Smart cities and the Re-Invention of the Panopticon

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Introduction: on mediation of space

Harvesting in Mesopotamia or along the Nile, for instance, required both **geometry** and **planning** – and consequently forced labour and slave supervision. On the top of the hill stood men in charge of supervision, ensuring **commands** were being heard and executed. Then ramparts and towers were raised, **mediating space and amplifying the power of men over men**.

So began the *Architectural Era*.

A MECHANISM OF POWER: THE PANOPTICON

«We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring, the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows on the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light across the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, **in which the actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible**.» Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punichment 1975, 200.

A MECHANISM OF POWER: THE PANOPTICON

Bentham's Panopticon is a multipurpose-design and a **laboratory** for eventual social transformations –prisons, madhouses, factories, schools. And, if it functions correctly, almost all internal violence can be eliminated.

Is this the model implemented by smart cities?

«The theme of the Panopticon — at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency — found in the prison its privileged locus of realization.» (Foucault DP 249)

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Some general inferences on smart cities can be drawn from the analysis to panopticism:

1. It serves to act upon individuals.

2. In it power is exercised, not simply held. It's an exercise of power with limited manpower at the least cost.

3. Bentham' s Panopticon also captures and manifests a reversal of visibility in the organization of space.

It represents a shift in the regimes of visibility: «Whereas in monarchical regimes it was the sovereign who had the greatest visibility, under the institutions of bio-power it is those who are to be disciplined, observed, and understood who are made the most visible.» (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 191)

