



T. Pitch, *Pervasive Prevention: a Feminist Reading of the Rise of the Security Society*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham 2010, 158 pp., ISBN 978-0-7546-7564-8

review by

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Perils. Omnipresent video cameras. Private security companies controlling the street where I live. Codes. Preventive wars. Thousands of medical examinations. Hundreds of emergency news. Prohibitions for your safety. Dangerous immigrants. Electronic Cards. Diffusion of private insurances. Global citizens' freedom. Global citizens' fear. By reading *Pervasive Prevention* some clarifying connections between all these phenomena can be found.

The era of globalization maintains a modern push towards risk, together with those pre-modern fear, uncertainty and insecurity. Although this trend apparently seems contradictory, it can be synthesized and even harmonized by the Imperative of Prevention, namely, the contemporary western declination of social control. After a historical and Foucaultian digression on the theme, Tamar Pitch, who is a Professor of Philosophy of Law and a reference figure of the Italian feminism, exactly focuses on the current system of controlling citizens and on its main limit.

Besides the elements just mentioned, physical bodies also burst on the scene as main characters. Established powers, together with social control, have always transformed physical bodies into controlled social bodies. Today, this phenomenon has reached its extreme form: the disappearance of physical bodies. Although it sounds strange, at least at first sight, this interesting metaphor is one of the best contributions of Tamar Pitch. She writes that typical globalized citizens are meant to be independent from any kind of relationship with their physical bodies, too. They are continuously involved in getting rid of their limited, material, imperfect and mortal bodies with the final aim of completely subjugating nature. Global citizens are the only rulers of their bodies and this property is supposed to make them free. There are many explicatory examples: from decomposition and recomposition of our fragmented bodies, typical of organs transplantation and plastic surgery, to assisted reproduction or to genetic research. We can completely transform what we apparently are, we can even have a sex change. At the same time, our technological dissolution becomes necessary when society trusts imper-



sonal and homologated codes instead of original individuals. Today, our physical bodies are socially identified by our codes and by those traces and signals they leave.

Moving to the core concept of *Pervasive Prevention*, any historical review could object that prevention has always existed in human history. Whatever prevention might have been in the past, nowadays it has become the Imperative of Prevention characterized by some peculiar features. Its systematic nature leads global individuals to see possible dangerous events surrounding them. Besides being omnipresent, the Imperative of Prevention makes individuals feel completely alone in facing all those risks and they consequently rely on a newborn private security market. In other words, the Imperative of Prevention is individualized and privatized. Defining it as individualized, Pitch claims that preventing risks is just up to each of us and, in parallel with the decline of the modern welfare state, it is no longer a common and state responsibility. Prevention is an inevitable need of global citizens and, as just mentioned, a newborn private market promptly answers it. Health insurances and private security companies have been able to seize that opportunity: they can sell you all the prevention you need.

By telling the readers about this daily controlling mechanism, *Pervasive Prevention* is definitely set in our real life. People who have never reflected upon that, will do so. Unlike pre-modern and modern times, today almost all public and private institutions can monitor individual behaviors and choices. They control our attitudes and preferences as students, workers, patients and, above all, consumers. For example, when consumers pay using their credit cards, their consumption habits are generally registered and then sold to marketing companies. Again, the private security market takes advantages out of this post-modern soft surveillance. This mechanism simply goes together with the disappearance of bodies: our post-modern bodies are a perfect medium for data transmission. Furthermore, a Foucaultian instrument of governmentality is in force: post-modern citizens are supposed to ask themselves for security so that control practices are nowadays interiorized and they find expression in the habit of censoring and admonishing personal identities. Since social control is turning into self-control, the Imperative of Prevention guides our own actions. This mechanism of controlling people is consequently focused on possible victims instead of effective social causes. In other words, social causes do not exist anymore: the origin of problems always lies in individuals.

