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Governmentality, Science and the Media. Examining the “Pandemic Reality” with Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the legitimization process of the public health preventive measures implemented in many Western countries following the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak. Through concepts such as governmentality, disciplinarization and security mechanisms proposed by Foucault, we trace some of the basic principles and implications of the relationship between biopower and medicine, as well as the media dissemination of an official narrative on scientific truth. These reflections are complemented by the contributions of Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard reflects on the relationship between science and a “performative game”, whose own staging is the core of its criteria of truth. Baudrillard shows the relevance of a “hyperreality” in which the signs presented by the media take precedence over the experience of the subjects. We argue that a mediatized version of science, defined through a strong disciplinarization of knowledge and the censorship of dissident voices, played a key role in the establishment of consensus and the legitimization of policies that granted extraordinary power to governments and transnational elites. Although the work of Foucault in this demonstration is essential, the contributions of Lyotard and Baudrillard provide additional elements to understand a fundamental problem: the public acceptance of “truth” as an instrument of governmentality on a global scale.

Keywords: Governmentality, pandemic, legitimation, scientific debate, biopower.

INTRODUCTION

Since the World Health Organization –WHO– declared in March 2020 that there was a “pandemic” caused by a new coronavirus (Sars-Cov-2), governments around the world imposed a series of “public health preventive measures”, including, first and above all, mandatory lockdowns of entire populations, which were justified according to the

predictions of the "experts" –notably the mathematical models of a team co-sponsored by the WHO and led by Neil Ferguson at the Imperial College, London.¹

At the same time, government officials, as well as most of the mainstream media, legacy media and news outlets –hereinafter, the media– constantly disseminated what we call an official narrative that can be summarized as follows: a highly contagious and lethal virus threatened to kill anyone; we could all be infected and pass it on even if we were "asymptomatic"; and there was no effective medicine against the disease, so we should all stay at home as long as possible and wait for science to find a vaccine.

After declaring the "state of exception", "state of emergency" or "state of urgency", depending on the country, governments were able to take decisions ignoring many legal considerations and political debates that are usually indispensable in constitutional democracies.² Government officials were then able to carry out enormous transfers of public money to private companies. Thus, public health measures implied an unprecedented expenditure of state resources and an extraordinarily high level of population control.³ The empty avenues in the normally crowded and hectic cities seemed to be the realization of a "perfectly governed city", a totally "disciplined society", as described by Foucault.⁴

The forecasts derived from the mathematical simulation models were alarming, so governments thought they should spare no effort. Generalized and compulsory lockdowns were presented as urgent and absolutely necessary in March 2020. In China, they were successfully implemented some weeks before. Italy followed the example, then France and many other countries, with very rare exceptions such as Sweden. In the words of the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, the government's absolute priority was "to save lives, *whatever it takes*."⁵ While these types of ideas were disseminated by the media, the people, mired in fear and uncertainty, only had to keep themselves "informed" and act "responsibly".

"To guide" the practices of entire populations in this rapid, unquestionable and generalized way is perhaps the most advanced and extreme expression of what Michel Foucault called governmentality, understood as "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target."⁶ The objective of this article is to present a critical analysis of how this contemporary form of governmentality was legitimized by presenting itself through the media as "scientific" and as the inevitable consequence of "facts" and "reality". This analysis does not imply, of course, denying the existence of the virus or its effects on health, nor is it intended to invalidate all types of preventive health measures. It is an inquiry into the legitimation of power. As

¹ Neil Ferguson et al., "Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand," *Imperial College London*, 4.

² Laurent Mucchielli, *La Doxa du Covid. Tome I* (2022), 45.

³ Carlos A. Gadea and Rafael Bayce, "Coronavirus: una pandemia hiperreal," *Estudios Sociológicos* 39:115 (2021), 215-217.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* [1975] (1995), 198.

⁵ Chloé Hecketsweiler and Cédric Pietralunga, "Coronavirus : les simulations alarmantes des épidémiologistes pour la France," *Le Monde*, March 15 (2020).

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (2009), 108.

Lorenzini⁷ puts it, Foucault invites us to recognize “that power is not good or bad in itself, but that it is always dangerous (if accepted blindly, that is, without ever questioning it)”. Paraphrasing Foucault’s words when he defined the concept of “critique”,⁸ it is important to question the pandemic truth on its effects of power and to question power on its discourses of truth about the pandemic.

According to Rabinow and Rose, government decisions regarding a viral disease constitute “a biopolitical space par excellence”.⁹ Furthermore, it has been observed elsewhere and until very recently (2020) that epidemics (including Covid-19) have favored the development of some forms of political control that make use of blackmailing, censorship and the demonization of the opposition by presenting it as a danger to the integrity of society.¹⁰ During epidemics, one can clearly observe the enforcement of a centralized and comprehensive *medical* knowledge with considerable effects on people’s lives. Biopower, explained Foucault, “made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life”.¹¹ This transformation of lives relies on a discourse of truth which grants legitimacy to government’s decisions.¹²

Governments and their health authorities argued that they were simply “following the science”, but what is that “science” that the rulers followed? This is the contemporary manifestation of the knowledge-power that we are questioning. The executive’s decisions were justified –and even demanded by the public– after the media constantly reproduced the official narrative for several weeks and showed the “scientific data”, the statistics, the epidemiological curves and the numbers, which were supposed to be “indisputable”.¹³ Those were the “facts”; that was the “pandemic reality”.¹⁴

According to the above premises, anyone who questioned the decisions taken by the governments could be branded as “denialist”, “anti-science”, “ignorant”, “conspiracy theorist”, or “irresponsible”. Further scientific debate or political discussion became undesirable and even dangerous. We only had to listen to certain experts with their data and predictions. The humanities, philosophy, or social sciences would have nothing to say here, as if there was nothing epistemic, social or political related to the “management” of this crisis; as if a political decision as extreme, risky, and uncertain as the lockdowns –

⁷ Daniele Lorenzini, “Biopolitics in the Time of Coronavirus,” *Critical Inquiry* 47:S2 (2021), S41.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Qu’est-ce que la critique? Suivi de La Culture de Soi* (2015), 39.

⁹ Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, “Biopower Today,” *BioSocieties* 1 (2006), 208.

¹⁰ Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (2020). For more examples of the abuses of power, particularly in the Global South, see: Mariana Sirimarco, “Entre el cuidado y la violencia. Fuerzas de seguridad argentinas en pandemia y aislamiento,” *Revista de Estudios Sociales* 78 (2021), 93-109.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. 1. The Will to Knowledge* [1976] (1978), 143.

