

## Social Control: a Defence and Reformulation

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Social control in the widest sense has always been and will always be inextricably linked to the existence of the human animal. But while it can justly be regarded as a central, indispensable and omnipresent aspect of social life, from archaic groups all the way to the global village, theoretical efforts directed at the clarification of 'social control' as a concept began only a century ago and have often led to results that seemed to obscure rather than illuminate the objects of study, their history, contexts and perspectives. Hence we find it useful to take a fresh look at the main problems associated with the current use of the term, to attempt to develop a more adequate formulation of the concept, and to try and catch a glimpse of the control mechanisms that are most likely to shape life in the future.

### **A much criticized concept . . .**

The concept of social control – according to its inventor, Edward Alsworth Ross (1866–1951), 'a key that unlocks many doors' – is a child of the twentieth century. Ross first developed it in 1894 'while he sat in an alcove in the Stanford Library during Christmas recess' (Weinberg et al., 1969: xvii), then published a series of articles in the *American Journal of Sociology* (starting May, 1896), and in 1901 made 'Social Control' the title of his most successful book. His attempt to ascertain how people 'are brought to live closely together, and to associate their efforts with that degree of harmony we see about us' (Ross, 1901: 3) was greeted with enthusiasm by many of his colleagues and reform-minded followers. It is also true, though, that Ross himself was not a very systematic thinker and that his concept has remained one of the most elusive and under-theorized ones in the social sciences (for a more detailed account, see Sumner, Chapter 1, in this volume).

### *Vagueness*

The most frequently cited problem with 'social control' is the extreme vagueness of the term – a criticism that had been articulated by Hollingshead as early as 1941 and repeated ever since. According to

Stanley Cohen, social control has become 'a Mickey Mouse concept' that plays a different role in different places, and nowhere a clear one: 'Historians and political scientists restrict the concept to the repression of political opposition, while sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists invariably talk in broader and non-political terms. In everyday language, that concept has no resonant meaning at all' (Cohen, S., 1985: 2). While some scholars use the term in a historically specific way, namely 'in its true Chicagoan sense', involving 'the participation of informed and diverse publics in the construction of associations which are meaningful to those publics and which function to regulate the terrible consequences of unregulated capitalism' (Sumner, Chapter 6 in this volume, see also Melossi, 1990), others use a much more formal approach in which social control designates everything that contributes to the construction and reconstruction of social order (see Hess, 1983a). In addition, while some favour an emphatic, value-laden understanding of the term, in which the very concept of social control is inextricably linked to the vision of a new society which is regulated by itself rather than by state decree (see Sumner, Chapter 6 in this volume), others find it more promising to decontextualize the term from the socio-political messages it carried during the Progressive Era in the United States. While both approaches to a definition of social control do have their merits, it is also certainly true that the use of the term for two different things in the same criminological and sociological discourse requires constant attention if one wants to avoid equivocations and superfluous quarrels. Small wonder, therefore, that many scholars would probably subscribe to the historian John A. Mayer's (1983: 22) statement that the usage of the term social control had rendered it 'more productive of confusion than of meaningful analysis'.

Strange as it may sound, however, vagueness alone is not a sufficient reason to discard the analytical potential of a concept. As a matter of fact, vagueness even seems to be a characteristic trait of practically all central notions in the social sciences and beyond. Just ask a Nobel Prize winning economist about the exact meaning of the term 'money', a famous philosopher about 'truth', or an acclaimed surgeon about a definition of 'health', 'life' or 'death' and, chances are, you will harvest a good deal of embarrassment. In the social sciences, terms like 'structure' and 'social control' are of the same type and abstraction as the above mentioned concepts, and there is no reason why they should not share their paradoxical fate of being both indispensable and irritatingly elusive. While a theoretical clarification is urgently needed, social scientists might be comforted by the fact that they are not the only ones to face this problem, and that other disciplines are faring quite well by using and attempting to clarify their

central notions instead of simply discarding them. In the social sciences, by the way, the term 'structure' started out being exceedingly vague. It was not abandoned though, but progressively clarified (see Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992). We do not see any reason why the term 'social control' should be treated any differently from the equally abstract and vague, but also equally important term 'structure'. Once rescued from being under-theorized, it would allow us to relate to all the problems of social order and would enable criminologists and sociologists of deviance to use it 'to describe and think about most if not all of their field's subject matter, thereby prompting recognition of conceptual and empirical relations that otherwise would go unnoticed'. It would, in other words, serve as a classical 'central notion' of the social sciences (Gibbs, 1989: ix).

#### *Stasis*

Another problem is the concept's awkwardness in relation to social change. Just like the term structure (see Sewell, 1992: 2), the term social control seems to empower what it designates, implicitly transforming into an overwhelming force what otherwise would show the complex and contradictory face of a social conflict. To many critics, therefore, using the term already implies an 'overestimate of the operation of social control' (Stedman Jones 1983: 47) and a far too rigid determinism of social life, resembling a command structure that by definition meets with no effective resistance (see Sack, 1993). The fact that Parsonian functionalism had absorbed 'social control' in the 1950s as 'a set of mechanisms to prevent the origin of strains or to preclude their expression in overt deviation' (Weinberg et al., 1969: li) did not exactly help to avoid such misconception, since this formulation laid all the emphasis on the capacity of social control to maintain a given order. All told, the centrality of the concept to Parsonian thinking rendered it anathema to all those who disliked positivism, functionalism, Parson's style of writing, and conservative politics. And that was, at least in the late 1960s and all of the 1970s, the large majority of sociologists, criminologists and academic professionals in the field of crime, deviance and rehabilitation. Scholars like Stuart Hall et al. (1978: 195), for example, were (and probably still are) convinced that the concept 'cannot designate the significant moments of shift and change'. Neither, they claim, does it 'differentiate adequately between different types of state or political regime', nor does it 'specify the kind of social formation which requires and establishes a particular kind of legal order'.

In spite of its popularity, this criticism is also far from convincing. To identify 'social control' with an emanation from an unrealistically unified and totalized source of power reveals nothing about the term

but a lot about a given writer's blindness with regard to the actual complexity and diversity of social life. One just has to stay aware of the fact that social control complexes intersect and overlap, that there are competing sets of norms and values, and that each and every set of control mechanisms is bound to interfere with and to be relativized by many others. To recognize the necessary imperfection of social control is to understand that the processes of social control and of social change are not mutually exclusive, but completely interdependent. If Hall et al. (1978) also find it unsatisfactory that the term 'social control' does not differentiate between different types of state or political regime, one might feel justified to ask if they require the same from the term 'structure' – or, for that matter, from their own terms such as 'state', 'political regime', 'social formation' or 'legal order'. The right answer would be that the most general concepts are not designed to differentiate in themselves, but to allow for differentiations on lower levels of abstraction. The particular usefulness of terms like 'structure' and 'social control' lies in their potential to allow differentiations between, for example, the structure of feudal and that of capitalist societies as well as between the dominant means of social control in one society and in the other – including the detection of turning points from one kind of control to the other. In short: concepts like structure or social control are not made to designate moments of shift and change, but to allow for comparisons as well as for the detection of these moments.

#### *Law and state bias*

In its original version and during the first decades of its existence (including its functionalist understanding), the concept of social control was concerned with such pervasive and 'active' forces like public opinion, religion, traffic regulations and socialization. It was only in the 1960s that Clark and Gibbs (1965) advanced a reformulation of the concept that intentionally reduced its scope to 'reactions to deviance'. The argument they advanced at the time was not theoretical, but pragmatic. Their intention was to build a new specialized sociology, a field of study and research that was to be called 'the sociology of social control', modelled after such fields as the sociology of labour relations, of sports, of education, and the like. In Clark and Gibbs's own words, their definition represented 'first and foremost an attempt to give the field an independent and meaningful subject matter' (1965: 402). For this purpose they thought it unwise to use the broader concept of social control, since that would make it difficult to draw a clear line between the special branch of sociology they had in mind and all the rest of sociology. Since this proposal coincided with the growing popularity of the social reaction approaches to deviance

(labelling theory, stigmatization, secondary deviance, criticism of legal institutions and procedures) their reformulation became a great success, although, one must add, the amount of theoretical work invested in both the reformulation and its discussion were rather modest. But be that as it may, everybody in the field seemed to be happy with the new formulation, using it in their studies ever since. The narrow concept, therefore, gave rise to a whole body of literature that was mainly concerned with the juvenile justice system, the police, legislation, the courts and corrections. It was only then that the concept acquired its bias in favour of easy-to-see and easy-to-define institutions like the police, the law, courts and prisons.

