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Digital Culture: Control and Domination of Technical Images in the Era of Psychocapitalism

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Abstract

This Chapter aims to conduct a theoretical study in order to understand the transmutation of modern culture into digital culture, which is intrinsically linked to technological, political, economic, artistic and cultural advances. Our goal is to unite components of the visual culture and the culture of convergence to explain how new realities and new forms of control and domination are created through images and used on a large scale by the neoliberalist system in the network society, inaugurating the new phase of capitalism, i.e., psychocapitalism. Until recently, mobile phone devices were used solely for calls (oral language), being then followed by the era of text messaging (written language). Today, everyone has cameras (image language) and Internet connectivity. The Internet is part of people's daily lives, and the trend is for us to increasingly connect to devices connected thereto and to connect electronic devices of daily use to the Internet. This ensures connectivity as a common space in the social construction and identity of the social being in such a way that there is no longer a distinction between "online," "offline," "real," and "virtual." The disciplines of arts, sociology, philosophy, anthropology and social communication are used as a basis.

Keywords: psychocapitalism, digital culture, image, contemporary philosophy, control, domination

1. Introduction

In order to understand the new challenges in cybersecurity, it is necessary to understand the functioning of the contemporary social body, digital culture, and the rise of technical images and their use for the construction of new realities. This encompasses new forms of control and domination used on a large scale, in the network society, by the neoliberalist system, inaugurating the new phase of capitalism, i.e., psychocapitalism.

This Chapter, produced based on a philosophical approach, aims to collaborate with the discussions on technical images in the contemporary times using photography as an object of studies to facilitate this analysis. We address the main issues surrounding the production of images in the field of documentary and artistic photography, delimiting their borders, transgressions, and points of convergence. This should contribute to the understanding of contemporary society, cyberspace, cybersecurity, and how psychocapitalism has used images as a form of control and domination.

Anthropologist Bittencourt [1] argues that the use of photographic imagery as a representation of the real by anthropology – notorious as an academic discipline for scientifically studying the human being – has become a powerful instrument for generating and maintaining a regime of truth. For political, power and control interests, photography has been used to maintain and, in some cases, create the regime of truth that stigmatized criminals, the mentally ill, the poor, indigenous people, quilombolas, Arabs, blacks, Asians, and all segments considered subordinate.

For a long time, anthropology used photography for the purposes of surveillance and stigmatization “of the wild and the exotic as Other.” According to Bittencourt [1], this means of surveillance created a specific regime of truth and built stereotypes that positioned the “Other in relation to a notion of Us as producers” of images. They created exotic images of people and places, hitherto unknown to society, i.e., they created, in addition to images, the people and places themselves. In anthropology, photographic documentation was widely used as a means to justify an idea related to race and anthropometric systems in the second half of the 19th century [1]. Photography proved to be a powerful tool for creating realities, regimes of truth, and power.

The general purpose of this Chapter is to analyze, through a theoretical study, how the technical and photographic images contributed to the rupture of the modern concepts of truth, cooperating in the creation of new regimes of truth and new less standardized power structures, which have provided greater freedom to contemporary photographic production. Concomitantly, this Chapter will also shed light on how power systems have been transmuting and shaping this “image civilization” in which we live, while offering illusory images of freedom in a cyclical system of repetition of human actions¹ that feeds itself back and feeds on data.

We will define an instrument, apparatus and machine and enter a brief history of the evolution and convergence of these objects based on Flusserian thinking. The conceptualization of these terms aims to facilitate the understanding of current discussions about the interaction between man and machine, cybersecurity, and the current conception of man and machine co-authorship that surround the debate about the post-human and photography in post-modernity. The reflections written here should be expanded and applied to other fields of knowledge. We will start with the definitions and origin, which are so important and often overlooked by the desire to talk about the now, which in my view, in a way, would result in a shallow Chapter.

2. Instrument, machine and apparatus

Flusser [3] states that instruments are tools used by man to modify the world or to make human life easier. According to him, these tools would comprise empirical extensions of the body’s organs, generally simulating the functioning of the organ that they extend. The difference lies in how they are more powerful and efficient, as they reach farther distances and deeper in nature and thus fulfill their role as an instrument. This instrument, after being discovered and mastered, is incorporated into human experience and culture. In each society, the instruments were removed from nature to fulfill a specific human need in that location. Human beings, then, transferred this knowledge of the use of instruments to their successors, learning

¹ Man, excluding his intellectual integration and mobilization of consciousness, has an animal machine that is identical to that of other mammals, subjecting himself to the “digestion movement,” eating at fixed times, “following the crowd and, like sheep, the pace of the pace collective” ([2] p. 85).

about the usefulness of instruments used by other peoples and creating, adapting and converging their instruments into new instruments that would make their life easier. The instruments contributed to the evolution of the human being and evolved alongside them.