¹² Costas Constantinou, “Responses to Covid-19 as a form of ‘biopower’,” *International Review of Sociology* 32:1 (2022), 29.

¹³ Mucchielli, *Doxa du Covid*, 14.

¹⁴ Epidemiologists who advised governments, however, presented estimates, possible future scenarios which were not at all facts.

considered “draconian” by various analysts,¹⁵ and particularly harmful for poor people in the Global South¹⁶ – did not deserve some kind of discussion.

The analysis presented in this article begins with a revision of Foucault’s work in order to show some relevant examples of how knowledge-power has been constituted. We can thus see how medicine, as part of a disciplinary mechanism, contributes to the process by which biopower penetrates all aspects of human life. On the other hand, we notice that medical science has been subjected to a process of “disciplinarization” by powerful actors on a global scale (such as large corporations and institutions of transnational governance), a process that has been overshadowed by the wide-spread belief that public health measures have nothing to do with politics and come from some sort of “independent” and “pure” research.¹⁷

Going beyond the “disciplinary mechanisms”, we explore in a novel way Foucault’s concept of “security mechanism”, which proves to be useful in order to understand the legitimation of specific policies and the important role of the media in this process. That is why the last section of this article presents the thoughts of François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard, who – as Foucault did – delved into the question of language, truth and power. The three thinkers lived in the same period of time (until Foucault’s premature death, of course), and can be considered as important contributors to the French post-structuralist movement. However, Baudrillard and Lyotard explored further the role of contemporary *media* communications and their effects on society.

In modern democracies, governments persistently appeal to expert and distant knowledge, in which we – as consumers of information – simply have to believe. According to Lyotard,¹⁸ the proscenium of that science is the “performative game” of the media, in which the chosen signs reduce complexity to a Manichean duality of efficiency/inefficiency. And if we refer to the importance of the “truth” and “reality” presented by the media, the contributions of Baudrillard are also very relevant. Mathematical models, with their future scenarios, constitute a clear example of the “simulacra”¹⁹ that, preceding reality, supplanting the very possibility of an event, are today, with their added “scientific nature”, an outstanding instrument of governmentality.

WORDS, FACTS AND POWER

To say that power seeks to legitimize itself by appealing to the scientific nature of its decisions is, of course, nothing new. At least since the 19th century, a “good government” is the one which, supposedly, listens to science and molds its decisions accordingly. Even neoliberalism has been presented as a set of recommendations based solely on science.

¹⁵ Lars Gjerde, “Governing Humans and ‘Things’: Power and Rule in Norway During the Covid-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Political Power* 14:3 (2021), 472-492.

¹⁶ See, for example: <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/pandemic-prompts-rise-poverty-levels-unprecedented-recent-decades-and-sharply-affects>. See also: <https://razonpublica.com/pobreza-abandono-ninos-adolescentes-la-pandemia-una-tragedia-callada/>.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception* [1963] (2003), 51-52.

¹⁸ Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984).

¹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995).

But during this pandemic episode of global governance, the name of science has been evoked in a particularly insistent manner. The extraordinary policies implemented in this period needed a very convincing justification in order to be accepted. A particular type of “hard science” (represented by the natural sciences, virology, or mathematics, amongst others) provided that special justification with its precise data, the numbers (which “never lie”), the statistical projections, and the unquestionable facts.

That is also the manifestation of a growing neoliberal tendency that Rose called “policy as numbers”. Others have noted that “numbers are increasingly used to justify policy priorities. [...] They are] assumed to report 'the facts'; they are seen as authoritative, neutral, dispassionate, and objective”. To believe this, we would have to ignore what sociology of science has empirically unveiled decades ago: that all scientific theorizing (and the “facts” they talk about) is a social construction. “Economic forces [for instance] tie down the researcher both as an independent capitalist and as an employee; in this position it is easy enough to squeeze him so as to extract a fact.” The “reality”, the “facts”, and the statistics presented to us by the authorities in the media are all necessarily “fabricated” by humans. The same must be said about numbers, which are “no more obvious, neutral, and factual than any other form of data. Statistics are socially constructed in exactly the same way that interview data and survey returns are constructed”. So, even “hard science facts” are the product of long chains of “mediations” in which many types of actors intervene. This does not automatically make them false (or fabricated by some malevolent conspirators, of course), but it reminds us that scientific statements are not the same as the objects they speak of, *logos* is not reality, and, to put it in Latour’s terms, “facts” are not “autonomous.”

Having partially inspired the sociology of science referred to above, Foucault noted that we must identify the “conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, [...] the conditions necessary if it is to exist in relation to other objects”. Any scientific discourse establishes some particular categories, defines its objects and, by the same token, it excludes other objects. Power/knowledge establishes categories, distinctions, and separations that are inserted into language and allow for the “appearance” of certain objects which are then taken for granted by the population. In 2020, as the “epidemiological curves” became the reality that we should care about, the “experts” and the media installed in our daily language unusual categories such as “asymptomatic cases”²⁰ and “covid deaths”. The very word “pandemic” (with its fearful connotations) is now widely used to speak about the Covid-19 outbreak, but this is only possible because the WHO recently changed its definition of the word, so the number of cases and the severity of the disease would no longer be relevant.²¹

²⁰ The “asymptomatic” category has important biopolitical consequences. See Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (2007).

²¹ The new definition is very short and simple: “A pandemic is the worldwide spread of a new disease”. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20190926022012/https://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/frequently_asked_questions/pandemic/en/ (accessed November 10, 2022).

Foucault invites us to question precisely what is taken for granted and to put into practice a "*rupture des évidences*"²² upon which we build our knowledge and our consent. He insists that it is not a matter of finding out what is true and what is false (regarding the biological characteristics of a virus, for example); instead, we should be interested in "the connections which can be found between the mechanisms of coercion and the elements of knowledge."²³ It is a matter of unraveling the conditions and processes that allow a "fact" to be accepted as such without being questioned.²⁴

THE EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP OF TRUTH

As we have seen, the pandemic "reality" and the "facts" allegedly came from scientific "experts". This authority "also involves the rules and processes of appropriation of discourse"²⁵. In the midst of power relations, certain individuals or groups seize the "right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices"²⁶.