The disadvantages of this procedure became clear when the sociology of deviance turned its attention to forms of control much more subtle than the law and the criminal justice system; when scholars like Michel Foucault revealed the paramount importance of the forces of 'normalization', and when feminist research showed that control over women's behaviour was not generally dependent on legal institutions and formal interventions, but rather on the genderized formation of desires, role models, and dreams – phenomena that are hard to reach with an analytical tool that normally only spotlights handcuffs, police interrogations, shotguns and correctional institutions. The definition that Clark and Gibbs had given to the term social control proved incapable of recognizing the relevant aspects of 'the complex and contradictory relationship of women to the state and law', as Chunn and Gavigan (1988: 110, 120) observed. But there is no reason to follow Chunn and Gavigan's advice to abandon the concept altogether. This would throw out the baby with the bathwater, since the unfitness of one definition of a term does not imply the unfitness of all definitions. In other words: to meet Chunn and Gavigan's justified requirements, it would be enough to reverse the step taken by Clark and Gibbs in the 1960s, and to re-open the concept for a broader understanding. Such a revised understanding of social control would have to incorporate 'active social controls' (Lemert) and the 'productive, pastoral' power (Foucault), since it could no longer deny their basic relevance. Or, as Dario Melossi says, 'Our desires, our moral choices, our identification with role models, images, heroes, are indeed the ways in which we are controlled' (Melossi, 1990: 170). We will show later on in our discussion what such a systematic reformulation could look like, and how it could serve as an analytical tool in the analysis of the very subtle proactive processes that produce conformity.

#### *Euphemism*

Some scholars argue that the term 'social control' is really less an analytical tool than a treacherous euphemism used to conceal the

brutality of the fact that there are, for example, many countries in which 'social control' is being exercised by torture, public executions, massacres and the like. A pale term like social control does little to denounce such practices. It rather conceals than reveals them. They contend that one should be as explicit as possible rather than using innocent-sounding abstractions of a deceiving neutrality. It is for these reasons that Heinz Steinert (1995) and Fritz Sack (1993) argue for a replacement of the concept of social control by politically more meaningful terms such as 'social exclusion' or 'social discipline'. A closer look at the substitutes, though, reveals that they are more explicit simply because they are less abstract, designating specific types of social control instead of the totality of the production of conformity and the reaction to deviance. Social exclusion is just one class of reactions to deviance (the other being 'social inclusion', that is, intensified attempts to integrate the person in question), and it is hard to see how a concept that is part of a larger one should be able to replace the more abstract notion without damaging its theoretical potential. Similar problems arise when one considers a replacement of the term by 'social discipline', or '*Sozialdisziplinierung*' as Gerhard Oestreich (1969) had called the making of modern occidental man during the reign of European baroque monarchies. While it may be true that this period deserves more attention because of its vital importance for the formation of modern 'social characters', it is hard to see how such a specific term could ever serve the ends of a category like 'social control' (which, through its very level of abstraction, has to cover all historical phases and cultural peculiarities). Again, an analogy to the term 'structure' may be of help: while there is no way to deny that some social structures produce more violence (structural and other) than others, it would probably be counter-productive to ban the term 'structure' with the allegation that the term itself is a euphemism designed to conceal the brutality and loss of lives that some of these 'structures' engender.

#### *Sloppy use*

In spite of the concept's vagueness (or maybe because of it) there has been an inflationary tendency towards what David Rothman called 'sloppy use' of the concept in a flood of publications proclaiming that this or that movement or institutional reform served the ends of 'social control'. According to Rothman:

To attach the label of 'social control' to these institutions and to let the matter rest there hardly represents an advance. Taken by itself, the label is often redundant: what else are prisons if not institutions for control? Or it is too encompassing: is not every institution, from the family to the office place, an institution of social control, either an agent of socialization (in

the Mead–Ross tradition) or an agency of coercion (in the Cloward–Piven tradition)? And social control by whom? For what purpose? And why in this form rather than in another? If once it was fashionable to think every process of social change could be explained by reference to ‘status anxiety’, one can detect signs of a new fashion, labelling every institution an institution of social control. (1983: 113–14)

While this criticism certainly fits the facts (especially for a tendency in the 1970s), it is not necessarily a good argument for the abandonment of the concept as such, but rather an admonition that should be directed to all students, scholars and researchers – one that applies not only to the theatrical misuse of the concept of social control, but also to that of ‘power’, ‘structure’, ‘capitalism’ and the like. Put in other words: if one were to give up every concept that has been subject to inflationary and sloppy use, the social sciences would instantly become speechless.

#### **... but nevertheless a key concept**

Most arguments advanced against the usefulness of social control as a concept seem to rule out the possibility of saving it by yet another reformulation. Taken at face value, they seem to be directed against the very concept itself (that is, all possible meanings). But when examined more closely, they only apply to the unfortunate, albeit widespread definition invented by Clark and Gibbs in the mid-1960s, who indeed intended to narrow it down to ‘reactions’ to deviance. The bulk of criticism stops at this point, taking the Clark and Gibbs version of the term as the final point in the concept’s history. Remarkably, nobody seems to deal with the possibility of elaborating a more consistent, theoretically more sound and more systematic reconstruction of the term. In our opinion, though, there is no reason to discard such a possibility a priori. After the pragmatic reformulation by Clark and Gibbs, it is now time to venture a systematic reconstruction of the concept. Such a revision should enable the concept to cover a theoretically (instead of only pragmatically) defined subject matter. It should allow for the investigation of proactive and subtle ways of shaping human behaviour. It should not make it seem an awkward exercise to deal with social change. And it should go without saying that it should be designed in a way that encourages analytical and discourages sloppy (that is, merely rhetorical) use.

In our opinion, the solution to the pressing conceptual problems of social control, therefore, does not lie in its abandonment, but in its theoretically sound, non-contradictory reformulation. The concept should be reconstructed at a high level of abstraction so it can serve as a central notion in criminology and the sociology of crime and deviance. Seen as

a basic concept that sheds light on the regulation of behaviour and the dialectic between change and order, it will be comparable to terms like ‘economy’, ‘structure’, ‘religion’ or ‘kinship’. ‘Social control’ will help in the analysis of all social contexts by focusing on their particular control mechanisms.

As we will propose to use it, the concept is ahistorical. This is not because we want to ignore historical differences, but because the notion of social control – just like that of ‘kinship’ – must be abstract enough to encompass all historical situations in order to make historical comparisons possible. Thus, ‘social control’ must be ahistorical as a general term in order to be useful as a tool in the analysis of all specific historical situations. Any concept that is ‘historical’ in the sense of being applicable only to one historical situation would, by definition, not be able to serve that universal purpose. Indeed, this argument has been acknowledged by the majority of social scientists who will try to work with the concept. When Black speaks of social control as ‘all the practices by which people define and respond to deviant behavior’ (Black, 1984: xi), and when Horwitz (1990: 1) sees social control as ‘the aspect of society that protects the moral order of the group’, they implicitly envisage such an ahistorical definition. If the study of social control is constituted by ‘What people consider to be right and wrong and how they act when their notions of justice are violated’ (Horwitz, 1990: 1), then social control is bound to occur in ‘primitive’ as well as the most ‘advanced’ societies, thus enabling the researcher to start her or his comparative studies from this central and ahistorical notion. The problems with Black’s and Horwitz’s notions are not that they are not universally applicable, but that they either lack precision or are biased in terms of focusing on ‘morality’. As far as Black’s definition is concerned, it makes one wonder if and how the prevention of deviant behaviour is to be included in the study of social control. And as far as Horwitz is concerned, just consider activities that only intend to protect the moral order of the group (but do not succeed); consider the question if social control only applies to a ‘group’ (and if one can justly consider ‘society’ to constitute merely another ‘group’); and consider the possibility of a given group just ‘protecting’ or ‘advancing’ its ‘interests’ instead of a superior ‘moral order’ – does it not also exercise ‘social control’?

Because of these and other doubts about Black’s and Horwitz’s definitions, we believe it to be useful to work out a new and more systematic definition. While the theoretical foundations of our own concept will become clearer in the course of the argument laid out in this chapter, our definition may already be spelled out here. We use the term ‘social control’ to refer to all social (and technical) arrangements, mechanisms, norms, belief systems, positive and negative sanctions

that either aim at and/or result in the prevention of undesired behaviour or, if this has already occurred, respond to the undesired act in a way that tries to prevent its occurrence in the future (see Hess, 1983a).

This definition instantly evokes some questions and sceptical comments. Apart from its Germanic and/or Weberian phrasing, many may find it quite unsatisfactory that it does not indicate whose standards it is inclined to adopt when it speaks of 'undesired behaviour'. But, in the end, this turns out to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage of the concept, since it allows changes of perspective according to the different actors, norms and implementations involved. Obviously, most kinds of behaviour are the object of the most controversial attitudes, being admired by some, tolerated by many, and perhaps disliked, detested or even prosecuted and punished by others. The acts of vandalism that some soccer hooligans commit with great regularity are horrifying to victims and most bystanders, but are regarded as status-enhancing and, therefore, very 'desirable' by the vandals' best friends. The unspecific concept of social control allows us to look at the hooligan subculture and their specific way of internal (group) control as well as their attempts to control the actions of those surrounding them, but also to look at, let's say, police strategies to prevent or contain the hooligans' destructiveness.