Let us then take a leap in time to the period of modernity. After the Industrial Revolution, instruments passed through the sieve of science, were considered technical instruments, and received technological and scientific investments, becoming more powerful in their functions and programming, being then called machines. Based on this transformation, their relationship with man was inverted. Man has ceased to be the constant and has become the variable in this relationship. The instruments that used to work for men now witness part of humanity working for the powerful machines, which have also come to dominate the production lines and become essential for economic development.

This change caused by the rise of machines in the post-Industrial Revolution period promotes and accelerates countless social, political and economic changes, as one of the main causes of what Flusser [3] called “alienated work.” This process was responsible for dividing society into “capitalists” and “proletariats,” comprising, respectively, the owners of the machines and those who work for the owners of the machines as salaried employees.

The alienated work problematized by Flusser [3] is linked to the displacement of manufacturing and production information from artisans to machines. He emphasizes the historical and social importance of this enormous transformation that took place at the time, as customs, traditions, social relations and economics were rapidly changing over a short period of time. According to Flusser, the allocation of traditional craftsmanship knowledge from the hands of the artisan also removed their power over the value of their product, as the value of the product or consumer good was linked to artisanal making, i.e., to knowing how to make. The artisan materialized the information during the making and attributed value to it. Flusser referred to it as the information about “pieces of the world.” Following the Industrial Revolution, the tool began to preserve the information on production of products, transferring the value of goods and products to the tool and, subsequently, to the owners of the tools, the capitalists.

2.1 Technical objects and technical images

In order to understand the current discussions about digital culture – the cyberspace – we must approach Simondon’s thinking. We do not intend to exhaust the complexity of thinking about the evolution of technical objects, but rather elucidate issues that are related to the interaction between man and apparatus, which Flusserian thought did not have the opportunity to resolve. It is necessary to rescue the thought of this author, specifically the concept of human interaction with technology.

Simondon [4] builds on the thought of his teacher, Canguilhem, and bases his reflection on three fundamental problems that, according to Lopes ([5] p. 308–309), comprise “(1) the meaning of the technical object as to be technical, genetically conceived, (2) which also implies thinking about its evolution, and (3) the question of its absolute origin within the vital invention “of technical objects, instruments, machines, and devices. When analyzing the “technical object” as a technical “being,” the author appropriates and is based initially on the “genetic method,” which implies thinking about the evolution of technical objects and their origin.

According to Simondon [4], the technical object was naturally invented without being correlated with economic, social and cultural factors. He associates the

evolution of technical objects with human evolution, as a joint and natural evolution. He attributes objects to their own genesis, separate from the genesis of the human being. In this process of attributing its own genesis to the technical object, the author gives it autonomy so that they become a technical “being,” which evolves and develops through convergence and adaptation. As Simondon argues ([4] p. 20), “the technical being evolves through convergence and adaptation to itself; it is internally unified according to a principle of internal resonance.”

Based on the fusion between the thoughts of Flusser, Canguilhem and Simondon, we understand that the camera may have evolved by adapting both the visual and technological needs of contemporary society, converging with other more current and powerful technological devices, such as the smartphone. In Flusser, machines were powerful because of their size; in contemporary times, we notice a certain inversion in which mobile devices have become smaller and more powerful. Large machines still have their space, although they are expensive and have little mobility, which puts them in the background in today’s society, with the possibility of being classified, in some cases in photography, as handcrafted devices.

One of the main thoughts in Simondon’s theory [4] consists of arguing that the idea of opposition between culture and technique is false, just as the opposition between man and machine. This “ignorance” in relation to the nature of machines and technical knowledge would be one of the causes of the recurrent malaise in contemporary society and which would in some way result in technophilia and technophobia – while some wish to follow the technological flow and prevent their obsolescence, others, conservatives, would not assimilate technological innovations.