The United Nations' (UN) Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications (Melissa Fleming) said in an interview organized by the World Economic Forum (WEF) that the UN had worked with Big Tech companies, including Google and TikTok, to control information related to this "pandemic" and to climate change. She also acknowledged that the UN worked with doctors from all over the world, training them on how they should communicate and interact with their local communities. She asserted boldly: "We own the science, and we think that the world should know it".²⁷ Likewise, Anthony Fauci, then the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the United States National Institutes of Health, one of the most media-covered bureaucrats, adviser to the presidency of that country and an important propagator of the official narrative, said: "I represent science", so "if you're attacking me, you're really attacking science. I mean, everybody knows that."²⁸

While the media widely disseminated the words of those "authoritative" voices, public critics were stigmatized and excluded from public debate.²⁹ Big Tech companies and news agencies collaborated in this global crusade for "truth". Moreover, in the task of stigmatizing and discrediting voices not aligned with the official narrative, "fact-checkers" have contributed considerably; they appear to be independent agents who work purely for the

²² Michel Foucault, *Qu'est-ce que la critique?*, 76.

²³ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁵ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 68.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnarHXcGN8M> Minute 47 (accessed May 15, 2022).

²⁸ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-dr-anthony-fauci-on-face-the-nation-november-28-2021/> (accessed July 20, 2022)

²⁹ Mitchell Liester, "The Suppression of Dissent During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 11:4 (2022), 53-76.

sake of truth, swiftly and decisively dismissing what would be false on the Internet.³⁰ We do not really know how they do it, and they do not disclose their research methodology, but their financial sources can be revealed. Reuters, Facebook, Google and Microsoft have their own fact-checkers. Many others work under the umbrella of the International Fact-Checking Network, which is run by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, “a non-profit journalism school whose main financial supporters include Google and Facebook.”³¹ It is not surprising that the opinions of fact-checkers have great visibility in the Google search engine and in Facebook’s social networks. Moreover, many smaller and apparently independent journalistic sites around the world resorted to these fact-checkers to report on the pandemic “reality”.³²

The UN Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications also affirmed that the UN has “worked” with “influencers”, fact-checkers and with Google so that people can only access the “right” information. They wanted to *purify* our “polluted information ecosystems”,³³ and that meant canceling or discrediting anything against the official narrative. Likewise, for the WHO, it was necessary to mobilize resources in order to fight the spread of the, so called, “misinformation” since the beginning of 2020.³⁴ Correspondingly, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube have made considerable efforts to suppress videos, messages and personal accounts that presumably contradicted the governments and health authorities.³⁵

Through these types of initiatives (which surely require considerable amounts of money), many of us could, at first, believe that there was a total consensus on this pandemic “reality”.

But the apparent unity of a discourse, Foucault warned,³⁶ should not be confused with the absence of disputes, contradictions and exclusions that existed before a discourse is imposed. Although many critiques against the official narrative were based on claims which could not be scientifically proven (and some of them were simply lies favoring a political party), it is also necessary to recognize that many highly qualified scientists were excluded from the public debate after 2020. They questioned the public health measures and many of the fundamental “facts” about this pandemic. Some of their findings can be summarized as follows:

A) The lethality of the virus was much lower than the official numbers disseminated by the media.³⁷ B) Mathematical models used to forecast the evolution of epidemics have

³⁰ In many cases, of course, these fact-checkers and other agents looking for “misinformation” contributed to denouncing clearly false messages, like the ones proposing to inject bleach in the veins to kill the virus.

³¹ Yaffa Shir-Raz, Ety Elisha, Brian Martin, Natti Ronel, Josh Guetzkow, “Censorship and Suppression of Covid.19 Heterodoxy: Tactics and Counter-Tactics,” *Minerva* (1 Nov., 2022), 21.

³² Mucchielli, *Doxa du Covid*, 103

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnarHXcGN8M> (accessed May 15, 2022).

³⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/let-s-flatten-the-infodemic-curve> (accessed October, 2022).

³⁵ Shir-Raz et al., Censorship and Suppression, 9.

³⁶ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1982).

³⁷ John Ioannidis, “Reconciling estimates of global spread and infection fatality rates of COVID- 19: An overview of systematic evaluations,” *European Journal of Clinical Investigation* 51:5 (2021), 1-3.

failed too frequently.³⁸ C) The true causes of all the deaths could not be established with certainty, especially because most of the cases involved elderly people with co-morbidities.³⁹ D) There was not enough rigor to clearly distinguish who died with coronavirus (i.e., with a positive test result) and who really died of Covid-19; this lack of clarity is partly because RT-PCR tests are not suitable for diagnosing a disease.⁴⁰ E) Many people may have died not due to COVID-19 complications but because of the protocols used to treat the disease imposed indiscriminately by medical bureaucracies.⁴¹ F) The protocols and recommendations of the global authorities prevented local doctors from using all their know-how and experience to help the sick.⁴² G) The use of off-label medicines that could have saved lives was rejected.⁴³ H) New rules were established for the completion of death certificates that made Covid-19 appear more frequently as the cause of death.⁴⁴

These types of critical remarks suggest that the official numbers of “covid deaths” could be questioned from a scientific point of view. Therefore, the cost/benefit ratio would not be so clearly in favor of the lockdowns (or, perhaps, many of the other health policies). We now know about the extreme harms caused by the lockdowns, harms which are even greater in the global South, where poverty has drastically worsened due to the limitations imposed by governments⁴⁵. Even Ferguson’s team admitted that their recommendation to “stay home” did not take into account *any* social or economic consequences.⁴⁶

On the contrary, the scientists who pointed out the dangers of the lockdowns, or those who questioned the statistics, the protocols, etc. (as described above), were censored by the media and most of the main social networks;⁴⁷ they were also smeared in their own

³⁸ John Ioannidis, Sally Cripps, and Martin Tanner, “Forecasting for COVID-19 has failed,” *International Journal of Forecasting* 38:2, 423–438. It should also be noted that Neil Ferguson’s renowned model was based on “expert opinions” (without references), data from China (no comments on the reliability of this source), and “personal communications”. See Ferguson et al. “Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions,” 4.

³⁹ John Ioannidis, Catherine Axfors, Despina Contopoulos-Ioannidis, “Population-level COVID-19 mortality risk for non-elderly individuals overall and for non-elderly individuals without underlying diseases in pandemic epicenters,” *Environmental Research* 188 (2020), 109890.