As far as the vastness of the concept is concerned, it is true that it covers everything that intends to produce or maintain, or that results in the production or maintenance of, social order – be it socialization, education, the routine of political administration or the extraordinary violence of a military dictatorship, the subtle tradition of table manners, or the less subtle activity of the criminal justice system. And beyond all this, it also covers the decisions of a referee at a soccer match as well as the maintenance of religious beliefs during church ceremonies. Thus, the study of social control is, in a specific way, equivalent to the study of society in general, as Park argued (see Sumner, Chapter 1, in this volume), with 'in a specific way' meaning a specific perspective that is interested in the rules, the prevention of deviance from the rules, and the sanctions imposed (or not imposed) on infractors. Sociologists have a lot to say, for instance, about a soccer match. They may analyse its entertainment value (which they are less likely to do), but they may also focus on the economic powers behind each team (which they are much more likely to do) or on the making of modern heroes and their function for everyday life. If they look at it from the perspective of social control they will concentrate on the rules of the game and their preventive and reactive enforcement, on infractions that go unnoticed and those that may have been noticed but go unpunished; or they may focus on the problems posed by crowd behaviour, on architectural designs that may be conducive to

violent clashes or that may serve a preventive function; or they might interview the security personnel on their work situation and attitudes, and how they reflect on their interventions, or many other aspects. While all these social-control-related topics are extremely varied, they do share as their common denominator the interest in the making, maintenance and infraction of rules – and that is what any inquiry into social control is all about.

### **Types, limits and ironies of social control**

#### *The basic need for social control*

It is a truism that all societies, including the most unjust, unequal, disorganized and anomic ones, manifest certain structured patterns of interaction and routine behaviour which we refer to in aggregate as 'social order'. Otherwise we would not call them societies. While the existence of a given social order used to be attributed to external and immutable forces, such as the will of a divinity or the laws of nature, modern thinkers have come to the conclusion that the social order is in effect a result of human activities, albeit under conditions that are not a product of the human will alone. Translated into sociological terminology we would say that the great discovery of modern thought was the fact that social order does not exist without permanent efforts at its reproduction, and that this reproduction of the social order is being achieved by what we refer to as the mechanisms of social control.

One of the first modern thinkers to advance this line of reasoning was Thomas Hobbes. For a man who had experienced the anomie of the religious wars in England, the problem of social order was of paramount importance. His question was how human beings could overcome the disastrous situation in which 'every man is Enemy to every man' and where life was 'nasty, brutish, and short'. It is generally agreed today that his very global recommendation of a centralized state power as 'a common Power to keep them all in awe' (Hobbes, 1909: 96) neglected some relevant alternatives, since there did and still do exist other forms of peaceful social organization. Before the advent of a state, mankind lived for thousands of years in what Max Weber called 'regulated anarchy', with kinship as the main ordering structure. Nevertheless, Hobbes's great achievement was the discovery that social order does not come upon human societies by divine will, the laws of nature or other outside powers, but that its creation and maintenance is an unavoidable and authentically political task. In other words: while Hobbes's 'condition of warre' is a virtual reality only, and while the monopolization of violence by a strong Leviathan is only one possibility of dealing with this virtual reality, he did point out the truly

inescapable fact that all societies are endlessly confronted with the problem of upholding order.

The fundamental reason for this is anthropological: the fact that the human being, as a 'non-determined animal' ('*das nicht festgestellte Tier*', as Nietzsche said), lacks other animals' built-in directives. For better or for worse, humans do not automatically follow their instincts, but rely on the construction and reproduction of cultural patterns in order to find individual and collective security (Gehlen, 1940). But cultural patterns (unlike instincts) can be transcended at any time and, therefore, both the individual and society have to live with the ever-present possibility of non-compliance and the disappointment of expectations.

While this basic contradiction between the individual fate of freedom and the social necessity of normativity will accompany human beings until their last day on earth, there also exists in all modern societies a second contradiction that necessitates the existence of agencies of social control. This second contradiction is not anthropological in essence, but of a much more recent historical origin. It is, put very simply, the contradiction between those with more and those with less social, economic and political power. Thus, the privileged are forced to control the underprivileged, lest the latter do away with privileges or, more probably, replace the former in their privileged positions. While the anthropologically founded contradiction between individual and society renders social control truly inescapable, the second contradiction is, in principle, limited to non-egalitarian societies, and therefore subject to relevant changes and even abolition. As a matter of fact, history is replete with attempts to overcome the problems of the class divide, to create egalitarian societies and thereby eliminate the non-anthropological need for social control – from Spartacus's slave revolt and the medieval heretics all the way to the socialist movements and Marxist revolutions of the twentieth century. Once established, though, the patterns of domination of one class, one race or one sex over the other have proven to be rather resistant to abolition. At best, collective efforts have succeeded in reducing the acuteness of some of these contradictions, as in the case of the anti-apartheid movement, the conquests of trade unions, civil rights groups and the feminist movement.

*Proactive control: the construction of conformity*

From Ross (1901) to Lemert (1967) social control was seen not only in terms of a reaction to deviance, but also, and even primarily, as something that actively produced conformity in the members of society. And while they repeatedly stressed both the influence of family education (socialization) and the power of public opinion over the

behaviour of individuals, this extremely important focus started to be neglected in the late 1960s, when the meaning of social control was narrowed down to the reactive side. It was only when feminists started to complain about the insufficiencies of a mere social reaction approach to the making of 'good girls' (Cain, 1989) that the deficiencies of the concept became apparent to some. Even that would not have helped to uproot the all-to-narrow concept of social control had it not been for the simultaneous shift of attention from punishments to the construction of conformity by means of discipline, stimulated by the writings of Michel Foucault and the new (and mostly French) social historians.

Conformity is constructed through a great number of means. These range from the most subtle seductions to overt violence, and from short-term interventions to long-lasting arrangements. As any glimpse at the history of church and state censorship, at wartime information policies, or an awareness of a dictator's watchful eye on press imports can show, simply to keep people uninformed used to be, and still is, a very frequent method used in the production of conformity. Bereft of essential knowledge about alternative perspectives – moral as well as political options – they, therefore, tend to conform to the standards provided by those who have the power either to withhold general education as such (keeping the majority of the population illiterate) or to make it difficult to get access to relevant (background) information.

While 'information management' in the widest sense of the term is still a favourite means of active social control, the global communication networks have definitely made it more difficult to isolate larger parts of the world population from relevant data. But this development is in itself very ambivalent since, not only does it promise more freedom of information, it simultaneously carries the danger of an inverted form of censorship through the exponential growth of 'information' (mostly trash) that may make people as disoriented as did traditional manipulation.

An important but widely neglected means of active social control is 'techno-prevention' through devices that simply do not allow the occurrence of certain undesired behaviours or behavioural effects. The architecture of public or private buildings, according to the principles of 'defensible space' (Oscar Newman, 1972), aims by design to reduce the occurrence of undesired entries; while fences that separate highway lanes or car ignitions that simply refuse to work as long as the driver has not put on his safety belt may not prevent road accidents, they do tend to minimize their consequences. This kind of active social control is one of the secrets of the astounding success of such phenomena as, for instance, McDonald's fast-food restaurants. As George Ritzer explains:

Human workers, no matter how well they are programmed and controlled, can foul up the operation of the system. A slow or indolent worker can make the preparation and delivery of a Big Mac inefficient. A worker who refuses to follow the rules can leave the pickles or special sauce off a hamburger, thereby making for unpredictability. And a distracted worker can put too few fries in the box, making an order of large fries seem awfully skimpy. For these and other reasons, McDonald's is compelled to steadily replace human beings with non-human technologies, such as the soft-drink dispenser that shuts itself off when the glass is full, the french-fry machine that rings when the fries are crisp, the pre-programmed cash register that eliminates the need for the cashier to calculate prices and amounts, and perhaps at some future time, the robot capable of making hamburgers. (Experimental robots of this type already exist.) All of these technologies permit greater control over the human beings involved in the fast-food restaurant. (1993: 11)

Few scholars have paid attention to the dilemmas connected with this emerging pattern of social control. The liberal mode of social control respected individual freedom of choice and relied on the threat of sanctions against those people who were tempted to make a wrong choice. The new mode is one of a structurally imposed security-orientation and abolishes that freedom from the very beginning. Undoubtedly, the political and ethical issues related to this shift of emphasis will become more pressing in the next decades.

The fact that it does not take intentional acts by the enforcers of order and/or intentional submission to a personal command to have proactive control, or to produce conformity, will also be of growing relevance. As a matter of fact, the bulk of work in the process of producing conformity is not being done on the level of intentional action. In the field of housing policy, for instance, simple market forces are clearly sufficient in the exercise of a very rigid (and, in a way, efficient) system of keeping 'undesired' (that is, poorer) neighbours away from the well-to-do suburbs. While the 'invisible hand' (Adam Smith) of market forces has always played a certain role in the prevention of undesired behaviour, it is probably true that the relevance of 'the quiet force of economic relations' (Karl Marx) is on the increase. For example, while feudal lords still had to resort to the conspicuous force of visible coercion in order to extract the surplus production from their subjects, the very structure of today's labour market suffices to make the worker sell his labour-power to the capitalist, who can then harvest the surplus value without resort to spectacular action. Many theorists believe that increased commodification in present-day societies adds still another dimension to the ever-more subtle means of producing conformity. In their opinion (see Campbell, 1987), the ever-increasing numbers of once 'simple' commodities becoming 'romanticized' as symbols of life-styles, personal identity, adventure

and excitement, are rapidly becoming the most alluring and influential agents in the shaping of people's motivations and actions: people are increasingly 'doing everything there is to be done' in order to be able to afford their 'dream car', their 'dream vacations', their 'dream house' and the like.