Technophiles are generally people who interconnected the different spheres of their lives in new technologies, creating a certain dependence on these technologies, because, as Flusser [3] says, man transferred his interests from the objective world to the symbolic world of information. This type of phobia is very common in today’s connectivity society. Technophilia would then comprise the fear of failure due to some technological breakdown or failure.

In turn, technophobia is the reverse. It is the fear of technology. This is also a very common phobia nowadays. Many people have lost their jobs, being replaced by machines. We have an interesting example, within the world of photography, relating to technophobia: the transition from the analog photographic device to the digital device. Here, we can also speak of the fear of hackers and data theft by large companies that monetize this information.

Following this brief introduction, and the limitation that the work involving this Chapter imposes on us, we will address the definitions of image and technical image. According to Flusser [3], images are codes that replace events with scenes with the purpose of representing, comprising maps or instruments to guide the human being in the world, mediating the relationship between man and the world, gaining more and more power over time and replacing even informative texts. This, however, is a mistake, in the author’s view, as images and texts should complement and not replace one another. In his studies, Flusser already pointed to the emergence of the culture of convergence.

With the advent of technical images, images leave the field of imagination and enter the field of alienation, and man begins to use them as screens for reality and to create images to represent his own life and to live according to the production of images. This promotes the inversion of the function of images, creating a form of idolatry in relation to images and neglecting the reason why images are produced – to serve as an instrument and to guide man in the world. “Man, instead of using images in function of the world, begins to live in terms of images. He no longer

deciphers the scenes of the image as meanings of the world, but rather the world itself is experienced as a set of scenes” ([3] p. 9).

The transmutation of the imagination into a hallucination is marked by man’s inability to reconstruct the abstracted dimensions of the image and thus decipher them. By losing this potential, the image ceases to be a mediator between man and the world, losing its magical aura, to become its own credible reality. This type of image, called a technical image, apparently does not need to be deciphered, as it is confused with the very representation of the world, leading the observer to trust the image as much as they trust their eyes. We can see this in the use of social media, as will be explained later in this text.

Flusser questions the replacement of texts with images because the technical images themselves have text in their essence, being produced by photographic devices that have, in essence, the union of research and studies in the form of technical texts that were applied in the construction of this device, which in turn create the technical images. This dynamic in the construction of the technical image grants it credibility and the potential to replace traditional images, which, in Flusser’s view, contributes to idolatry regarding the image. It would be up to photography to reunify thought, freeing us from text-centered culture and the domain of the conceptual, guiding us to (re)think through images. This is another point that will be discussed below, but, first, let us get into the study of space–time called contemporaneity.

2.2 The clipping of the contemporary space-time

The post-Industrial Revolution world has advanced rapidly, with new technologies changing the entire global geopolitical system and beginning to command the economy through control over the production of goods and products. With the rapid advance of science and technology, new technologies have become more accessible and exponentially incorporated by society in order to facilitate the activities of daily life, being used both at work and in the mediation of personal relationships. We realize that scientific and technological advances have created better living conditions for the population that has access or the purchasing power to do so.

We have presented the main characteristics of the changes from the historical period known as modernity to postmodernity. We have shown both positive and negative characteristics and alert to the use of technology by the current hegemonic power system, financial capitalism, which acts with precision and works with specific data for each individual, using technology as a form of control, inaugurating a new phase of capitalism, i.e. psychocapitalism.

The social transformations of the last decades are not constituted solely by economic and technological changes, but also by profound social transformations that are still boiling, requiring an analysis of dense circumstances, to name the main ones, which is not the object of study of this Chapter. Nevertheless, it is relevant for a better understanding of how photographic images are consumed or shared on social networks to understand how and where these networks are structured in contemporary times. It is also necessary to show how the construction of social identity has changed and is changing due to the rupture from the concepts of truth and modern meta-narratives.

In this Chapter, the main characteristics of cyberspace are presented, without the aim of exhausting the subject. We wish solely to provide the reader with clear guidance as to the issues raised in this research and how photographic production and creation are following, being influenced and influencing decisively the imagery construction of the globalized collective identity in the current era.

Today, we are moving towards ensuring that everyone is connected to the Internet, producing and sharing data. Until recently, mobile phone devices were used only for calls (oral language), being then followed by the era of text messaging (written language). Today, everyone has cameras (image language) and Internet connectivity. The Internet is part of people's daily lives, and the trend is for us to increasingly connect to devices connected thereto and to connect electronic devices of daily use to the Internet. This ensures connectivity as a common space in the social construction and identity of the social being in such a way that there is no longer a distinction between "online," "offline," "real," and "virtual" [6]. "The Internet is no longer merely an instrument, becoming part of the political action of a wide network of social stakeholders" [7].