⁴⁰ Christian Perronne, *Les 33 questions auxquelles ils n’ont toujours pas répondu* (2022). See also Karina Reiss and Sucharit Bhakdi, *Corona, False Alarm?: Facts and Figures* (2020).

⁴¹ John Leake and Peter McCullough, *The Courage to Face COVID-19: Preventing Hospitalization and Death While Battling the Bio-Pharmaceutical Complex* (2022).

⁴² Russell Blaylock, “COVID Update: What is the truth?,” *Surgical Neurology International* 13:167 (2022), 1–14. See also Laurent Mucchielli, *La Doxa du Covid* (2022).

⁴³ Paul Alexander et al. “Early multidrug treatment of SARS-CoV-2 infection (COVID-19) and reduced mortality among nursing home (or outpatient/ambulatory) residents,” *Medical Hypotheses* 153 (2021), 110622.

⁴⁴ David Armstrong, “The COVID-19 pandemic and cause of death,” *Sociology of Health & Illness* 43:7 (2021), 1614–1626.

⁴⁵ See, for instance: <https://www.oxfam.org.nz/news-media/media-releases/covid-vaccines-create-9-new-billionaires/> (accessed May 1, 2022), and <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-chief-warns-hunger-pandemic-covid-19-spreads-statement-un-security-council> (accessed November 15, 2021).

⁴⁶ Ferguson et al. “Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions,” 2.

⁴⁷ Carlos Cáceres, “Unresolved COVID controversies: ‘Normal science’ and potential non-scientific influences,” *Global Public Health* 17:4 (2022), 622–640.

academic communities and attacked by some official institutions.⁴⁸ A case that illustrates this problem is “The Great Barrington Declaration”. Despite being written by highly recognized researchers in the field of public health, with outstanding careers at universities such as Oxford, Harvard and Stanford, this declaration was ignored by public health authorities, and its authors were stigmatized, called “fringe doctors”, and canceled from social networks because they questioned the convenience of some measures.⁴⁹

All the above-mentioned elements contributed to the delusion that the entire “scientific community”, in a fully consensual manner, agreed with the official narrative and had no doubts about the “facts”, the statistics, the curves and the recommendations given by the authorities. Furthermore, when the governments confidently say to the public that they are just “following science” (and people actually believe it), they seem to refer to an abstract, fictitious entity –which we will write hereinafter with a capital S–, a unified, indivisible and undisputed “Science”, where absolute truth is produced without any political or economic interference. That apparently unquestioned and consensual “Science” was constantly evoked by the media, transnational organizations such as the WHO and the WEF, as well as by local authorities and institutions.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDICINE AND POWER

To understand the relationship between biopower and medicine, it is useful to consider Foucault’s genealogical research into the history of power in the West, particularly the Church’s pastoral power. The pastor governed the subject, guiding his/her thoughts and behavior, leading her/him towards salvation. “To govern” is “to direct”⁵⁰ in a physical sense and “to conduct someone” in the “spiritual sense of the government of souls”.⁵¹

Later, it could be said that “the doctor governs the patient”⁵² by imposing a certain regimen that would lead to health. The concept of “health”, by the way, is related to that of “salvation”. The link is not anodyne or simply etymological. From the eighteenth century on, “health replaces salvation”.⁵³ Consequently, the medical profession “organized like the clergy” and was invested with powers over the body and mind similar to those exercised by the clergy over the souls.⁵⁴

Just as the concept of salvation was an important instrument of power in medieval populations, the concept of health may also be functional to power in modernity. Furthermore, just as the Church’s power was unquestioned by those who imagined it as a quasi-divine, pure and purifying entity, and beholder of sacred truths, Foucault reminds us that modern medical science enjoys a positive image since it is linked to the “great myth of the free gaze, which, in its fidelity to discovery receives the virtue to destroy; a purified

⁴⁸ Ety Elisha et al., “Retraction of scientific papers: the case of vaccine research,” *Critical Public Health* 32:4 (2021), 533-542.

⁴⁹ Yaffa Shir-Raz et al., “Censorship and Suppression,” (2022), 5 (Advance online publication).

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (2009), 121.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 198.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

purifying gaze; which freed from darkness, dissipates darkness”.⁵⁵ Correspondingly, the WHO can take, in a certain way and to some degree, the place that the Church had before. The WHO would be the institution where pure (disinterested) and purifying truths are produced for the world’s salvation.

Thanks to the “medicalization of society”,⁵⁶ medicine has become an instrument of power since at least the 18th century. The power of the biomedical sector has progressively grown, and today it has reached unprecedented proportions. Indeed, according to Rothman, we live today under a “biomedical empire” which is “more powerful than global industry—extending beyond each neoliberal government”.⁵⁷ In these “pandemic times”, its influence on our lives has become more obvious than ever, deepening and expanding a trend that began, as Foucault noted, centuries ago.

Foucault⁵⁸ observed that in the eighteenth century there was a process of homogenization, normalization and centralization of medical knowledge by the State. This modern “disciplinarization of knowledge”⁵⁹ means that truth can be established by centralized structures and pronounced only by certain authorities. The disciplinarization of medicine has been taking place through various strategies that range from the simple imposition of rules and codes to the payment of doctors’ salaries and the financing of their research.⁶⁰

Today, medicine is not only disciplined by the State (as described by Foucault). Most importantly, medicine is subjected to the authority of transnational organizations such as the WHO (or its multiple subdivisions in different regions of the world). However, it must be said that this organization’s decisions depend on those who finance its research and its priorities.⁶¹ Two of the most important donors to the WHO are the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Vaccine Alliance–GAVI (founded and funded by the same Gates Foundation). “Philanthropic” initiatives such as the Gates Foundation are important players in the new forms of power under financial capitalism, influencing the agendas of the organizations they support.⁶² Other “authorities” in the biomedical sector, such as the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or the European Medicines Agency (EMA), are also heavily funded by private capital, mainly by the pharmaceutical companies.⁶³ So, most of the medical research and large clinical trials depend on global capital and its interests. This situation was already there, even before this “pandemic”, as published by former

⁵⁵ Ibid., 51-52.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*, 32

⁵⁷ Barbara Rothman, *The Biomedical Empire: Lessons Learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2021), 25

⁵⁸ Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*.

⁵⁹ For a reference to this concept, see: Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (2003), 174-186.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 48-53.

⁶¹ John Harrington, “Indicators, Security and Sovereignty during COVID-19 in the Global South,” *International Journal of Law in Context* 17:2 (2021), 249–60.

