Guest Editor's Note

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The notion of 'power' in Foucault's theory is construed not as an 'object' but as a 'relation'. Power is exercised on to the social body through vision; and culture is a field where 'power' is exercised. Political regimes constantly turn to the arts to promulgate ideology and consolidate power. Or they engage publics in social initiatives with symbolic and material consequences by the use of familiar visual and mental mechanisms.

Based on concrete ideological structures, visual and oral incentives allude to the observer meanings and interpretations about reality, social relations, social groups and their systems of values. Power relations are almost invisible social mechanisms inasmuch they are perceived as a natural way of leaving and thinking; and, definitely, they deter the ability to analyze the real factors and agents behind everyday phenomena. Even more, they obscure their expediencies and implications. Foucault comments on the direct line connecting power and knowledge whilst Bourdieu points towards those who hold symbolic cultural capital as the sources and modulators of mental dispositions and behaviours.

The current crisis of the capitalist and the neoliberal system questions fundamental beliefs and redefines the visual carriers of power. The media, in the whole of their vast spectrum, photojournalism, photography, cinema, art, fashion, advertisement, spaces of culture are, among others, the first to reflect the radical changes around us being carriers of the new values. At the same time, during a transitional period, they reflect – and function according to – the ongoing previous ideological structures.

How do we see and how do we visually build stereotypes? Could "Occupy Wall Street" movement become a potent symbolic action and recast the way we perceive ourselves and society? How could the media or art react to the new social realities? Will consuming keep on being a means of exercising power?

Mike Featherstone focuses on the visual and visibility as pivotal components of nowadays social life, and unfolds the variety of their manifestations, explicit or implicit, tangible or moral ones. He argues on the different levels and degrees of visibility and disclosure new media are in position to provide, in comparison to the more traditional ones. The operation of internet and other media forms – that aim to profile and effectively manipulate the manners and dispositions of users – is paralleled to Foucault's panopticon and his theory on surveillance and discipline. Featherstone notes the analogies among desire, governance, normalization and consumerism under the light of the new needs emerging since the beginning of the 19th century; and he draws a direct line between the disciplined body and the desired bodily visual projections fabricated by the market and the plethora of media means.

Irini Stathi analyzes the mechanisms of vision and of the construction of images, and raises questions on the complexity of the "being able to see or to be seen" state. She explores the aesthetic and political dimension in the process of seeing and of the visual, and argues on the symbolic power of the latter. Stathi stresses the attention on the power the 'mediated visibility' of visual media hold, and on the abundance of manners they possess to exercise individual and social control through moulding and manipulating thinking patterns and mental dispositions.

Greg Elmer discusses the power of "go public" practice in regard with the revolution of the social media, and comments on their multiple impacts in everyday life. He argues that social media platforms are largely constructed, revised, and designed in the first instance to enumerate the terms of "going public" today. Face book, MySpace, E-Bay, among others, share clustered data-profiles that link users with their friend networks.

In their article William Anselmi and Lise Hogan discuss three films: Jean Cocteau's Orphée (1950), Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) and the recent Hugo by Martin Scorsese are analyzed in terms of how such representations bring to light contemporary questions of power. The power of language as a pivotal means of humanness and the mythical roots of technological objects such as radios, telephones, cars, motorcycles and trains appear to be the communicative transmitters and modifiers of mythological narratives in Cocteau's film back in the 1950s. In 2002: A Space Odyssey what is compelling is the focusing on the creation of self-referential, sentient technology embedded in humanness as an evolutionary stage. Mona Lisa's cryptic smile reappearing in a mechanical being in Hugo raises the question of how has technology integrated humanness so as to inevitably extend and reformulate questions of power.

Ifigeneia Vamvakidou focuses on the structure and aesthetics of the communistic films made about the Greek Civil War by Greek film directors. Narrative structures are interwoven with historical and cultural patterns and social changes of post war Greece. Through these films the Greek civil war is approached as a historic, social and political event where respective ideologies shape their own discourse. The power exercised on the social body derives from the myths fabricated through these narrations and their symbolic allure.

Vicky Karaiskou points at the opening and closing ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and analyzes them as visual manifestations of the country's perception of cultural and national identity. She considers both ceremonies bearing eloquent evidence of the symbolic power which myths, along with ritual representations and orchestrated spectacles, hold in fabricating and enhancing collective memory. She focuses on the visualized collective pride element communicated in the opening event and juxtaposes it in terms of structure, aesthetics, context, iconological components and symbolisms with the closing spectacle.