A number of theorists see connectivity as the characteristic of our time, placing it above a simple connection between people and things and linking it to the very time in which we live – the era of connectivity – wherein participation becomes self-motivating, as contents are received and shared exponentially on the network, with many of these images. We are moving towards a "civilization of the image."

Today's photographic devices already have Wi-Fi functions for quick connectivity and diffusion of photographs, and most photojournalists, particularly those from major media outlets, work with this type of equipment to disseminate images quickly in the cyberspace. Smartphones have also been frequently used to produce photographic images. The network society is massively using the mobile phone camera as an alternative for producing images due to portability and direct connection to the Internet.

The main advantages of the smartphone are its size, which facilitates transportation and provides agility; connectivity to the Internet, which allows the rapid dissemination of images on the network; and ease conducting research on the spot, besides being more discreet than a professional camera. The cost-benefit ratio is also of fundamental importance. Being present in the cyberspace is crucial for the contemporary artist, having also become, for the modern individual.

The cyberspace is gaining more and more prominence as a stage for political debate and has attracted different social spheres, such as companies and public officials, to social media platforms. It is necessary to understand the context and the global conjuncture of why, who and where the discussions take place, as they guide the collective agenda, influencing and converging with the collective social imaginary. The following will be a summary of the thinking of scholars who study the subject of postmodernity or supermodernity² and how social movements are developing in this new field.

3. Psychocapitalism

The contemporary photographic image has been used on social media platforms as a means of self-promotion for the individual who acts as an image idolater. The image in the consumer and spectacle society takes on a primary role in personal

² "From the 1950s, the term began to be used in American literary theory to classify the main schools of the 20th century. Initially, the term was used in a pejorative sense, i.e., to designate an uninspired moment compared to previous productions in the area of Humanities. By the mid-1960s, however, the word began to gain an affirmative connotation. In 1969, American literary critic Leslie Fiedler (*Cross the Border*) described his time as a death struggle between modern and postmodern literature. The postmodern slogan would be: "Cross the border" between supposedly elitist art and the more popular art" [8].

relationships, particularly in the cyberspace. People begin to create images to represent their own lives and to live according to the production of images, thereby promoting the inversion of the function of images, which some theorists refer to as image society or “image civilization.”

The current hegemonic regime of power, aware of the underpinnings of today’s society, has used the power of images to create regimes of truth and regimes of power to watch and control society. It is not something new for photography, which has been used since its inception to create real regimes that have stigmatized peoples and cultures. Next, we will deepen the understanding of how power groups have used scientific and academic knowledge – such as the concepts of civilization of connectivity and civilization of the image – to control and subdue entire societies. In future research, we will address the issue of photography as a meeting place between art, science, and technology, proposing possible relations with psychocapitalism.

Photography has always been linked to the construction of realities through images. Throughout history, these images have been used for different purposes and interests. Both photography and the photographer were linked to the role of observer of society and undertook to record it for the purposes of domination or for liberation.

Based on the understanding of the concepts of market³, signal⁴, spectacle society⁵, the era of connectivity, and civilization of the image – which are the result of social research produced in the last decades – we can approach the current discussion on contemporary society⁶, also referred to as the transparency society. The concept of a transparency society encompasses all the concepts presented, unifies them in a single definition, and proposes a systematic analysis of the way of life in today’s society, simplifying this dense subject for academic studies.

We understand that, as from the 1970s, in Germany, the consequences of the gradual integration of the political state with civil society could be observed. Industrial, commercial and banking capitalism were joined in the form of financial capital, giving rise to organized capitalism, i.e., an organized group with political and economic strength capable of influencing the internal politics of the state.

“The 1970s and 1980s saw major changes in different dimensions of social life. We can observe the disorganization of the accumulation pattern implemented with greater force in the post-war period, with changes in the productive structures, production relations, consumption patterns, forms of sociability, and the various spatialities of the world economy. At the same time, and in an articulated manner, welfare states were gradually dismantled. Social and political stakeholders of crucial importance for the understanding of the political and economic scenario of the central countries until the 1970s, such as unions and the major American banks, lost

³ This conception of a consumerist society speaks to the thought of Baudrillard [9] who proposed to explain contemporary personal behavior through consumer society and the objectification of things, of life itself, plotting a reality in which the object has more value than its functionality, i.e., consuming a particular object is more important than its usefulness.