⁶² Linsey McGoey, *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy* (2015).

⁶³ Jon Jureidini and Leemon B. McHenry, “The illusion of evidence based medicine,” *British Medical Journal* 376 (2022).

editors of prestigious journals such as *The Lancet*⁶⁴ or the *New England Journal of Medicine*.⁶⁵

That type of medical research is, however, the source of legitimacy for many public health policies which affect the lives of billions of people, as we saw in 2020. The medical “guidance” of populations is therefore a form of “governmentality”, understood basically as one of “the ways of conducting the conduct of men”.⁶⁶ These capacities go beyond the direct action of the medical doctor on the patients. Doctors and local healthcare providers are “guided” (i.e., governed) by the “information”, the standards and the recommendations coming from organizations such as the WHO.

The power of modern medicine resides partially in its ability to see what common people cannot. Since the 18th century, medicine “anticipated the invisible by means of a visible mapping out”.⁶⁷ The potential of medical forecasting as a technology of governmentality is clearly observed through the case of this pandemic, when the mathematical simulations were presented as indisputable knowledge about a future catastrophe. The “experts” in the media made visible the “pandemic” with the help of very simple and colorful images, graphs and curves. In this way, we were supposed to see and understand this “reality” and the need for the preventive measures.

And with the same mathematical precision, the experts anticipated the end of this “pandemic”. We were first told that once 70% of the population would get vaccinated, we would achieve “herd immunity”, the virus would disappear and “the nightmare” would be over. Those words seemed to be appealing to the myth (referred to above) of “total disappearance of disease in an untroubled, dispassionate society restored to its original state of health”.⁶⁸ This state is reached, in Foucault’s terms, thanks to a “strict, militant, dogmatic medicalization of society, by way of a quasi-religious conversion”.⁶⁹ In our case, we all had to believe in the total medicalization of society as the only way out of “the nightmare”. Any doubt (or lack of faith) would be dangerous, especially if it made other people doubt.

The concept of health is closely related to the concept of security. So, medicalization of society also means, according to our global leaders, the only way to recover our *security*, another key concept within the mechanisms of governmentality, as we shall see in the next section of this article. Later, in 2021, the authorities from the Gavi Alliance,⁷⁰ UNICEF⁷¹ and the WHO⁷² told us that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”. This type of

⁶⁴ Richard Horton, “Offline: What is medicine’s 5 sigma?,” *The Lancet* 385:9976 (2015).

⁶⁵ Marcia Angell, “The pharmaceutical industry. To whom is it accountable?,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 342:25 (2000), 1902-1904.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79* (2008), 186.

⁶⁷ *Birth of the Clinic*, 91.

⁶⁸ *Birth of the Clinic*, 31-32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 32.

⁷⁰ <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/no-one-safe-until-everyone-safe?gclid=CjwKCAjwpKyYBhB7Ei-wAU2Hn2bsiddt5Om9kYJMGiIxcOrzEqGl42F70Fcw0xneWvAgvR1KPz94IZBoCmqcQAvD BwE>

⁷¹ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/no-one-safe-until-everyone-safe-why-we-need-global-response-covid-19> (accessed May 1, 2022)

⁷² <https://www.who.int/news-room/photo-story/photo-story-detail/No-one-is-safe-from-COVID19-until-everyone-is-safe> (accessed May 1, 2022)

sentence was meant to promote the vaccination of every human being. The founder and executive chairman of the WEF, Klaus Schwab, said it more directly: "As long as not everybody is vaccinated, no one will be safe". We must now deepen our reflection on the concept of *security* according to Foucault's contributions.

SECURITY MECHANISMS AND THE MEDIA

The idea of medical (in)security has played a key role in the discourse of influential organizations like the ones mentioned above. Potential risks justified the draconian measures, and we should all obey in order to be safe. Again, the strategy is not new. As Foucault noted, from the eighteenth century, the notions of risk and security provide justification to a particular technology of power: "security mechanisms".⁷³

In principle, security mechanisms, according to a modern *Raison d'Etat*, "have to be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimize a state of life".⁷⁴ This is a technology to govern more and to govern better. "The mechanisms introduced by biopolitics include forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures".⁷⁵ Their goal is to achieve a certain state of life that is considered, by the elites, as desirable. They define the limits of what is "acceptable" and "optimal for a given social functioning".⁷⁶ Thus, when the measurements, statistics and calculations indicate that a certain phenomenon is going beyond the "acceptable limits",⁷⁷ the interventions of the governments (a lockdown, for example) would become legitimate.

Statistics as a tool for biopower, in our current case, should not be understood merely as useful data for elites to take their decisions. Today, populations have received higher degrees of education than in past centuries, so they can read numbers and supposedly understand statistical curves when shown on a T.V. screen. Those numbers and curves, together with the explanations about the "risks", the "safe" or the "acceptable" were presented by the media as the justification for the measures. And just as the Science (referred to above) would be the site for the production of perfect and pure knowledge, statistics enjoy an image of mathematical precision and transparent objectivity. The figures and forecasts related to "Covid deaths" would then be unquestionable. Besides, the statistical curves showed –again, with the unmistakable clarity of a red line on our screens– that in the future those deaths would reach an "unacceptable" number, so we should have to do "whatever it takes" (like Macron said) to "flatten the curve".

Along with the establishment of the limits of what is (un)acceptable, as we have seen, the notion of "risk" is crucial for security mechanisms.⁷⁸ Nowadays, thanks to the media, this notion is to be communicated to the people, who then have to believe that there is a

⁷³ We will use this expression as equivalent to "mechanisms of security" or "security apparatuses", which are also used in different English versions of the original texts, and correspond to the French expressions of "mécanismes de sécurité" or "dispositifs de sécurité".

⁷⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 246.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 246

⁷⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 56-75.

threat; a “real risk” that can only be avoided if they behave in a certain way. This is how security mechanisms serve the purpose of “conducting the conducts”.⁷⁹ There was nothing more instrumentalized by governments and the media than the notion-emotion of risk during this “pandemic”. As regards the new coronavirus, the perceived risk was maximized by the media. All public attention was focused on one object, and nothing seemed to be more important in social life in 2020.

