short, it reflects “a reprimand and a deprecation of the weakness and inadequacy of human time, with its blurred, meandering textures” (Crary, 2014, p. 39).

The nefarious aspect of this “time without time” that Crary, alluding to the total hours of the day in a week, called *24/7*, is in the incompatibility it reveals, in the discrepancy between a human life-world and the idea of a “switched on universe for which no off-switch exists” (Crary, 2014, p. 40) – in contrast to the eight hours of work, eight hours of leisure and eight hours of rest of the Fordist conception. The risk that Harvey pointed out, in the passage from modernity to postmodernity, of our mental maps not corresponding to current reality, can be unveiled with the contemporary *24/7 non-time* that incessantly insinuates itself into all aspects of social and personal life.

As Harvey pointed out to a change of only superficial appearance, Crary speaks of one of the most “numbingly familiar” assumptions in discussions of contemporary technological culture: that “there has been an epochal shift in a relatively short period of time, in which new information and communication technologies have supplanted a broad set of older cultural forms” (Crary, 2014, p. 44). For the author, the conception of technological change as a quasi-autonomous process, driven by a process of autopoiesis or self-organization, allows many aspects of contemporary social reality to be accepted as necessary, unalterable circumstances, as necessary, unalterable circumstances, akin to facts of nature, and conceals the “the most important techniques invented in the last 150 years: the various systems for the management and control of human beings” (Crary, 2014, p. 45). Thus, the form that innovation takes in contemporary capitalism is that of “continual simulation of the new,” while existing relations of power and control remain effectively the same.

If in the 20th century a good part of the organization of consumer society was linked to forms of regulation and social obedience, in the contemporary world the management of economic behavior is identical to the formation and perpetuation of malleable and submissive individuals. This condition of submission is reinforced by the fear of social and economic failure, the fear of being left behind or left out, of being considered old-fashioned or inadequate. The rhythms of consumption reinforced by technology are inseparable from an increasing demand for continuous self-administration by the subject. Although the relations of power and control remain, they acquire other contours from a new rationality (Dardot & Laval, 2016): neoliberalism.

This scenario reveals a regulation strongly guided by competition and, alluding to the ideas elaborated by Foucault, “a strategy without a strategist or without a strategy” (properly speaking):



... First, there are the practices, often disparate, that establish techniques of power (among which disciplinary techniques in the first place) and it is the multiplication and generalization of all these techniques that little by little impose a global direction, without anyone being the instigator of that impulse toward a strategic objective. (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 192)

In this new regime, the individual is solely responsible for his destiny; on the other hand, he must constantly show his worth in order to deserve the conditions of his existence. And, taking into account this technological determination, the search for infinite connection as a form of belonging is evident. If in the consumer society there is an economic reason applied to every sphere of private and public action, that is, the cost-benefit analysis to all human behavior; in the information society, technology fulfills this function through algorithms, which makes it possible to eliminate the separation between politics, society and economy and, at the same time, unify them around technology.

This “general pragmatics” (Dardot & Laval, 2016) is indifferent to party origins, it is just about “good governance, good practices and globalization”. Crary (2014) warns us about the fact that the privatization and compartmentalization of our activities in this sphere, that is, governed by data and algorithms, is able to sustain the illusion that we can “outwit the system” and devise a unique or superior relation to these tasks that is either more enterprising or seemingly less compromised. Based on the author’s considerations, it is no longer possible to believe in the statement that contemporary technology is something neutral or just a set of tools that can be used in different ways, including in the service of an emancipatory policy.

However, the *smart* concept emerges as the most prominent to conquer the public imagination in the last decade and the most fertile to address this issue, as it is linked to the idea of emancipation and autonomy. Terms like *smart cities* and *smart citizens* are commonly used to qualify territories and their citizens. The idea of a total interaction between people and machines points to the efficiency of technology as something capable of catalyzing economic development while promoting quality of life in urban centers.