⁴ The characteristic feature of this time is that no human being, without exception, is able to determine their life in a sense that is to a certain extent transparent, as used to be the case in the evaluation of market relations. In principle, all are objects, even the most powerful [10].

⁵ [...] people do as much as possible and use the best resources available to them to increase the market value of the products they are selling. And the products that they are encouraged to market, promote and sell are themselves ([11] p. 13).

⁶ We are mainly talking about large urban conglomerates.

strength, while other sectors such as the finance industry gained prominence. The national states themselves had their power significantly changed, redrawing the map of power in the world. Simultaneously, the 1970s and 1980s represent a milestone in the social sciences. With the explanatory exhaustion of macro-theoretical models, represented mainly by functionalism and Marxism, facing a changing world, we are witnessing a great theoretical effervescence and the consolidation of the search for new paths for social theory. The most general feature of this search for paths is convergence” ([12] p. 1).

Currently, according to economist Ladislau Dowbor (2017), we live in the era of unproductive capitalism, which consists of a process of financialization of the planet. For the author, banks and financial institutions have come to dominate the productive system by extracting from it, through interest and tariffs, volumes of incomparably greater resources of contribution than production, generating a society of “unproductive rentiers.” In his book *The Age of Unproductive Capital*, Dowbor ([13] p. 17) criticizes the current financial system:

“We wish to outline how three dynamics are articulated that structurally unbalance development and quality of life in the world. In simple terms, we are destroying the planet for the benefit of a minority, while the resources necessary for sustainable and balanced development are sterilized by the global financial system.”

For the sociologist Alfredo Pena Vega ([14] p. 16), we are experiencing another moment in which the situation of the world reveals to us that the model of hegemonic civilization, based on economic growth, has become exhausted. Society does not have the skills to deal with the environmental crisis. Our ancestors bequeathed to present generations a great environmental burden, believing that we, with our technology and evolution, could end hunger, social separation, and the finitude of natural resources.

We do not intend to delve into socioeconomic or geopolitical factors. What we wish to bring address is how these factors act to govern our daily lives, creating social inequalities and destroying the planet, which tend to worsen over time. Today’s society is sick because the system that controls and governs our lives is unhealthy and Machiavellian. The chronic disease of financial capitalism is psychological illnesses, which are transmitted through invisible frequency bands, the host being often one’s mobile device.

3.1 The power of the image in the society of tiredness and transparency

South Korean Eastern philosopher Byung-Chul Han, based in Germany and author, among other works, of *The Burnout Society* [15] and *The Transparency Society* [15], argues, when studying the historicity of society, that humanity developed a characteristic social disease in each time. For instance, in the last century, pathologies were bacteriological or viral, while the pathology of contemporary society is neuronal, or psychic. For the author, the neoliberal system deployed a new phase of capitalism – emotion capitalism – marking the transition from biopolitics to psychopolitics, from disciplinary society to a society of control by income, in which man is obliged to surrender, becoming the very inspector of his performance and the accuser of his failure.

We currently live in a society formed by multitasking people who carry in their minds the constant demand of the neoliberal system to produce and be the best in everything they do. They must be the best in all areas of life, with no possibility of failure. It may appear controversial – although therein lies the strategy – that such a system is based on the excess of positivity, incentive and reward, as an update

of the punishment system proposed by Foucault⁷. As an example, to clarify our discussion, we can analyze the images posted and shared on social media, such as Instagram or Facebook. Pictures of supposedly successful people, living spectacular, healthy lives, only possible through much effort and sacrifice, which led them to great rewards provided by the capitalist system and only possible in that system: financial success. It is very clear the purpose of these images is to motivate, encourage, and seduce. They talk to us and tell us that it such images are the images of success, happiness, self-realization, while everything that they are not, or which is not contained in them, means failure. The power of these images over us is intense, as they approach human desires that we do not wish to show or admit, such as envy, greed and desire. They are malicious images that corrupt us at the same time as they motivate us. They interact with us and tell us that we can do what we want, that is, become entrepreneurs, become our own bosses, bring our jobs home, or be financially successful to buy and consume. Thus, we can be happier to acquire products and consumer goods and produce more images that will be shared worldwide, creating a system that feeds itself back, satisfying the wishes of power of the images and the system. The images want the body of those who see them, the observer, and those who look at them desire what they show or are seduced by the mystery they hide.