Security mechanisms developed together with the liberal (and capitalist) praise of freedom.⁸⁰ Under this technology of power, people are meant to move according to their own will, but they are governed (conducted or directed) through the modifications of the environment in which they live. This is why security mechanisms may seem less coercive than disciplinary devices, and for that very reason they may be more successful (and less noticed by self-appointed “critical thinkers”) in our liberal modernity. Security mechanisms “will try to plan a milieu in terms of events or series of events or possible elements, of series that will have to be regulated within a multivalent and transformable framework”.⁸¹ They try to influence the movements of populations by changing their “milieu”, and they are based on the study of causal relations: a change somewhere in the milieu will cause a certain effect somewhere else. It is about knowing, “through calculation, analysis, and reflection”,⁸² precisely what type of interventions will have a certain effect on populations and their movements.

Security mechanisms modify not only natural elements (by building roads or flooding fields, for example) but also any “elements of reality” related directly or indirectly to populations.⁸³ In our actual world, the milieu in which we live is filled with new information and communication technologies. We spend an increasing amount of time consuming data in front of our screens. This new, mediatized and digitalized milieu can be understood through the concept of the “infosphere”, as proposed by Luciano Floridi. The infosphere is the informational environment in which we spend more and more time, and which is characterized by the growth of the digital space;⁸⁴ the infosphere includes alphanumeric texts, statistical data, hypertexts, pictures, mathematical formulae, video clips, etc.⁸⁵

Considering that the security mechanism makes calculated changes to the milieu, some interventions in the infosphere can be a contemporary manifestation of this technology of power. In the context of this pandemic, some calculations would lead us to think that it was necessary to “flood” the infosphere with certain contents so that people would freely behave as the elites expected. An example of such calculations took place during “Event 201”. Held at the end of 2019, this event brought together a group of powerful

⁷⁹ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 186.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-48.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁸⁴ Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality* (2014).

⁸⁵ Betsy Van der Veer Martens, “An illustrated introduction to the Infosphere,” *Library Trends* 63:3 (2015), 317-361.

organizations, such as The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security,⁸⁶ the WEF and the Gates Foundation. They carried out a drill to establish the global measures that would be necessary in case a very dangerous virus, capable of spreading via the respiratory tract, would spread throughout the world (something surprisingly similar to what the media presented to us a few weeks later). As a result of the analysis and calculations made at this event, it was recommended to develop "the ability to flood media with fast, accurate, and consistent information",⁸⁷ in order to achieve global compliance to the measures and thus guarantee the security of the planet.

As we know, such "flooding" with an official narrative indeed took place from the beginning of 2020, involving not only the media but also many "alternative", "liberal" news outlets, social media platforms, and communication networks of all sorts. All of them "worked" with the UN and the WEF in a joint crusade to put Science and the "right information" in all our communication devices. We saw practically nothing else for months, and from the start of the lockdowns, it was very improbable to see any other points of view or critiques. Everywhere we looked, there was the same type of information. For instance, when we searched for information on quite unrelated topics, Google provided images, numbers or descriptions according to the official narrative. Even the *Google Maps* application showed official information on the pandemic, although we were just looking for an address.

LYOTARD AND BAUDRILLARD: LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND POWER

We have seen, with Foucault, some of the mechanisms which fuse the official narrative (presented as the only truth) and the exercise of power. In particular, how the security mechanisms allow setting complete control of an environment for a population. This line of thinking faces us with concepts related as "simulacra", defined for its capacity to replace the reality for its operational signs; and "performative game", the truth criteria of which depend on its own scope to unfold before the public. So, Lyotard notes that for the State or the capitalist partners of multinational companies, "scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power".⁸⁸ On the other hand, the philosopher warns, science no longer finds its sacred enclosure in the university cloister; nor does it find its epistemic foundation, its legitimization, in philosophy, and its "decision makers" are no longer those of early modernity.⁸⁹ The displacement of this legitimizing element on which science rests in contemporary society lies at the core of the radical changes of strategy, scope and main actors that came into play during this "pandemic".

⁸⁶ Funded by the Gates Foundation. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_%26_Melinda_Gates_Foundation (accessed November 1, 2022).

⁸⁷ <https://www.centerforhealthsecurity.org/our-work/exercises/event201/recommendations.html>

⁸⁸ Jean Francois Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 46.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

The question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government.⁹⁰ For media Science (the Science presented to us by the media) as an instrument of power, what matters is its “performance”. The strength of that turn is evidenced in the language game that has been privileged; the performative staging anchored in the “sensationalism” that subordinates and contains the language games of the true (denotative) and the fair (prescriptive) and exploits them through another type of town crier. The effigy of the certifier placed in the university cloister can no longer face a gigantic, mediatized staging.

A crude proof of this: what do scientists do when they appear on television or are interviewed in the newspapers after making a “discovery”? They recount an epic of knowledge that is in fact wholly unepic. They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of the media, but also on the scientist’s sentiments.⁹¹

When the performative game of language is privileged, we face the installation of a hermetic and inscrutable order, a tautological and circular form of totalization and totalitarianism, a form of “terror” –in the words of Lyotard⁹²– in which all entities fit perfectly into the puzzle and nothing is questionable. The same media are the ones that provide the proof of their truth, which depends on its translatability into the simplified journalistic format and, in this way, becomes credible to the consumer public. Great scientific rigor (and even extreme secrecy) is practiced when it comes to discovering truths that will contribute to the development of technology (vaccines, for instance), but to open the debate (indispensable in science) about a global health policy does not seem desirable. The Science, precise (mathematical), triumphant, perfectly complete and immune to any criticism, is a very useful image for the State, as noted by Lyotard: “The state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the State’s own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to obtain the public consent its decision makers need”.⁹³ In a pandemic, it is not appropriate to reflect on the measures; what matters is to “guide” and obey. From this perspective, philosophy and social sciences must keep quiet. They have nothing important to say, and they are not accurate enough; it is the time for technocrats to circumscribe, manipulate and guide as much as possible the flow of events in our lives, which delimit at their convenience the order of the possible.

With Lyotard, we notice that when the governments, local or global, use a statement such as “the population must be confined”, their effect of power coincides with the statement, immediately installing us in the new reality thus created a bleak reality of deserted avenues. Instantly confined, bombarded by the staging of a discourse of performative legitimation, dazed and terrified, isolated from other social realities, our relevant reality is reduced to the screens, and we are fully installed in the bewildering realm of the tautological circulation of equivalent meanings. The postmodern condition is not about the lack of truth. It does not refer to a different period in history, as a naïve reader could think; it

⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁹¹ Ibid., 27-28.