4. It is, ultimately, an utopian architectural device, functioning automatically.

5. It is also an explicit program. Foucault remarked that discipline is not the expression of an «ideal type» but rather the connection between different type of techniques and the responses to local objectives (Dreyfus & Rabinow 132).
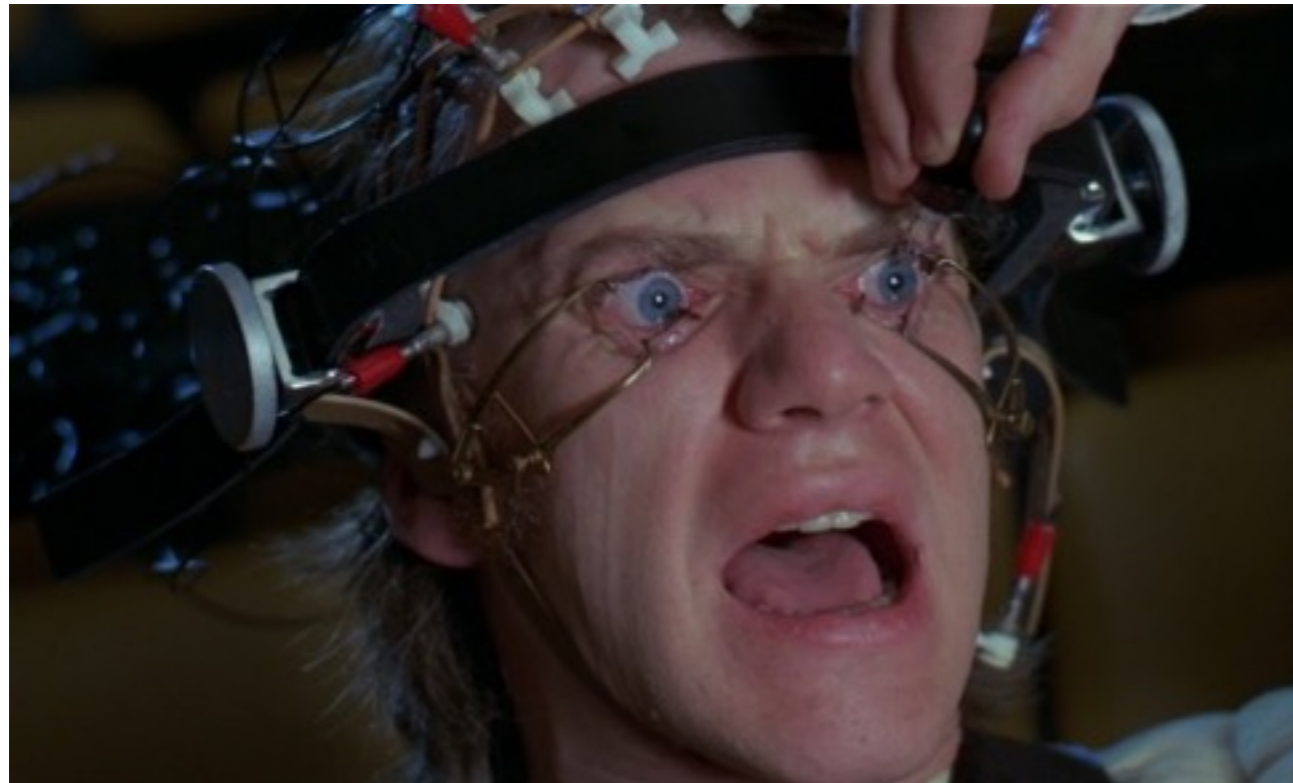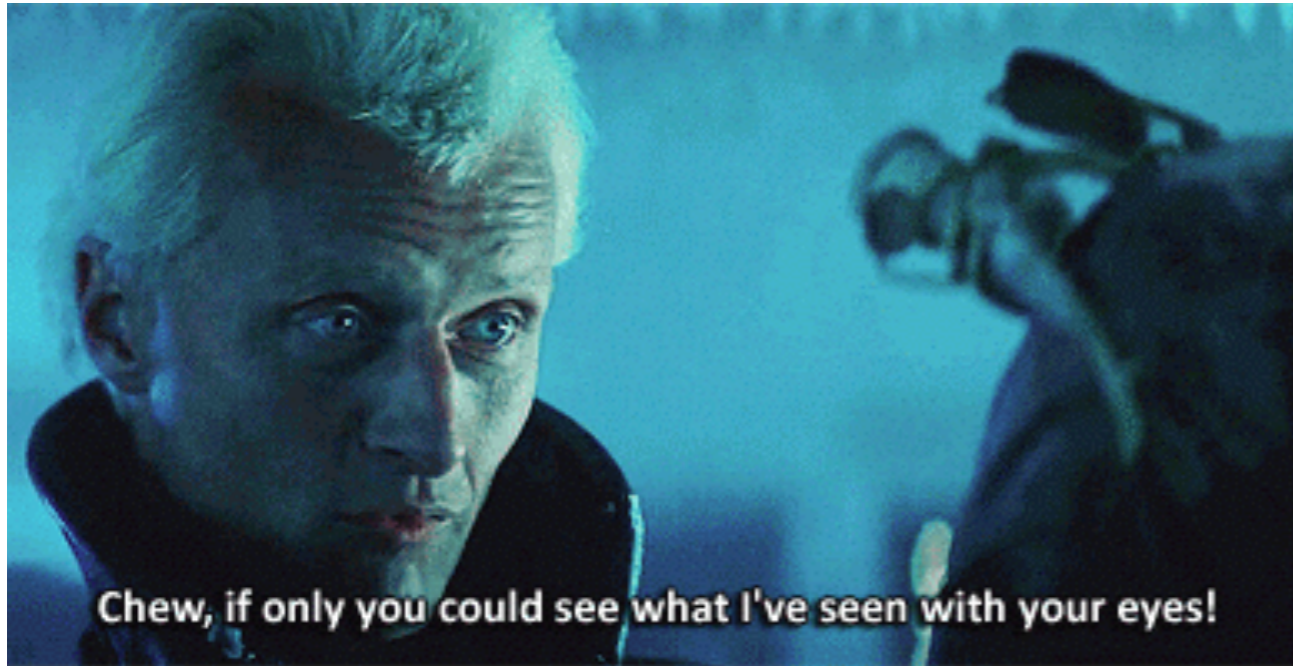
IBM' solution for the «*Smarter City*».

We see how SMART CITIES could be a digital analogue of the Panopticon, where the presence of an **unseen watcher** keeps order with more efficiently than physical violence. Thanks to advances in data processing, machine learning and computer vision, we are nearing a world where surveillance cameras are also able to analyze our emotions and behaviours, while inducing movements and intentions, just like in Orwell's «Nineteen Eighty-Four» (1949) or Aldous Huxley' «Brave New World» (1932).

Writers of fiction occupy a pivotal position – both mirror-like and ambiguous.

Fiction is as true - that is to say present and effective - as it can be

Chew, if only you could see what I've seen with your eyes!

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However we must acknowledge not only the **apparatuses of power within a smart city** but also the **resistances** that necessarily run across it.

Rather than a descriptive account of power, the question of the apparatus is the **ontological reckoning of a multiplicity that is strongly relational**.

Power is a fractured field. Lines of power are to be **intercepted**, **interrupted** and **transgressed.**

END OF PRESENTATION
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