Polyphemus' Eye
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The giant with a single eye is, in fact, just a poetic reference that takes us from those times of Ulysses to our day. Certainly, many things have changed since then. One of them has been the state of sophistication of that giant, in other words the sociopolitical and economic system in which we are immersed, as he observes us, his eye constantly on the watch. His is an electronic impersonal eye that is the one of the systems of surveillance.

When we talk about an eye, we would do better to speak simply of just a vivisectionate brain fed on its decision-taking by thousands of tiny eyes and ears. On the one hand there are the almost omnipresent surveillance cameras; on the other hand, the systems of telephonic listening, right down to the tiny microphones that pick up all kind of conversations. And, further than that, with the development of the informatics networks, our body and, with it, our public and private activity appear permanently deconstructed and regenerated, like a digital Frankenstein made of small fragments, of indications that, of course, can be used against us.

It has been said that, on matters of security, what differentiates between a democratic system and a dictatorial system is that repression is exercised with much subtler, almost imperceptible methods. This statement immediately makes us reflect on the limitations of freedom in a democratic system. Surveillance gives us security within the system, but at the same time supervises — potentially all the time — social and intimate activity that ought to be presided over by the assumption of innocence. The systems of surveillance would, according to these reasonings, be the practical limits of the system of freedom. The impunity of the "voyeur" would be confronted in them with the one eye thatin its turn scrutinizes him.

But while the "voyeur" is a private eye that looks at the potentially forbidden and is, therefore, dangerous, the systems of security are the public eye that spies as continually as it does indifferently. It doesn't select the individual: everything comes under its lens quite indiscriminately. The impersonality that the system tries then to mix for its own profit with objectivity, is its distinctive feature. In the same way, the microphone or the ear-piece of the bugged telephone accept all kinds of messages and, as we know, there are technological tools that allow conversations to be intercepted and a great number of them to be simultaneously recorded. They are deterrent weapons that protect certain interests, as opposed to other weapons that are there -in the best of cases- for accumulating evidence on how a crime against property or against physical integrity was committed.

While the crime is committed, the electronic eye or ear capture it, but the human eye and ear are the ones to interpret the facts. But here we are no longer talking about the gaze of the "voyeur". It's a purely professional gaze — or listening-in. People are more and more afraid of meeting someone's eye, but they accept without question being submitted to the scrutiny of the surveillance professionals. And when they decide themselves to scrutinize the movements or actions of others, they prefer to do so from a technological watch-tower, as do the professionals. This is then from the anonymity of the Internet, from the TV "reality shows", from the ever-open "hot" lines with the news of radio stations. The "voyeur" can be arrested "in flagranti", but not the televiewer, for whom the system extends security status that, like a protective cloak, has to take in all social groups, whether or not they wish to be protected.

So interactivity is the calculated risk of a fairground chamber of horrors. True interactivity is linked to the risks of horizontal dialogue. On the interactivity of the technological systems there is previous decision-taking that refers to vertical design, hierarchicized. It's another track

of the systems of security, a "ludic" corollary of the technology that serves them. To put it another way: the electronic technology serves as a tool of control and as a space of evasion. The convicted individual is escaped at the same time that he or she is controlled, the mor they are controlled, the more they escape.

Space of evasion and space of invasion. If the cultural industry has provided us with appropriate products for invading more spaces for evasion each time, while our living space finds itself more and more invaded by the systems of surveillance, what can art do? How should it respond? Polyphemus met Ulysses, and the giant Goliath the far smaller David. Should it be the task of the artist of our days to generate what some call "a context and a content that would displace the strategies of the technoculture of reduction of knowledge and of communication to the information transmitted by the media"? If this is so, art should be able to clean up with the prejudices and bad habits of the eyes and the ears of the people. We all could be like Ulysses, in that case, because our contemporary Polyphemus will end by noticing that we are all conscious of his look, when we look at him consciously, when he looks at us and through his look discovers the falseness of the answer.