⁹² Ibid., 46.

⁹³ Ibid., 28.

is rather a case of how the legitimization displacement, according to the performative game of truth, has built an impenetrable shell in our global society, subsuming the language's modern games of legitimization (prescriptive and denotative) and locking down the whole population in a global governability with no cracks of dissent. It is also about how totalization, through the translatability of a complex message into media and the spreading of this message in this techno-science era, makes the debate suspect around "Democracy" (with capital letters), and, indeed, it works as a smokescreen.

"The terror" of the consensus channelled by media Science blocks all critical perspectives, describing and explaining "reality as it is", while only allowing the circulation of simplified truths structured with the same speed with which it has elaborated its facts. "Nothing inscribed on these screens is ever intended to be deciphered in any depth: rather, it is supposed to be explored instantaneously, in an abreaction immediate to meaning, a short-circuiting of the poles of representation".⁹⁴ We all repeated that simple "reality" on a daily basis; any questioning would be reduced to "denialism".

As we saw in 2020 and 2021, great efforts can be made to ensure that only one universal and definitive Science is imposed in the public space. All kinds of devices were arranged to protect this Science from potential non-aligned scientists. That is why:

Countless scientists have seen their "move" ignored or repressed, sometimes for decades, because it too abruptly destabilized the accepted positions, not only in the university and scientific hierarchy, but also in the problematic. The stronger the "move," the more likely it is to be denied the minimum consensus, precisely because it changes the rules of the game upon which consensus had been based. But when the institution of knowledge functions in this manner, it is acting like an ordinary power center whose behavior is governed by a principle of homeostasis.⁹⁵

The performative characteristic of this privileged type of governmentality implies the decoding of a message in terms of elements of a system of communicable signs: transparent, effective, mass consumable and simple: "if we manage to vaccinate 70% of the population, we will be able to remove our masks", or, "stay home, save lives". The translatability of the message to a communicable code depended, during this "pandemic", on reducing the complexity of the contingent to a system of signs and messages easy to understand by the entire global population. This communication process equates "reality" with measurements and data. This is why Baudrillard raises the question: "If information referred not to events but to the promotion of information itself qua event? If communication were concerned not with messages but instead with the promotion of communication itself qua myth?"⁹⁶

Examining the importance of media communications, Baudrillard proposes the concept of "simulacra", defined by its capacity to replace reality for its operational signs on the screens. We consider that mediatized Science is part of the "precession of the

⁹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (1993), 54.

⁹⁵ Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 63.

⁹⁶ Baudrillard, *Transparency of Evil*, 50.

simulacra”.⁹⁷ The catastrophic scenario that justified the most draconian policies was *first* and above all that of the simulations and mathematical models presented on our screens. In the reduction of meaning to the circulation of significations within a system of signs, as it is the case of mediatized Science, our non-mediatized experiences had to be ignored and be replaced by the duplication of its operative signs. Most of us were constantly consuming signs of the catastrophe, thereby suffering from the pandemic (and the new pandemic rules) without suffering from the disease. And the (very real) suffering caused by the governments’ measures, such as lockdowns or other mobility restrictions, is still confused with the sign “pandemic”.

“The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory –precession of simulacra– that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map”⁹⁸. We had to rely completely on the map drawn by this mediatized Science in order to move; we had to see nothing but the map to conduct ourselves. “Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all the models based on the merest fact - the models come first [...]”⁹⁹ The mathematical simulations that predicted a terrifying reality of indefinite exponential growth were what we had to look at with total attention and mechanical assent. For the public, everything is framed and manipulated within a “neutral” informational space in an aseptic setting. Local politicians had to follow this “information” and the public opinion thus fabricated. In Baudrillard’s terms, “there is nothing now to protect politicians from the virus of opinion; but nothing protects that opinion from the virus of information”.¹⁰⁰

The numbers, announced by the authorities in the media, were a more perfect, precise and real reality than the reality experienced in our local communities. They were what Baudrillard called the “hyperreality”.¹⁰¹ The growing media coverage – the omnipresence of the infosphere– allows “hyperreality” to prevail. It is a reality more important than anything else, with its truths, its facts; it is intended to cover the entire territory, preventing any other perceptions, perspectives or experiences. Behind each piece of information, an event disappears, and virtuality covers the territory. “It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double”.¹⁰²

In 2020, there was a hyperreality vociferated as “scientific”.¹⁰³ This hyperreality then turned into the daily rumor of the people themselves, becoming common sense and public opinion. “The magnified impression of a catastrophe goes viral. [...It is the] social construction of an excess believed to be scientific and prudent”.¹⁰⁴ Paradoxically, people

⁹⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Screened Out* (2002), 173.

¹⁰¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 4

¹⁰³ Gadea and Bayce, “Coronavirus: una pandemia hiperreal,” 228. [Our translation].

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

sought to alleviate the anxiety and uncertainty generated by the media by consuming more information in the media. In this way, there was a "hyperreal certainty."¹⁰⁵

We also witness here a modern obsession for the emancipation from contingency through control, through the annihilation of an "enemy". The result is not virus control but social control by manipulating the signs of the virus, achieving the most impressive blow of governmentality on a planetary scale. Power depends on virtuality and, among other things, on the capacity –through the model, the map, the simulacrum– to designate the Other, the enemy, the threat. "Power exists only as long as it has this symbolic potency".¹⁰⁶

The "Observable Reality" of pseudo-scientific journalism, as Lyotard¹⁰⁷ would call it, is based on the criterion of commensurability, which is inseparable from scientific-technical accumulation, and whose most immediate materialization is its operability. Computer language, translatable into media, is a technical-semantic transformation of the Causality Principle¹⁰⁸ and Sufficient Reason of Philosophy.¹⁰⁹ Only the calculable, the measurable, the computable is "real", and it is precisely so because it can be reduced, totalized and manipulated. We all became *potential* "asymptomatic" threats; we *could* all cause the death of someone else. An apparently scientific language but without any possibility of falsifiability.