Evidently, it is much more efficient to make people want to do what they are supposed to do instead of having to stand behind them wielding the big stick of coercion. To transform an obligation into the subject's 'own will' often takes a lot of effort, but once achieved it often continues to work for a long time without any additional outside investment. While criminologists have traditionally overestimated the role of formal state interventions for behaviour control, it is now time to comprehend, as Dario Melossi (1990: 170) states, 'how positive motivations are instruments of power potentially much stronger than threats' (see also, Melossi, Chapter 3 in this volume, on proactive control through mass media). This kind of proactive control begins not with any reactions to deviance, but in the earliest (perinatal) phase of child-rearing. And while the primary object of every society's considerable investment in education and socialization is the contradiction between individual and society (making a 'social animal' out of the 'little savage'), all socialization also carries a political component that aims at the preventive control of potential disruptions emanating from the second basic contradiction in modern societies: the contradiction between those who are in politically privileged positions and those who are not. When children learn to salute the flag of their country, learn the national anthem etc., they are expected to internalize features of the political (and at the same time the economic) system's status quo that will make it easier for those in power to appeal to their identification and thereby make them conform to the given definitions of, for example, the national interest – even if that 'national interest' contradicts the individual's own interest. (For prevention as a method of proactive control to curtail the frequency of undesired behaviour, see also Pavarini, Chapter 4 in this volume.)

#### *Holes in the net: individual freedom and social change*

Of course, there never was and never will be such a thing as a perfect system of social control. But while that is a lamentable fact for past and future victims of crime (as well as those who, for other reasons, might be interested in the perfection of control over human behaviour), it is also certainly a positive and reassuring fact, since it implies the impossibility of ever establishing a long-lasting, completely totalitarian system of social control as imagined by George Orwell (in 1984) or Aldous Huxley (in *Brave New World*). The necessary imperfection of social control is not only the best guarantee yet for the

survival of individual freedom, but also the very point in the concept of social control that makes sure it is compatible with social change.

The reasons for the essential imperfection of social control are numerous, with the most basic one being the essentially non-determined character of the human animal. The human character's inextinguishable capacity to transpose and extend learned schemas to new contexts, thereby creating new conditions with new possibilities out of the old elements, includes the freedom to transgress normative expectations and even neutralize internalized values for the sake of innovation action (see Sykes and Matza, 1957). Likewise, any effort of those in power to change the subjects' beliefs and resulting actions might completely fail, when the subjects stubbornly stick to their internalized norms and resist even the most brutal control measures (like the early Christians in Rome, Jehovah's Witnesses under Stalin, or some communists under Hitler). Therefore, the effect of any enactment of control attempts is never entirely predictable. A specific approach by a police psychologist to persuade a person threatening suicide not to jump can work with the majority of cases, but may even provoke the lethal jump in others. On a macro-level of social action, the complexity of conditions and interrelations transcends any notion of calculus and prediction. A soft diplomatic reaction to a regional claim for independence may, for instance, either help the challenged central government to restore confidence and undermine the rebels' support, or it could allow the secessionists to accumulate resources and build international support nets; similarly, while the adoption of a tough line of action may crush the revolt for good, it could equally provoke a rush of solidarity with the rebels leading to a sudden defeat of the central government. In the end, all teaching and drill of any knowledge and skill is polyvalent. A highly disciplined workforce may be the dream of every factory manager but, once unionized, such workers also tend to be highly disciplined union members and a source of constant headaches for managers.

The form of the factory embodies and therefore teaches capitalist notions of property relations. But, as Marx points out, it can also teach the necessary social and collective character of production and thereby undermine the capitalist notion of private property. (Sewell, 1992: 19)

Alternatively, another essential reason for the unpredictability of outcomes of control attempts is the necessary multiplicity of social webs in which any individual is embedded. As Simmel ((1992) 1908: 305–44) pointed out, the individual lives her or his life at a crossing point where several reference groups intersect and overlap. While non-identical role expectations and normative orders may cause stress in the individual on the one hand – imposing a segmented existence – this

plurality of normative embeddings also serves as a reliable source of freedom, since it allows the individual to balance one requirement against another, to shift allegiances and to increase his or her radius of action. Even the young child is already embedded in different normative systems with mutually contradicting influences, beginning with the conflicts between the mother's policy with regard to television and the consumption of sweets and that of an auntie or grandma. Later on, the parental norms are challenged by those of the peer group, and soon it becomes apparent that there are numerous difficulties and ambivalences in the determination of 'proper behaviour' as well as in the legitimation of institutions. On a larger scale, the Christian religion, for instance, was as useful a vehicle for the legitimation of the feudal lords' interests as it was for the legitimation of the egalitarian revolts of poor heretics in the late Middle Ages and early Modernity.

In present-day societies there is no single (religious) schema that can be exploited by contradictory interpretations, but there are normally various (secular) schemas that oppose each other and leave the individual with even more choice. While the legal system, by definition, claims legitimacy for all its aspects, there is an ever-growing number of dissenting groups that claim legitimate 'civil disobedience' in the face of legal statutes and provide alternative legitimation for acts strongly disapproved of by the majority.

Another conflict between normative systems often arises when norms and values that an individual had internalized during childhood and adolescence clash with the expectations articulated by his or her respective present reference groups. Contrary to a widespread assumption, early-instilled inner controls can be rendered ineffective relatively easily through the respective individual's 'techniques of neutralization' (Sykes and Matza, 1957), whereas the importance of actual interactive social bonds and attachments to friends and companions are often underestimated in their capacity to steer an individual's actions. The more people are integrated in a social (group) relationship, the higher they tend to value it – and the more they are ready to do in order to maintain the love, esteem, respect or business contact that they are enjoying because of their belonging. The implicit or explicit threat of social exclusion and the loss of both material and immaterial resources actually constitutes quite a remarkable potential for control of any group over any individual. Anyone not wanting to be completely dominated by group norms is well advised to seek membership in many groups, and to move within and between a number of social circles. While this may balance some pressures, it also leads to new difficulties, since the individuals may very well face contradictory expectations that are hard to combine. This could force them to hide some of their behaviour from some of their friends, colleagues or



other contacts. In the case that this information management fails, they may even be forced to reorganize the whole social network, to change friends or even move out of town – thus gaining a different kind of freedom, namely that which accompanies the role of the stranger (see Simmel, (1992) 1908: 509–12).

It is not without reason that most theories of crime and deviance nowadays do not part from any assumption about 'born criminals' or a specific 'criminal motivation' or the like, but from the much more trivial acknowledgement that social control is bound to work less than perfectly, that it is bound to have lacunae (see Box, 1981; Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969; Sykes and Matza, 1957; Felson, 1994). Those 'deficiencies' of active or preventive social control allow the deviant motivation (which is, as Freud has convincingly demonstrated, common and well known to all of us) to develop into actual deviance which, thus, becomes an inescapable fact of life. While different social structures, educational systems and policy guidelines do have an influence on the number and ratio of murders, robberies, burglaries, etc., there is no social movement and no political system that could possibly eradicate crime and deviance and prevent such occurrences. The unavoidable lacunae of social control make deviance a normal feature of any social organization. This very simple fact – originally developed (albeit along a slightly different line of reasoning) by Emile Durkheim and often repeated since – engenders another one as its consequence, namely the simple fact that there will never be a society without the need to *react* to deviance.

#### *Reactions to deviance: informal, formal and sanction rules*

The imperfection of social control guarantees the perennial existence of deviance, thereby forcing every social organization not only to react to deviance on either an informal and/or a formal basis, but also to develop rules regarding the application of sanctions against infractors ('sanction norms' in the terminology of Heinrich Popitz, 1980: 86).

Informal social control is so much a part of everyday interactions that it is often hard to recognize. But every individual possesses a number of techniques to deal with other people's undesired behaviour. One may, consciously or unconsciously, either escalate verbal fights in order to clear the situation or begin to reduce or avoid contacts with the person(s) in question; one might complain to friends in the hope of finding support for one's own point of view or of excluding the annoying person(s) from one's circle of friends. If the annoying behaviour constitutes a serious offence, one might consider notifying the police in order to initiate some formal action. On a micro-level, informal controls that are much more subtle than this are being attempted innumerable times every day. For example, any slight modification of a

married couple's everyday routine activities – like an unexpected kiss or lack of an anticipated one, an almost imperceptible avoidance of the other's look, a gift of flowers with no proper occasion – can either be meant as an (inclusive or exclusive) reaction to irritating spouse behaviour, and/or be seen as undesired and 'deviant' behaviour in itself, thereby occasioning demands for clarification ('what's the matter with you today, darling?') and/or reciprocal sanctions (from withdrawal from the common meal to have supper alone in front of an 'interesting' television programme that one 'cannot miss', all the way to withdrawal from the common bed). All in all, there is an enormously wide range of informal controls, ranging from joking, frowning, gossiping and scandalmongering over loss of honour and status, malediction and total exclusion from a group, through the firing of an employee and the boycotting of an undesired competitor, to all possible violent means, such as slapping a child or killing the seducer of one's wife, daughter or sister.