Also known as the labor society and the performance society, the contemporary social body imprisons people by promising a false illusion of freedom in which the master himself has become a slave to work and without time for recreation. In this coercive society, each one carries their field of work. The individual explores themselves and believes that this is a form of personal fulfillment. This exploratory self-collection generates self-criticism and leads the individual to develop psychological diseases that, alongside other factors of postmodern life, induce hyperactivity, work fatigue, attention disorders, and burnout syndrome, in addition to causing depression and other psychological illnesses.

Another major point pointed out by Han [15] is related to surveillance in today's society, which, unlike that analyzed by Foucault in the 1970s, is made by the social individuals themselves. It would be a kind of digital panopticon in which people undress, i.e., they put valuable personal information on social media, the majority of which comprising the imagery. Images have increased their power to create and

⁷ The new technologies of power are only possible due to the advent of the "subject" category, and the physical bodies of people comprise the first space in which a new form of power has been exercised. Disciplinary power is a technology of individualized power, "man-body," which trains the subject, tames them, automates habits and transforms them into an obedient and useful instrument for the society of economic production. One of the main tools of disciplinary power is the idea of a panopticon, which induces the subject's mind, leading them to think that they are being watched even without being observed. This tool replaces the physical violence of the time of slavery with psychological violence. Biopower is an extension of the application of the individual's disciplinary power to society, "species-man." It is a technology of collective and massive power that is established on the "fundamental biological fact that the human being constitutes a human species," a society, and the primary thoughts are that of "let live," preserving life and society, and "let die," which eliminates everything that is useless for economic production and which may come to threaten life and society. These new forms of power that emerged in Europe in the 18th century are the evolution of sovereign power, of monarchs, who had the right to "let live" or "let die." From this rupture, we can understand what the author says about "micro power," which is an analysis of the power that is not central, but rather in the peripheries, and which today is so current if we consider the current decolonial movements that cross the entire social fabric, in all social structures, at the global level. "Power is everywhere; not because it encompasses everything, but because it comes from everywhere" ([16] p. 89).

sustain regimes of truth and power. The prosumer, in the illusion of being authentic within a given social circle, creates their fictional images loaded with neoliberalist power and narrative, fostering and validating the hegemonic imagery system. All of this is stored in Big Data, which generates, through artificial intelligence, highly accurate statistical data, processing huge amounts of personalized information about certain human groups with common interests that elucidate many characteristics regarding these segmented groups.

The idolatry of image purported by Flusser [3] makes a lot of sense today. Life in sameness, in monotony, demands dreams and adventures. Han [15] says that the images are not just “reproductions, but also models where we take refuge to be better, more beautiful and more alive”. The neoliberal system identified this, and apparently, the communication team in that system read Flusser, studied the history of photography and visual culture, and learned about the power of images. The knowledge produced in the academy has been applied by groups of power for the surveillance and domination of society.

Social networks have several uses, although they place people inside social bubbles of artificial realities. When analyzing this system fed by fictional images, Han [15] argues that these groups create a type of violence of excess positivity that forces us to be happy all the time, leading to an exhaustion of happiness. Another important observation about this happiness is that it is an artificial happiness, created as a way of controlling and maintaining this system.

Individuals have an artificial notion of freedom, as they have the impression of control over their lives and actions. They are situated within a system programmed to alienate people and bring them into subgroups of common interests. Because they have the freedom to choose among some possibilities of their subgroup of interests, these individuals are led to believe that they are free. From the moment they believe they are free, they enter the game of psychocapitalism, which uses psychological images to exert dominance.

The virtual social circle, which concentrates the social dynamics of postmodern life, consists of a controlled environment in which users are able to block people with whom they do not wish to have any contact. It would be like a life linked to the algorithm of the place of comfort, wherein individuals only relate to people similar in terms of ideas and behaviors. We agree with the author on the harms of this type of escape from problems and not facing one's challenges. It is detrimental to the maturation of the individual, who does not learn to deal with life's frustrations and is deprived of finding solutions to complex problems, always opting for the easiest route. Such route is already pre-established, i.e., a utopian and perfect life that collaborates with the homogenization of people's behavior. As individuals do not acquire emotional maturity and social skills, they also do not know how to identify stealers and energy vampires.