According to Morozov and Bria (2019, p. 20), who have addressed the issue of smart cities, everything indicates that “technological infrastructures configured in a fashion more in line with the dogmas of neoliberalism will make it rather difficult for cities to experiment with non-neoliberal political and economic agendas.” This is in line with the new rationality of the world, discussed by Dardot and Laval (2016) and with a new ordering of the world based on technology, if we consider that the concept of:

... smart refers to any advanced technology deployed in cities with the intent of optimizing the use of resources, producing new resources, changing user behavior, or promising other kinds of gains in terms of, for example, flexibility, security, and sustainability. These gains accrue primarily due to feedback loops inherent in the deployment and use of intelligent devices featuring connectivity, sensors, and/or screens. (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 21)

The smart city concept becomes a perfect example of corporate storytelling: “Stripped of all politics and accounts of contestation, these narratives inevitably celebrate the unstoppable march of progress and innovation, greatly accelerated by the ingenuity and inventiveness of the private sector” (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 25). When companies such as Uber, formed from the advancement and opportunities offered by new technologies, promote the slogan “We ignite opportunity by setting the world in motion,” they show significance relative to the continuous production movement, without any kind of pause or interruption. The result is the exhaustion of the senses and the consequent emptying of all forms of divergence.

In the neoliberal and smart city, rankings, competitiveness tables and comparative scores are highlighted. The quantification of performance of all types of productive value, including human value, is justified by the benefit of making them more reliable, competitive and manageable.

In this scenario, two processes are evident: on the one hand, the hiring of private agents for attributions until then reserved for public institutions; on the other hand, the injection of private financial capital in the management, maintenance and construction of public infrastructures. “Both exhibit significant, albeit underexplored connections to the smart city agenda, as both require an extensive infrastructure of gathering, analyzing, and acting upon data to succeed and proliferate” (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 43).

We have seen how much citizens are co-opted to stay connected, this can also be applied to cities: “The more services they subcontract and the more infrastructure they privatize, the more assistance they require from the likes of companies like Google in running whatever remains of resources and assets under public control” (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 67).

In this scenario, the political and economic models on which most cities are based are no longer locally determined and start to serve globally connected demands, from a sophisticated neoliberal capitalist system of the entrepreneurial type and a capital that built through financial speculation. Perhaps we have good reasons to (re)think the rebellious spirit of cities (Harvey, 2014), in apology for the smart city ideal, but it is also necessary to be aware of the limits of this rebelliousness, especially if disconnected from non-urban agents.



In practical terms, technological sovereignty should also mean the ability of cities and citizens to organize their affairs according to principles beyond what philosopher Roberto Unger calls “the dictatorship of no alternatives,” slowly imposed by the proponents of neoliberalism through the backdoor of metrics and quantification. (Morozov & Bria, 2019, p. 84)

Considering the relevance of these evaluation mechanisms and, consequently, the individual and collective organization, there is no way to leave out the nature of these new social relations established by a datafied order and the characteristic role of media institutions in sustaining this order (Couldry, 2000).

In short, datafication processes involve translating the values of a given organization in the social world into analytical measures; after this measurement, the process must be converted back into something that makes sense in terms of the values of that organization. In other words, it is not just data collection, but “decision making based on that data, based almost exclusively on automated calculation processes called algorithms” (Couldry, 2019, p. 420). Data is collected for a reason, and that reason can lead to economic and social discrimination.

The era of *Big Data* has decisive implications in data processing for the social construction of reality. “We can say that social media platforms and the corporations that own them have acquired the power to frame the social world and thereby name what happens in it, in addition to categorizing everything, that is, ordering through their algorithms” (Couldry, 2019, p. 423). In this sense, everyone, not just ordinary users of social platforms, are affected by the data, especially the consequent categorizations generated by these devices, disseminated by networks of employers, universities, political parties and governments, fostering the imagination that data are the reflection of an undeniable reality.

The connected subject lives in a “time without time,” and this reflects his inadequacy, given his confused and irregular movement. Therefore, communication and consumption assume important roles in the management and control of these movements: the rhythms of consumption reinforced by technology are inseparable from an increasing demand for continuous self-management. Statistics have the function of classifying, organizing and defining procedures for the population; in the context of datafication, the algorithms work together with each connected subject, presenting a world and proposing paths to follow, based on the information provided by the subject himself.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We identified transformations in the ordering of social life in the transition from the modern to the postmodern city from the interrelationships of communication and consumption and we arrived at the imperative of data as a key element to reflect on contemporary biopolitics.

