

Preliminary Reflections on the Visible, the Invisible and Social Regulation: Panopticism, Biopolitics, Neoliberalism and Data Consumption

MIKE FEATHERSTONE

Abstract

Different types of social structure and media, promote different forms of visibility and invisibility. Michel Foucault's influential discussion of the formation of disciplinary societies highlights the importance of panopticism in which inmates are constantly visible, subjected to surveillance and control by invisible authority figures. To better understanding power in today's neoliberal societies, we should also consider Foucault's writings on biopolitics which point to the generation of a new productive form of governance via the invisible forces running through the living mass of population. The new architecture of visibility is also evident in the consumer culture spaces, images and screen culture. Today consumption increasingly takes place in digitalised milieu such as the internet, in which purchases leave traces and create profiles to enable the accumulation of massive data sets which can be made productive by business, yet remain invisible to the vast majority of consumers. At the same time the new digital media such as the internet, also generate a new architecture of visibility with social media sites such as Facebook working off the fear of invisibility.