This should make it clear that the distinction between informal and formal controls is not identical with the distinction between 'soft' and 'severe' or 'inefficient' and 'efficient' means of control. While informal control is often rather light in the beginning, informal interventions also start at an earlier point in time, are more pervasive and usually have a greater impact on a person's self-concept, identity, career and life chances. Rather, the difference between informal and formal control lies in their organization. While you meet the authors of informal control in everyday life as mothers, teachers, peer groups, church pastors and the like, the authors of formal control are exercising a specific control job. That means, they work in institutions that were especially designed for the purpose of reacting to deviance – in the police force, the juvenile justice system, the courts or correctional institutions. They obey specific and mostly written formal rules ('sanction rules') that tell them how to proceed, how to punish and where to stop.

While the difference between informal and formal social control is in many respects essential, it should not be thought of as a clear-cut distinction. It is probably more correct to see formal and informal control as theoretically 'purified' ideal types (Max Weber) which, in reality, are often interwoven and hard to distinguish. There are, for instance, formal restrictions on informal control (penal procedures against parents who inflict brutal punishment on their children) as well as, on the other hand, informal codes of behaviour that influence the actions of policemen and other agents of formal social control. Terms like 'class justice', 'race justice' and others were all generated to describe or censure these clearly illegitimate, but existing interrelations.

Formal reactions to deviance usually achieve most of their effect by touching off informal reactions; what people often fear most is not the formal court sentence, but the loss of status and the restriction of life chances which usually come along with it. Therefore, the effect of formal sentences on the future behaviour of the delinquent can be extremely variable. A culprit who knows that none of his or her family and friends will let him or her down will bear a verdict much better (and will be affected by it to a far lesser degree) than one who, after an official verdict that labels him or her a criminal, may lose all social support.

There are other intriguing interrelations between formal and informal control. One example is the extensive use which formal control agents often make of the unparalleled quality of informal information systems (like the Paris police made use of the famous concierge system). The relation works vice versa when, for instance, criminal organizations try to control the illegal supply market (drugs, gambling, prostitution, weapons) by way of denouncing their competitors to the authorities. Another example is the possible substitution of formal by informal controls. Where agencies of formal control fail, other organizations may step in as their functional equivalents. In a little-known article, based on his own empirical research during a four-month visit to the United States in 1904, Max Weber described how religious sects managed to fulfil what normally would be considered state functions in frontier America (see Weber, 1978). Similarly, the Sicilian mafia stepped in as an institution of political control in the interest of the landowning classes when the Italian state apparatus was not able to protect them efficiently against rebellious peasants (see Hess, 1973).

The specific form that informal or formal social control may take depends to a large extent on the way a specific form of deviance is defined: in terms of 'crime' (= criminalization), of 'illness' (= medicalization) or as a 'minor incident' that does not threaten the validity of the normative order (= neutralization). Criminalized behaviour (in the widest sense) is regarded as intentional, and the actor is held responsible for it – and consequently eligible for punishment. To medicalize behaviour is to regard it as somehow pathological and to regard the actor as sick, that is, deviant but not of his or her own free will. Hence, the actor is eligible for certain types of help (treatment, therapy). Finally, social reaction can take the form of neutralization or insulation. In such cases, behaviour and actors are regarded as neither criminal nor sick, but silly. The behaviour may well be potentially disruptive and undoubtedly undesired, but it seems nevertheless best to let it run its course – to tolerate it as long as it stays within the limits of a specific context. Examples include subcultures like bohemianism, deviant institutions like prostitution, events like street carnivals or the

(unfortunately also mostly passing) condition of being passionately in love. All these fields, times and situations are more or less insulated from 'normal standards' of behaviour and 'normal' social control, be it by avoidance, by informal contempt or by the assumption that people who engage in this kind of behaviour are 'a little bit out of their minds'. But in the very instance the behaviour in question exceeds the limits of toleration in terms of time or space or intensity, heavier forms of social control will set in. Which of these definitional strategies will be applied is not totally independent of the actors and their behaviour. More important, though, is the power of attribution, and the more powerful interactive partner or the more powerful group will define the situation and decide if and what kind of deviance there is and how it will be reacted to.

A significant element in this process is the attribution of responsibility. Once upon a time, in the era of animism, forces that we now regard as impersonal forces of nature were held responsible for the events they caused. When the Persian Emperor, Xerxes, could not cross a wild river with his army, he had his soldiers line up and whip the water. In the Middle Ages, dogs or pigs who had killed children were put on trial and actually hanged or decapitated (see Evans, 1987). Later, explanations of behaviour gradually shifted. Animals, but also the mentally ill and small children, were progressively seen as unable to bear criminal responsibility and unfit for criminal sanctions. A more acute awareness of the force of socio-economic conditions upon the actions of individuals (Marxism), as well as the discovery of the unconscious (Psychoanalysis), contributed to a further retreat of the notion of responsibility during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, while natural catastrophes were often regarded as crimes in past ages, it has become more and more common to interpret crimes as catastrophes – that is, situations in which the application of legal sanctions makes little or no sense at all.

Often one finds competing definitions of the same act: a conservative prosecutor may say 'crime', while a psychiatrist would point to an 'illness' and suggest the notion of an 'accident'. These and similar negotiations can be observed in all courts at all times, but also outside of the justice system on all levels of interaction. The actors themselves and their interactional partners may differ radically in their interpretations. While we are inclined to blame delinquency on deficient socialization, poverty and the like, and take responsibility away from the actors, we would probably be unhappily surprised if positive achievements like passing an exam or finishing a manuscript were not attributed to our own endeavours.

The differential attribution of responsibility has enormous consequences, not only for the forms of social control applied, but also for

the behaviour of the actors themselves. Whoever is regarded as unable to steer his or her own actions (the 'sick junkie', for instance) is quite likely to acquire a kind of learned helplessness, and to regard his or her actions as determined by forces outside his or her own will and sphere of influence. Psychological research has shown that a radicalized idea of an external 'locus of control' can seriously impair a person's initiative and increase the seriousness of psychic problems – while also serving, at times, as a most welcome legitimation to continue destructive or self-destructive activities (see Peele, 1987).

#### *Ironies of social control*

Social control sometimes works as intended, but often enough it fails to work, producing surprising side-effects or even effects which run counter to its original intentions. Many times, it produces a mixture of desired, neutral and undesired effects. As David Matza (1969: 80) summed it up, 'the very effort to prevent, intervene, arrest, and "cure" persons of their alleged pathologies may, according to the neo-Chicagoan view, precipitate or seriously aggravate the tendency society wishes to guard against'. Ironically, too, the most focused and the most formal attempts at maintaining or regaining social order seem to be particularly likely to lead to undesired and even paradoxical consequences. Convincing demonstrations of this can be found at the juvenile courts, where interventions unwillingly, but systematically, seem to further exactly those criminal careers which they want to stop. Thus, they keep themselves busy with self-created 'secondary deviance', a phenomenon that occurs 'when the person begins to employ his deviant behavior or a role based on it as a means of defense, attack, or adjustment to the . . . problems created by the social reaction to it' (Lemert, 1948: 28).

This irony of formal control efforts was widely recognized in the 1960s. But from the 'diversion programmes' invented to avoid this paradoxical effect arose still another ironic result, which was to be discussed under the term of 'net-widening' – meaning the extension of social control to lesser forms of deviance, to the family and friends of the offender, and the intensification of control through psychological and therapeutic intervention that went much further than imprisonment. Formal social control spread out and moved from the institutions to the communities, until ever larger parts of the population were under some kind of surveillance. In a way, everybody became subject to some kind of control that used to be characteristic of institutions only, albeit maybe minimum security institutions. Hence the uncomfortable feeling of some critical criminologists that contemporary Western societies may be on the way to becoming 'minimum security societies' (see Blomberg, 1987).

While this criticism was to gain much and well-deserved momentum through the reception of Michel Foucault's works, it is certainly also not devoid of irony that the conservative defenders of the prison system could use many of Foucault's arguments, and those of the critics of diversion, to defend their anti-diversion position. Some reformers even accused a strange coalition of prison expansionists and radical criminologists of being responsible for the backlash which the prison reform and prison abolition movement suffered during the 1980s. While such an accusation may have exaggerated the importance of radical criminologists, it certainly would be an irony worth some consideration if their dystopian expectation of the total therapeutic or electronic state had somehow managed to contribute to a view of the prison as a symbol of the 'good old times' of a still limited and definable power of the state to punish.