Thus, we ask ourselves with Baudrillard: "what can medicine do with what floats on either side of illness, on either side of health, with the duplication of illness in a discourse that is no longer either true or false?"¹¹⁰ It is no longer true or false because the language game that governs it is not epistemic, but performative, and its veracity criterion lies in its efficiency/inefficiency in representing itself, corroborating itself and projecting itself on our screens. The performative efficiency is what matters from a governmentality perspective: statistics were combined with videos of crying doctors and images of hangars full of coffins. The media communicated the horrors and chanted the arrival of our salvation through technological innovation. In both cases, it did not matter much whether their claims were true or false according to the scientific method. It was not necessary to present before the public –not even to the most demanding academic public– any scientific evidence on the general convenience of the lockdowns; why go to the trouble of "the production of proof" in a seamless order of "indisputable truths"?¹¹¹

Without true scientific evidence regarding the causes of the deaths, the media performance of the terrifying figures and projections, together with emotional images and stories, were proof enough to justify the measures. As Baudrillard noted, it is all about credibility, and credibility depends on mediatized information. "Information long ago broke

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 210.

¹⁰⁶ Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 7.

¹⁰⁸ The Causality Principle affirms that all (real) events have a cause. This principle sets a logical relationship between the case and the effect, and it is a classical principle in philosophy and epistemology.

¹⁰⁹ The Sufficient Reason principle states that everything must have a reason or cause. The philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) was its most famous proponent.

¹¹⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 4.

¹¹¹ Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 25.

through the truth barrier and moved into the hyperspace where things are neither true nor false, since everything in the realm of information depends on instantaneous credibility".¹¹² We were *informed* about the "pandemic"; it was there, on the screens, before our eyes, there was nothing to question. "Unlike truth, credibility has no limits; it cannot be refuted, because it is virtual."¹¹³

With the provocative suggestion that the Vietnam War "was finished well before it started, that there was an end to war at the heart of the war itself, and that perhaps it never started",¹¹⁴ Baudrillard did not intend to deny that there were casualties or bombardments in Hanoi by the United States Army but rather indicate the pre-eminence of the simulacra. The Vietnam War is the most represented and representative chapter of China's incorporation into the nuclear order of "peaceful" coexistence. History no longer has to be written after the event; history is written before, it is projected, the narrative is woven, it is built for viewers. The "fact" is controlled in all its characteristics before being an event.

CONCLUSION

The close relationship between medicine and "biopower" was manifested in an extraordinary manner during this "pandemic". Furthermore, the numbers became "reality" and the "Science" evoked and invoked everywhere re-incarnated that "great myth" of free, independent, pure observation, which would also be capable of purifying society and its infosphere. On this basis, policies became unquestionable, and those who dared to question or criticize them were vilified and stigmatized as "anti-science", "ignorant", "denialist", and "a danger" for society.

Beyond the disciplinarization of medicine by organizations such as the WHO and large financial capitals (often "philanthropic"), and beyond the power of medicine to discipline society, we explored here the contemporary expression of security mechanisms. This technology of government intervened ostensibly in our milieu, notably the infosphere. The figures, the data and, in general, the "information" corresponding to the official narrative "flooded" strategically the environment in which we live, thus conducting the conducts of the populations, governing without needing explicit violence. The conjunction of a disciplined medical science at the service of power, with a heavily intervened infosphere, generated a highly effective "media Science" in terms of governmentality. The considerations of the "experts" and the statistics determined our behaviors day after day, invading all aspects of human life. This manifestation of biopower was based on apparently simple and absolute truths. The pseudo-epidemiological language proliferated; the flooding generated consensus and politicians just had to follow.

That Science, as Lyotard points out, is now validated through media performance, and it is the same media that provide the proof of its truth. For the public, the governed population, it is no longer necessary to contrast the model with reality: the data of "media

¹¹² Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, 85.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 27.

Science" are more real than reality. They are a hyperreality pushing us to believe that there was neither the time nor the need to question, counter-balance, debate or dissent.

As we have seen, the critical analysis of health policies has been widely categorized as an anti-scientific stance. Foucault has also been falsely accused in pseudo-academic media of fostering the belief that science is simply a set of statements convenient to elites. But identifying the power relations behind the most widely accepted truths, behind media Science, and what is promulgated by global elites (in the U.N, the W.E.F., the U.S. government, for example), does not lead us to an unscientific position, a postmodern "anything goes", or a post-truth delusion. Perhaps more than ever before, we are governed by "facts" and data, and the most draconian policies have been legitimized by invoking a scientific truth.

This is not a discussion about whether reality exists or not, nor about the subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy, or about the scope, limitations and contemporary relevance of the modern scientific method. Nor is it about debunking all scientific statements as simple manipulations of power. It is about examining the acts of governmentality that seek legitimation through a discourse of scientific truth. That is why we claim Foucault's legacy and his influence on post-structuralists like Lyotard and Baudrillard.

Some elements of post-structuralist criticism are occasionally and superficially used by Trump supporters, adherents to cloudy conspiracy theories, or by relativistic militants of the postmodern Left. But those uses and distorted appropriations cannot invalidate the scholars' profound contributions. We recognize that within science there are statements that can legitimately be considered true. However, what we see with Lyotard and Baudrillard is the importance of performativity and mediatization of a supposedly scientific reality: what we have called a mediatized Science.

The performative statement is totalitarian and totalizing precisely because it is imbued with pretensions of truth, politically correct moralism, and prescriptions immune to all criticism: it is true because it is righteous and necessary. People must not think; they are the material upon which the information and the morality of the precept must resound. To reach levels of governmentality seen in this "pandemic", three elements are needed. In first place, the assent to the "terror" of an absolute scientific truth as described by Lyotard. In other words, they need full and collective assent to the idea that science corresponds to an infallible, unobjectionable and unattainable "reality". There would be no possibility of raising one's head and no objection, because it was said by an all-embracing Science.

The second element is the precession of a homogeneous and universal map (based on that "Scientific reality"). We need to disconnect from, and ignore the territory (even if part of it is our own body); we must constantly observe the digitized map of orbital circulation. The status and function of the mathematical models (simulations) within the security mechanisms help us to understand Baudrillard's concepts and metaphors (which are not always clear). We now have a very clear example of the importance of models and simulations that precede reality and become *more real* than reality.

The third element is the use of that "Scientific reality", that hyperreality, to legitimize total governance. The terrifying projections of Science would justify our assent and

submission. In the face of extreme fear provoked by the media, we sought security (salvation), and the rulers provided it with extreme measures. All political opposition (as it is necessary in a democracy) was neutralized by calling it “anti-scientific” and “irresponsible”. Thus, we are exposed to the despotism of a biopower which presents itself as Science, hiding its political dimension and, by the same token, impeding democratic debates on decisions that affect the lives of most of us.

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