The concept, developed by Foucault, can be understood as “the attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race...” (Foucault, 1997, p. 89). It is, therefore, a biopolitics related to populations, so that “the disciplinary technologies of power which are directed at the body, in order to form and fragment it” (Lemke, 2018, p. 132). In postmodernity, however, biotechnologies allow a decomposition and recomposition of the body, constituting “a molecular politics that no longer proffers an anatomical view of individuals but rather presents a genetic one which situates the individual in the ‘gene pool’” (Lemke, 2018, p. 132). If, in its genesis, the term biopolitics referred to the specific problems of life and population placed within a government technology, this government, today, is managed by market rules and metrics. From this, we infer a transition from the role of statistics, typical of an administrative process, to the consolidation of data as regulatory principles typical of neoliberal entrepreneurship, based on metrics and performances.

Biopolitics then emerges “as life put to work and, therefore, as a policy activated to organize the conditions and control of social exploitation in the entire dimension of life” (Negri, 2016, p. 93). If in biopolitics the social is subsumed by capital, we can infer that the passage from the disciplinary society (ruled by statistics) to the society of control (ruled by data), production and resistance are organized through ways of life. Both the subject and the State are crossed by the technological and financial pressure of the market that penetrates human relations. But the human stirs, moves, transforms.

In the modernity of the *belle époque* analyzed by Benjamin, we identify the manifestation of a new sensorium characteristic of the consumer society and in the *flâneur*, a form of protest against the rhythm imposed by capital, as well as a reorganization of the productive base and a profound transformation in the means of living, in addition to the social revolutions that arrived both in Europe and in developing countries driven by the Industrial Revolution. The city and urban life became objects of study and reflection. And the street – central element of this modern city, stage of ways of life and metonymy of the city – becomes a



space for the consolidation of capitalism and also for social exclusions. In the street, the *flâneur* and the passerby meet and start walking at a fast pace.

When the factory gives way to computerized society and this is placed under the control of financial capital, a capitalist type of socialization emerges, which operates through (exploratory) processes that have become social (Negri, 2016). If we reject the conception of the city tightly stratified by class occupation, a pervasive individualism emerges instead, in which social marks and distinction are conferred not so much by possessions as by the performance of data. In this new biopolitical regime, the individual is the only one responsible for his destiny, having his own subjectivity questioned by a set of forces previously represented by a sea of people and now by an ocean of data.

If in modernity statistics served as an instrument for the administration and management of the population, in accordance with an accelerated and thriving production and urbanity; in postmodernity data are resources used for the ordering of social life and the constitution of subjectivities in the face of a deindustrialization that runs at a fast pace, a financialized economy that takes shape in unproductive capital (Dowbor, 2017), that is, profit does not come from investment in infrastructure and production, but from speculation and banking investments. In this scenario, culture also becomes a socioeconomic asset. The social, in turn, seems to get lost amid the distinction between (human) connection and (automated) connectivity.

In a world increasingly shaped by automated and discriminatory hidden calculations, “there will surely be an even greater role and need for the imaginative productions of the media industries, as interpreters of the changes that are taking place” (Couldry, 2019, p. 429). Is the power of the media one of the resources to help us imagine something different from a society managed exclusively by the power of data?

If we think of the media in a broader field, that of communication, perhaps this has more relevance. For Cohn (2001), the manifest form of the information society is that of selection, commanded by the disjunction “or,” and its orientation, therefore, is that of selection/exclusion. This contrasts with communication, which is fundamentally a process of addition. And, in this sense, communication operates within the focuses, established by the information, thus being able to translate the signs of consumption in a neoliberal and technological society and give them new meanings. The contemplation of the *flâneur*, the social exclusion evidenced in the streets of modern São Paulo, as well as the activism in social networks in contemporary times, signal possibilities of resistance and other ways of existing, which to a certain extent escape biopolitical orders, whether statistical or dataficated.

Despite the possibilities of resistance, we are affected not only by the change of place, of time or by the connection with the other, but also by the technical apparatus of thought and action: “Contemporary practices of subjectification, that is to say, put into play a being that must be attached to a project of identity... in which life and its contingencies become meaningful to the extent that they can be construed as the product of personal choice” (Rose, 2011, p. 271). Thus, safe spaces of interiority are undone and we are taken by the discontinuity that these choices can suggest and, simultaneously, contest the rigid forms of framing and invent ourselves differently. ■

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