But the irony does not stop here. Driving people into deviant roles and careers or producing stigmatized minority groups may in the end be very functional for social control purposes. Durkheim pointed out that the rituals of exposing crimes and punishing criminals help to clarify moral boundaries and integrate social groups. Freud described the criminal as a scapegoat of society. The id of all of us is a hell of deviant impulses which our Super-Ego holds in check by means of unpleasant guilt-feelings. We project our deviant impulses onto the criminals who dare enjoy the pleasure of acting them out and we thus satisfy our impulses symbolically. At the same time we revel in the punishment of criminals, because it satisfies our Super-Ego and makes us believe that we are superior to the criminal. The Danish scholar, Svend Ranulf, added an insightful sociological analysis to this explanation when he showed that:

The disinterested tendency to inflict punishment is a distinctive characteristic of the lower middle class, that is, of a social class living under conditions which force its members to an extraordinarily high degree of self-restraint and subject them to much frustration of natural desires . . . the tendency in question tends to disappear in the middle class, as soon as it has acquired a certain standard of wealth and prestige. (1964: 198; 2)

Ranulf could indeed demonstrate that the tendency to inflict harsh punishment out of moral indignation did not exist in tribal societies or in aristocratic and upper class social strata. This explains the great attraction that crime and punishment have for readers of the tabloid press, as well as the soft abolitionist approach of bourgeois academics.

Pariah groups like Jews, criminals, witches, blacks, gypsies, drug addicts and others can play a functional role in stabilizing any given social order. The Jews, who ran the financial administration of many European princes in the seventeenth century, extracted money from the people to pass it on to their masters. Because of their pariah

condition, they were easy targets for hate and aggression, while diverting the danger of popular revolts from the princes who probably would have been the more 'correct' objects of popular resentment (see Coser, 1974: 34–40). Similar processes can be observed today in the ambivalent attitudes towards the leisure class of the super-rich as well as towards drug addicts and other drop outs. While both the life-styles of the people on these extremes of the social ladder and our attitudes towards them have a number of common features (see Hofstätter, 1962; Matza and Sykes, 1961) – we admire them and look at their happy-go-lucky approach to life with envy, but we also have aggressive feelings towards them because of their 'undeserved' and often also 'immoral' lives at our expense – we normally show a split attitude towards both groups. The admiration is directed towards the leisure class, the aggression towards the pariah groups which, thus, help save the leisure class from a lot of envious hate (see also Melossi, Chapter 3 in this volume, on social control through crime).

#### **Tendencies at the end of the millennium**

On a grand scale, the history of social control reflects the power relations of each social formation. During the 'regulated anarchy' (Weber) of pre-state egalitarian tribal societies, social control was characterized by retributive reciprocity and pacifying reintegration. In feudal societies, and during the phases of early statehood, social control was characterized by overt violence that was as vicious as it was selective. The control apparatus was still rather weak and had to rely on selective brutal acts and their deterrent effect to try and keep the masses in line. The capitalist mode of production overcame the need to rely on overt force by the invention of paid labour and the simple act of withholding the surplus value while forcing the dispossessed working class to continue offering their labour.

Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* has worked out – in an ideal type perspective – the different control styles of feudal and bourgeois societies, giving in the first chapter a detailed description of a would-be regicide's painful public execution and later contrasting this with the pervasive methods of discipline, panoptic surveillance and institutional confinement. Evidently, all capitalist societies – while having preserved assorted traces of the control forms of previous stages – rely on a combination of generalized social disciplinary processes with a pervasive bureaucratic control. Present tendencies are characterized by an increasingly technical element as part of a general thrust towards ever more rationalization and commodification, but a more detailed view also reveals a number of contradictory tendencies.

#### *Opiatization of control*

Both socialization and legitimation were far more successful in the earlier stages of human societies. In the times of small egalitarian societies, conformity was relatively easy to instil; and during the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church exercised a near-to-perfect ideological control over socialization and the legitimation of institutions. Since then, from the Reformation to the present time, the capacity of Western societies actively to produce conformity has been in decline. The emergence of a comparable apparatus of active social control has been prevented by the processes of secularization and rationalization, and the increasing social complexities of modern societies. Attempts to fill the gap on a grand scale by fundamentalist religious revivals as well as quasi-religious political ideologies (communism, fascism) have utterly failed, even if one must probably concede that the last word about the fate of fundamentalist alternatives to modern secularism has not yet been spoken.

At present, though, the main force in Western societies which seems able to instil conformity in people has nothing to do with church, religion or metaphysics, but rather with an intricate system involving the creation of material wants and what one may call 'the politics of desires'. This system is deeply rooted in both the capitalist production sphere as well as in a concomitant 'consumerist ethos' (Campbell, 1987) which is itself closely, albeit contradictorily, related to the unbroken tendency towards ever more rationalization, routinization and disenchantment of the world. As is well known, commodification requires the continual creation of new products and new markets, thus contributing to the desensitization of the individual and to the need for ever more stimulating experiences to produce excitement. And the more the capitalist system stresses cost-benefit rationality, purposive labour, etc., the stronger becomes the consumption ethic as its complementary component. Powerfully constructed and reinforced by the mass media and youth culture (advertising, popular music, etc.), it not only portrays and applauds a world of pleasure in commodities and commodified pleasures, but in effect also builds a surprisingly influential system of social control which we could refer to as a new 'opiatization' of society.

With all kinds of direct ideological control in decline, the creation of material wants and the striving for the satisfaction of these wants has thus become the pre-eminent agent of conformity. With most people having a stake in life – or at least a convincing illusion of it – few should want to risk that stake by committing undesired or even punishable acts. Put very simply: to attain self-realization and meaning in life, one must buy certain commodities that represent this meaning, for example security (life insurance, a home), experience of the inner self

(course in meditation, preferably in Tuscany), existential self-experience (free-climbing, bungee-jumping), complete relaxation (long and expensive vacations in the sun), etc. To buy these symbolically-charged commodities, one must conform to the work ethic. And the harder one works, the more one needs to compensate everyday alienation in leisure time. But with all leisure time compensations ever more linked to commodified reifications, one must be ready to sell one's soul to the only system that both creates, shapes and – at least partially or virtually – fulfills these wants, thus making capitalism something like a latter-day catholic church.

Herbert Marcuse gives a profound analysis of this process in his *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). His main thesis is that Western societies are able to satisfy the basic needs and are at the same time solid enough to tolerate quite a lot of variation in behaviour and even some deviance – in sexual matters, for instance – thus producing a sense of freedom which, in a deeper sense, actually results in a submission to ever increasing processes of domination and manipulation. Postmodern societies evidently make particularly considerable use of techniques that are able to neutralize potential revolt through what he called 'repressive tolerance', that is, the harmless and sometimes only illusionary satisfaction of real or artificially induced needs that pacifies the working class and robs them of their revolutionary fervour.

Repressive tolerance works both ways, though. The endless creation of needs and material goals, and the accompanying ideology that those goals should be attainable by everyone (see Merton, 1938), creates at the same time an endless dissatisfaction – and, thus, the motivation to do away with the restrictions or barriers on the roads to achievement of the goals and to take illegitimate and illegal short cuts. No wonder the opiatized consumer society is, paradoxically, also a hotbed of unprecedented deviance, in which respect for the legal and legitimate pathways to riches rapidly withers away when risks are perceived to be low. This applies as much to the juvenile shoplifter, who does not yet have much to lose, as to corrupt officials, who feel protected by the consensual nature of their crimes and the resulting difficulties of detection. Furthermore, even if the working classes are and remain politically integrated, the system produces an ever larger Lumpenproletariat of poor, permanently unemployed, homeless outcasts whose stake in conformity is minimal (and on whom Marcuse, by the way, rested much of his romantic hope for a social revolution).

*Socialization: birth of the 'dividual'?*

The 'romantic ethic and the spirit of consumerism' (Campbell, 1987) are both an expression of and a guarantee for the further development of a new type of socialization. It would be small wonder if this new

socialization that fits the 'mall' and the 'amusement park' life-styles ended up producing new types of personality. These new personality types would probably be different from those of the preceding phases in the process of civilization in that they would mark a turning point from an increase to a decrease of personal integration. While the medieval person, according to Norbert Elias, used to live with a low level of self-constraints and impulse controls, the fabrication of modern individuals – at least since the sixteenth century – was marked by a steady increase in internalization and psychic integration of those originally divergent personality components that Freud would later speak of as the *Es* (Id), *Ich* (Ego), and *Über-Ich* (Super-Ego).

A reverse tendency was discovered by research in socialization since the Second World War. The actions of the now emerging personality type seem to be much less geared to internalized norms and values and more to the demands of the respective situations, interaction partners and group commitments. Since people are apparently less steered by conscience and convictions than by situational expectations and role requirements, this new personality type has been characterized as a 'marketing character' (David Riesman), and others have brought up complementary evidence about the 'narcissistic' character of this personality (Christopher Lasch). This is a dramatic change that implies a whole array of highly ambivalent phenomena including, for example, the relation between adults and young persons. Whereas child rearing in the nineteenth century was structured often enough by command, repression and submission, giving rise to the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 1950), children today are much more respected and often treated on a close-to-equal basis. Children may take their meals with adults and speak at will (a phenomenon that would have defied imagination some generations ago). They may get into arguments with their parents without having to take account of spankings or other forms of retribution. Children have a say in family affairs such as holiday plans, schooling, and separation, divorce and remarriage of their parents. They dress like little adults, they watch much the same television programmes as their parents, and, finally, they owe much of their enhanced status to the fact that they are important consumers in terms of kids' wear, sweets, toys, cds, video games and cassettes, computer hard- and software, and the like.