On social media platforms, people create images of themselves with the aim of selling themselves as authentic, as each one wishes to be different while following the same fashion trends and rules. In the past, people were aware that they were dominated; today, they no longer have this awareness, as they have been delegated the power of self-supervision and self-punishment, which is mistaken for freedom. We have moved from a disciplinary society to a society of control for income, in which man is required to surrender, and if he fails to surrender, he makes demands from himself. The person has the illusion of freedom and that he is his own boss, thereby being able to explore himself. Those who fail in neoliberal society make themselves feel responsible and ashamed, instead of questioning the system. They direct the aggression on themselves and do not become critics of the system or the economic model, but rather persons who are depressed for taking on the full weight of failure.

Han [15] proposes the rupture between Foucault’s biopolitical theory, based on the domain of the individual by the body, and the new phase of capitalism, i.e., emotion capitalism, which is the raw material of this new model. The current power system controls the individual’s psyche, in the same way as the control model used by Christianity, which controls the followers by their own mind, encouraging martyrdom and self-pity, imprisoning their mind at the same time as it preaches false freedom. In this era of society, only the capital, which explores, governs and feeds on images, data, information and emotions, is free to circulate the world and transform the psychic force into a work force (Figure 1).

As an example of this new technological data market, we can mention advertisements, which appear to us right after accessing an online sales website. The product usually appears in the advertising area of Facebook, or Instagram, or even in the Web browser. It is not necessary for the user to visit a website, however; if they try on a shoe at a physical store, the GPS on their mobile device will inform their location and propose shoes for the user’s profile. There are also advertisements that are suggested on social media platforms due to the capture of sound information by smartphones.

New communication and information technologies have been assimilated by the market, creating a digital economy that circulates capital through the sale of data; examples include the data sales scandal on Facebook (2018), the presidential elections in the United States and Brazil, which involved massive use of artificial intelligence. Power groups linked to financial capital use the new possibilities of ICTs to influence political elections, democracies, and people’s ways of living, mainly because they use and apply the complexity of academic knowledge for domination purposes.

Han [15] views a possible way out of the civilizational crisis that we are experiencing in art and contemplation. Art is a possible way out to find other narratives to live the Self, to better understand the world and its functioning, and to acquire self-knowledge. The author states that, in order to live better, moments of idleness are necessary, with deep reflections on our lives – moments when we do not exploit ourselves.



Figure 1.
Control devices (2021).

We understand that social, political, cultural and economic issues are directly linked to photographic production today and are not able to divide these matters, as contemporary photography could only exist due to technological, scientific and artistic evolution. Because it is a hybrid language, it continues to evolve and is used in artistic production in an intelligent search for criticisms of this system, it being understood that the system dominated the minds of a large portion of the population, which mocks the resistance, which, in this case, would be beneficial to themselves.

4. Conclusions

We understand that photography has accompanied the cultural, political and socioeconomic changes experienced by society in the past three centuries. These transformations, by integrating the sociopolitical system as the creator of images of power, contribute to the cultural construction of a homogenized society. In contrast, we propose a reflection on reality and society through artistic photography, as a solution for creating alternative realities based on the thinking of the tripod of author and co-author, individual and society, and observer and image.

Through this brief bibliographic survey on the cyberspace and social relations in contemporary times, we have sought to explain the current context and conjuncture of documentary and artistic photographic creation and how these images have been used as a means to homogenize behaviors and transform them into data. Such data is then monetized and sold by large technology companies to multinational conglomerates and political-electoral campaigns, directly influencing democracy. We also demonstrate that there is an Image System that induces people to offer their data of their own initiative, and that Image System feeds itself back. Our goal was not to exhaust the subject, but rather to provoke the reader into facts that are inherent in our society. We seek to show, through authors from different areas, that there is a dense social transformation that directly influences social reorganization through the power that images and their representation exercise on humanity. We also seek to demonstrate that the status of the image is being changed and that, consequently, the status of the observer is also changing. The images are no longer linked to the truth, but rather to a fictitious representation. All of this has a direct bearing on issues related to cybersecurity and cyber warfare since, through the image system, people give their data of their own initiative, sometimes causing damage to themselves.

In coming studies, we will deepen the discussion on the production of contemporary images – the photography produced by mobile phones – explaining and exemplifying how they have played an active role in science and in the construction of regimes of truth and power. Photography has converged, in terms of media and culture, maintaining itself as the main image-producing device in both modernity and postmodernity.

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