Some citizens are able to take the duty of prevention upon themselves and, as a result, they obtain the status of deserving victims. Besides hav-



ing suffered from an adverse event, a deserving victim has also done everything possible in order to prevent it. Those rising individual responsibility and insecurity are at the base of a cultural pressure towards independency. We are responsible for ourselves and, moreover, we are only responsible to ourselves. The central role of independency and autonomy is socially masked as the increasing individual freedom that, in Pitch's interpretation, is just illusory and which should be described as the "obligation to be free". While the individualized Imperative of Prevention is spreading a general sense of guilt, the privatized Imperative of Prevention determines social discrimination. The kind of prevention that the private market sells is definitely beyond the poorest means. However, this is no longer a social problem, they are simply not able to prevent themselves from perils. By using other words, they are not deserving victims. By using critical words, they are discriminated because of their economic status. Security has completely reshaped its nature: from a universal right guaranteed by the state to a private good, which only the richest can afford. The Imperative of Prevention creates and perpetuates social inequalities.

The main feature of the Imperative of Prevention lies in its insidious nature. In accordance with the typical Foucaultian perspective, Tamar Pitch interprets the present-day power as something so crystallized and diffused that it is hard to identify. The unbelievable paradox consists in that sense of freedom and omnipotence we feel real although it simply makes us more manageable. While we are becoming what we want, post-modern power exactly drives this same willingness. The strength of the present global control is clearly traceable in its imperceptibility: how can you resist something you do not even perceive? Exactly at this point of the analysis, one of the most interesting contributions of Tamar Pitch comes out. The post-modern system of controlling individuals has been so far described as a perfect entity: this would be a partial conclusion. That is to say that this same system definitely has an unsolved limit. Surviving bodies are its limit. In the globalized western world, there are two bodies which are different from all the others. Apart from causing discrimination, this difference is the reason of their survival. The bodies of immigrants, as well as those of women, cannot disappear.

Immigrants still maintain a body which our surveillance system cannot take under control: the western network of information do not have enough data about them, they do not leave signals and traces behind while their heavy bodies flood into our borders. However, power wants to control them, or better, it needs to control them, too. The only way social control can manage their presence consists in being violent, coacti-



ve, repressive, and thus, explicit. If we wanted to, we could see all those controlling and repressive actions towards immigrants. Centres for Identification and Expulsion are concrete manifestations of social control, let's start taking a careful look at them. At least.

Controlling women, especially their bodies, mainly means controlling their reproductive power which any kind of authority needed, needs and will need. This necessity has always terrorized the male established order which had to show itself in order to keep female bodies under control. Not even the most insidious and refined post-modern social control can escape from those explicit and touchable practices which cram our history. The attempt to manage the generative power of women would reach its final aim with the disappearance of female bodies. Whereas first improvements regarding contraceptives and female condition during pregnancy and childbirth fell into the category of "female emancipation", the latest scientific and biological attempts have notably exceeded the framework of the feminist demand by venturing into the challenge of human being reproduction. More than ten years ago, scientists started working on a possible artificial womb which, being still a theoretical device, could carry on an extracorporeal pregnancy. Even the maternal body will disappear when this artificial uterus perfectly works. Anyway, the female body still exists and it maintains its peculiarities, being the constraint or, as Tamar Pitch suggests, one of the most powerful post-modern weapons.

Pitch's perspective can be associated with the vast and heterogeneous family of the critics of globalization. This reading stresses how the post-modern mechanism of controlling individuals creates neutral and manipulable citizens who isolate themselves in that sense of fake independency and freedom. In such a context, the social and community interest turns out to be fragmentized and eroded. As a result, when the public sphere becomes weak, political choices are increasingly delegated to the global neoliberal power. The Imperative of Prevention comes out as a part of the necessary myth of globalization, which wants to "discipline the citizens to meet the requirements of the global marketplace" with the compliance of its economic citizens and National States. Besides confirming this critical perspective, which is shared by many scholars, *Pervasive Prevention* can add something important to the global debate. It basically presents you the weakest point of this mechanism: surviving bodies. Inhabitants of the third world, immigrants, political refugees, and asylum seekers together with women are luckily its unsolved limit. Moreover, even if it could seem a paradox, globalization itself strengthens its limit. Bauman claims that if every order creates some excluded elements, the



expansion of the globalization order will generate more and more waste and, at the same time, the space where they can be hidden will obviously diminish. Since globalization itself creates its enemies and make them more powerful, this system becomes unbearable. Although the western male leading power has historically been a rigid conqueror, the time to become a smart diplomatic has come, otherwise the myth of globalization could dramatically collapse.