Young people are being treated as equals in many ways, including some highly risky aspects linked with the commodification of sexual attractiveness (for example, young people's roles in television commercials, men's magazines and so on), but the positive and the negative potentials of this development are interwoven to such a degree that it is hard to predict which one will prevail. While narcissism is generally regarded as an undesirable trait, it is also true that the extreme

relevance this new personality type attributes to self-realization and diversity also makes it comfortingly hard to imagine that this type of person could ever fall prey to authoritarian ideologies that altogether deny the individual's autonomy and right to be different. In terms of the production of conformity, the emerging type of socialization will, therefore, give rise to relatively independent, but inoffensive, unaggressive, and self-centred personalities who are difficult to homogenize in their behaviour by totalitarian ideologies or simplistic command structures, but who can easily be steered by (pleasurable) intervention in their motivation.

Given the increasingly external guidance of this personality type's actions, it is easy to imagine that there will be an increased tendency for individuals to show a substantial disintegration and fragmentation of their personality structure. The person's roles gain increased independence, and her or his ability to construct and maintain a coherent self is seriously impaired, which might transform the occidental 'individual' – in the long run at least – into what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1990) called the forthcoming 'dividual'.

#### *Techno-prevention and control by consensus*

The mechanism of these 'politics of wants' or 'politics of desires' works better in environments that are free of visible misery, antagonism and strife. In short, they work best in artificial environments that preventively allow access only to those who are materially and ideologically prepared to participate in the consensual pursuit of commodified pleasures. To prevent undesired things from happening by using landscape architecture and environmental design is clearly a more elegant way of exercising social control than having to arrest, prosecute and sentence people who only became offenders because of the lack of a more appropriate preventative design of the place. It is also an expression of a general move away from the reactive mode and towards a more proactive way of social control. To paraphrase Stanley Cohen, social control is shifting from its normal reactive style – only activated when rules are violated – towards a proactive mode: anticipating, predicting and calculating in advance. And since there is hardly anything that could fit this tendency better than the creation of artificial environments, many analysts have come to believe that one only has to turn one's attention to the malls, the amusement parks and the affluent suburbs of the metropolises to have a preview of things to come.

The huge, covered shopping areas just outside the metropolitan areas of North America and Europe look like laboratories for the construction of an artificially 'cleansed' society. In the midst of a snowy Canadian winter, you will find palm trees and waterfalls, flowers and

exotic birds, and when the seasons change you will find respite in the cool spring-like mall when everybody else is sweating their souls out. The malls are little cities or mini-countries in their own right. They have border controls (private security have precise orders regarding who is and who is not to be granted entry) and internal policing (by private security firms), while the only real and ultimate sanction is expulsion from the artificial paradise. There are no beggars or loiterers, no (visibly) poor, nor will one find anyone who is not shopping (except, again, the omnipresent and helpful private security guard who makes a walk through the mall one of the safest experiences you can have).

The malls are a good laboratory for a new system of social control that works not by nineteenth-century command structures, but by unobtrusive politics of landscape (the malls are at a certain distance from the city, often with practically non-existent public transport connections, thereby preventing access of undesired people from the very start), defensible and sterile architecture with prefabricated pleasure stimuli (unobtrusive techno-prevention), and a consensual atmosphere that makes it the unavoidable duty of every visitor to obey cheerfully all the rules of the game.

The amusement parks are similar to malls, but they are even larger, making them more likely to represent a country or to simulate the world as it should be (Disney-Land, Disney-World). Amusement parks are geared not only towards the shopping adult, but to 'The Family', which is seen as a good-humoured, lovingly harmonious entity worth building a nation upon, and a worthy model for the structure of the global village (with the poor but happy countries in the role of the children). Everything must be safe, so everybody can have pleasure. Unlike the mall, the commodities that are for sale in the amusement parks are probably best described as highly standardized pleasurable experiences – and to the extent that pleasure is the ultimate end of most of our activities in life, what you buy in amusement parks is as close to a sense of life as one can get in a commodified universe. Safety control there is, to a large extent, unobtrusive. Things have been constructed extremely cleverly so as to allow as little deviance and accident as possible. Amusement park employees are gentle, often costumed and entertaining, and always lend a helping hand when anyone shows any sign of behaviour that is not perfectly in line with the expected routines. They act as unobtrusive engineers of consensus between the amusement park company, the parents, their children and the other visitors. There is no quarrel, no command, nor need to obey. Things work smoothly in what seems a universal consensus about the common goal of the community to have good, clean and safe fun.

There is an elective affinity between the very structures of the shopping mall and the amusement parks on the one hand and the ever-growing number of affluent suburbs that are beginning to cover the globe like a pattern of 'islands' or 'fortresses' of the very rich. Maybe it is here that the results of the social laboratories are finding their way into a 'real life' that, paradoxically enough, seems quite unable to shed the smell of the artificial in terms of social chemistry and social engineering, and is a sad simulation of what the ancient philosophers used to refer to as the 'good life'. The pattern of islands or fortresses is really a community of communities, unrelated geographically but structurally closer to each other than to their immediate environment where crimes of violence mingle with misery and desperation. On these paradise islands, there is no filth, no misery, no violence; the lawns are always well cut, the children happy and healthy, the people cheerful and positive in their thinking. Street crime is practically non-existent, and the dominant mode of social control is 'embedded, preventative, subtle, co-operative and apparently non-coercive and consensual' (Shearing and Stenning, 1987: 322) – that is, it is similar or identical to the type of social control that reigns in the amusement parks.

If the features of control that today shape the laboratories for future societies – the malls and amusement parks as well as the affluent suburban fortresses – were to be generalized in the next millennium, then things would have developed quite close to the sort of society described in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Within Huxley's imaginary world people are seduced into conformity by the pleasures offered by the drug 'soma' rather than coerced into compliance by threat of Big Brother, just as people are today seduced to conform by the pleasures of consuming the goods that corporate power has to offer. (Shearing and Stenning, 1987: 323)

The number of 'islands' or 'fortresses' structured along the lines described above is rapidly growing. This is for two reasons: one is the increasing wealth of those already at the top of the ladder since Reaganomics and Thatcherism turned the social welfare state's tide to a neo-liberal *enriches-vous*, the other is the exponential growth of the world's poor who are drawing suspicious attention from those inside the luxurious fortresses, like the nineteenth-century 'dangerous classes' once did in their respective societies. Those who can afford it flee into luxurious flats and homogeneous neighbourhoods which depend only to a very small extent upon state services, rather relying 'upon the voracious consumption of private security services' (Davis, 1990: 244). These services are innocuous for those who live there and fulfil more the function of a private army directed at the deterrence of,

and if necessary armed defence against, invaders from the non-affluent and, therefore, 'foreign' environment – 'hence the thousands of lawns displaying the little 'armed response' warnings' (Davis, 1990: 244). A comparable development on a larger scale is the attempt to fortify (by means of heavy border controls and restrictive immigration laws) a whole continent – 'Fortress Europe' – against the onslaught of waves of miserable Third-World asylum seekers.

For anyone familiar with European history, however, those phenomena are not as new as they might seem. Not only were towns, monasteries and even some village churches fortified against poor peasants, vagrants, bandits and other enemies of more civilized and more affluent inhabitants, but, inside the towns, the aristocrats or patricians used to live in buildings which turned strong and barren walls to the street and were easily defensible against the *popolo minuto* living around. Thus, the doorman-equipped buildings in Manhattan or the new downtown architecture of Los Angeles (as Mike Davis describes it in *City of Quartz*, 1990) will remind the reflective traveller of, for instance, the Renaissance towns of Tuscany or the Marais quarter in Paris. It is simply the typical situation that arises when the state is not yet (or not anymore) in a position to pacify the 'dangerous classes' of really down-trodden people, and the well-to-do have, therefore, to rely on their own private means.

#### *Privatization, commodification and expansion*

Privatization is one of the common denominators of today's laboratories for the future of social systems, and hence one of the traits most likely to continue to shape them. But privatization has many faces and means many things. While it is an attractive idea for all those who see the state as the source of all evil, it may also represent uncontrolled vigilantism and infringements of civil rights. More than anything else, it is likely to lead to an evermore unequal distribution of security, because privatization is also a very euphemistic term for what would be more correctly termed 'commodification' and 'commercialization' of security. Its growth corresponds to significant changes in property ownership. In North America, for instance, many public activities which used to take place in public community-owned spaces, now take place within huge privately owned facilities, which Shearing and Stenning call 'mass private property'. As examples, they cite the ever increasing number of 'shopping centers with hundreds of individual retail establishments, enormous residential estates with hundreds, if not thousands, of housing units, equally large office, recreational, industrial, and manufacturing complexes, and many university campuses' (Shearing and Stenning, 1983: 496). The considerable demand for both the services and goods of the security industry has already led to a reversal in the

ratio of public and private police personnel in the United States, with privates outnumbering the public service by almost three to one, and where four to one is a current forecast for the year 2000. In the USA, the private security industry's turnover was estimated at around US\$50 bn in 1990 and in Germany estimates rose from less than DM11 bn in 1990 to more than DM14 bn in 1994 (see Nogala, 1995).

But demand alone is not the driving force of this market, as Nils Christie has recently demonstrated (Christie, 1993a). It is rather one of the markets that follow the rules of a supply-side economy (Galbraith, 1985). The more money and personnel are being invested in the detection of crime, the more this will reflect in rising crime rates, which in turn stimulate the demand for security goods and services as well as for prison capacity that is also increasingly being furnished by private corporations (which have even gone to the stockmarket and seem to promise a lucrative investment). According to Christie, for the security industry to prosper, there must be feelings of insecurity and these feelings must be focused on crime, even if they might in fact stem from shrinking job markets, rising prices for housing, the risks of modern technology or the deterioration of the environment. And with crime rates being one of the most convincing methods to focus these feelings on crime, crime rates are rather like a 'natural resource' for the crime control industry. The special feature of this resource is the fact that it is unlimited, since crime can always be created by simple legislative activity or multiplied by increased police budgets – or even only by initiating some more dark figure research. Its production depends on no more than investment in the combat of drug crimes, street crimes, hate crimes, environmental crimes and the like. As Christie said, the 'economic interests of the industry . . . will all the time be on the side of oversupply, both of police and of prison capacity', thereby establishing 'an extraordinarily strong force for expansion of the system' (Christie, 1993a: 110). If the trend towards commodification of security remains unbroken, the consequences could very well take the shape, as Christie puts it, of 'Gulags, Western style'.

*Limits to leisure and pleasure: of normalization and brutalization*

The gulag perspective presented by Christie implies a continued expansion of Western prison systems, operated by an ever-increasing 'Corrections-Commercial-Complex' (Lilly and Knepper, 1993: 164) which exerts a significant influence in sustaining so-called 'get-tough-on-crime politics'. Eventually this leads to the incarceration or internment in camps of substantial numbers of 'undesired', that is, marginalized and criminalized citizens (like inner-city young African-Americans in the USA).

Such a perspective is diametrically opposed by the perspective that has been developed by the philosophers Herbert Marcuse, Michel Foucault and, more recently, Gilles Deleuze. Their prediction does not imply the exponential growth of incarceration but, much to the contrary, suggests a withering away of all kinds of camps, prisons, factories, school buildings and other nineteenth-century means of spatial inclusion in large-scale buildings. In their analyses all kinds of institutionalization and incarceration have already become obsolete in view of the system's growing ability to manipulate motivations and monitor citizens' movements at all times and on all occasions. Their assumptions rest upon undeniable changes in the practice and potential of social control that indicate a shift away from the cruel punishments of the past to medicalization, to admonition instead of infliction of pain, to de-carceration and diversion instead of imprisonment, to normalization instead of exclusion, and to destructuring instead of centralization.

In this context the undeniable growth of the therapeutic realm,

and its invasion into areas previously dealt with through other forms of power/knowledge (the 'medicalization of deviance' thesis) are of major significance in the social control landscape. Even more important than therapeutic systems where coercion is involved (involuntary hospitalization, compulsory treatment of addicts, thought-control of political dissidents) is the construction of new therapeutic categories (diagnoses, syndromes, classifications) – in areas such as sexual deviance, family violence, hyperkinesis, learning disorders, eating disorders, etc. In advanced Western societies, this is perhaps the major site for emergence of new forms of deviance 'normalization' – and, hence, social control. (Cohen, S., 1994: 69)

But while many theorists seem to believe that these new techniques will soon push the outdated forms of social control such as total institutions, imprisonment, torture and the death penalty into well-deserved oblivion, there are at least two aspects that should dampen our hopes concerning any 'withering away' of the prisons. First, Horwitz (1990: 247) has stressed the fact that the therapeutic style of social control has 'only a narrow range of effectiveness. It can promote positive change when clients voluntarily cooperate and share common value systems with controllers. This is usually only the case when people share the educational, class, and cultural orientations of their therapists.' Second, one only has to take a look at the deepening trench between the world's affluent and afflicted parts, between the growing number of both the very rich and the very poor, to become aware of the possibility that the introduction of the new techniques of social control may find its limits right along the poverty line. While the new techniques will drive the old ones into oblivion at the top and



maybe at the core of (post-) industrial societies, the old ones and even the very old ones will, more probably than not, be applied to those below and beyond the poverty line – that is, to the pauperized masses within and beyond the borders of the affluent world (see Sumner, Chapter 6 in this volume).

Those who live at the margins of society have little to expect from the gentle forms of medicalization, therapeuticization, neutralization and normalization. There, beyond the enclaves of commodified happiness, the coming of age of young persons is not the continuous learning game with electronically geared reinforcements, but an often violent struggle in an environment that comes as close to the Hobbesian state of nature as any. And as far as the reactions to deviance are concerned, one will find all of them there – including the overt brutality of past stages of social formation that many theorists had long forgotten. Reactive social control still does rely on selective brutality that contains a peculiarly effective terrorizing element and which is regularly put into practice by powerful groups when they begin to define situations as critical for the survival of the(ir) system. On a grand historical scale, Mussolini, Hitler and Franco represent this method of controlling the working classes at a moment of dangerous social unrest. But one can also observe more restricted examples like the virtually unconditional crack-down on leftist terrorists in Germany during the 1970s, or the extreme persecution of drug traffickers in the United States and other countries. Seemingly outdated and premodern as it is, this control method – which includes coercion of masses in camps, long-term imprisonment, the death sentence, extra-legal killings by death squads and/or corrupt police, etc. – will become ever-more important, being linked to the extent that structural unemployment, international mass migration, youth violence and a restless lumpenproletariat will continue to grow, while social consensus continues to decline.

### Conclusion

As far as the public perception of the status quo is concerned, an apparently discrepant discourse points to the dangers of an all-too-mighty state that reduces its citizens to mere objects of control on the one hand (leading to what one could call 'the transparent-citizen-panic') and to the risk of a complete breakdown of order on the other hand (which leads to 'the breakdown-of-social-control-panic'). The first panic is being fuelled by the analyses of Herbert Marcuse and Michel Foucault. It capitalizes on therapeutic control and computerized surveillance, and gives rise to the fear of an increasingly wider and deeper-reaching net of social control, depriving individuals of

their liberty by subtle but all-the-more effective means, and turning them into transparent pieces of glass under the gaze of the powerful. The second perspective contradicts this and points to the fact that the individual has never been as transparent as in early tribal societies or medieval villages. It was in those comparatively small human groups, when everybody knew and was able to supervise everybody else in a closed kinship-regulated system, that peer control reached its unparalleled peak. Top-down control also was certainly more powerful in medieval times and had another climax in the totalitarian states of the twentieth century (which not by chance gave rise to Orwell's dystopia). Since then the efficiency of control has actually declined.

Of course, computer surveillance, data matching, profiling and the like are very impressive new means of control. 'Visions of the central all-knowing computer and Kafkaesque nightmares lurk on the horizon' (Marx and Reichman, 1987: 202) and there is no doubt about the repressive potential of such technology. But, on closer scrutiny, the accuracy and efficiency of this technology seem severely limited due to shortcomings in data-gathering and errors in data-processing which, for an all-too-human bureaucracy, become ever-more difficult to control the more information there is. In addition, the technology's vulnerability to manipulation and even complete neutralization by knowledgeable violators who deliberately produce false data and manage to obscure detection of the correct ones (Marx and Reichman, 1987) should not be underestimated. Moreover – and this point is often neglected – those extraordinary control methods have only become necessary because the state's grip on its subjects has loosened, and those subjects have become extraordinarily difficult to control due to their great number, diversification, mobility, anonymity, in addition to the enormous differentiation of societies into subsystems and subcultures. Relatively speaking, the new control methods might be and probably are less effective than the old ones, in view of their respective control problems. Today's news from the front of the police's 'thin blue line' can easily give the impression that we are headed for a complete breakdown of social control, at least in the no-go areas of the inner cities, where poverty, homelessness, joblessness and lawlessness, drugs and violence, vandalism, truancy and teenage parenthood seem to reign supreme. Furthermore, heterogeneous phenomena such as international mass migrations, the apparently independent behaviour of multinational corporations, the drug and arms trade, the peddling of uranium, international terrorism and the handling of poison gas by doomsday sects or, for that matter, pilfering at the workplace and tax evasion – which all appear to be out of control of any national or international legitimate political authority – certainly nourish the same impression. These seemingly contradictory

fears of a coming totalization of social control on the one hand, and a complete breakdown of social order on the other, may, nevertheless, become compatible when we see them as a reflection of different risks associated with different areas of the social system.

Internal polarizations of societies and the creation of an ever-deepening gap between the fortresses of the affluent and the migrating miserable masses are developments that are resulting in a marked bifurcation of control styles. The prospects are normalization and de-institutionalization for the 'in-groups', and an increasing brutalization at the margins for the 'out-groups'. Each control style, in turn, generates its own dangers and panic-discourses. The amusement park scenario entails the risk of a totalized benevolent submergence of the individual in an ocean of techno-prevention and manipulated consensus, while the scenario at the margins justifies the vision of a complete breakdown of social order and entails the danger of brutal top-down control measures.

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