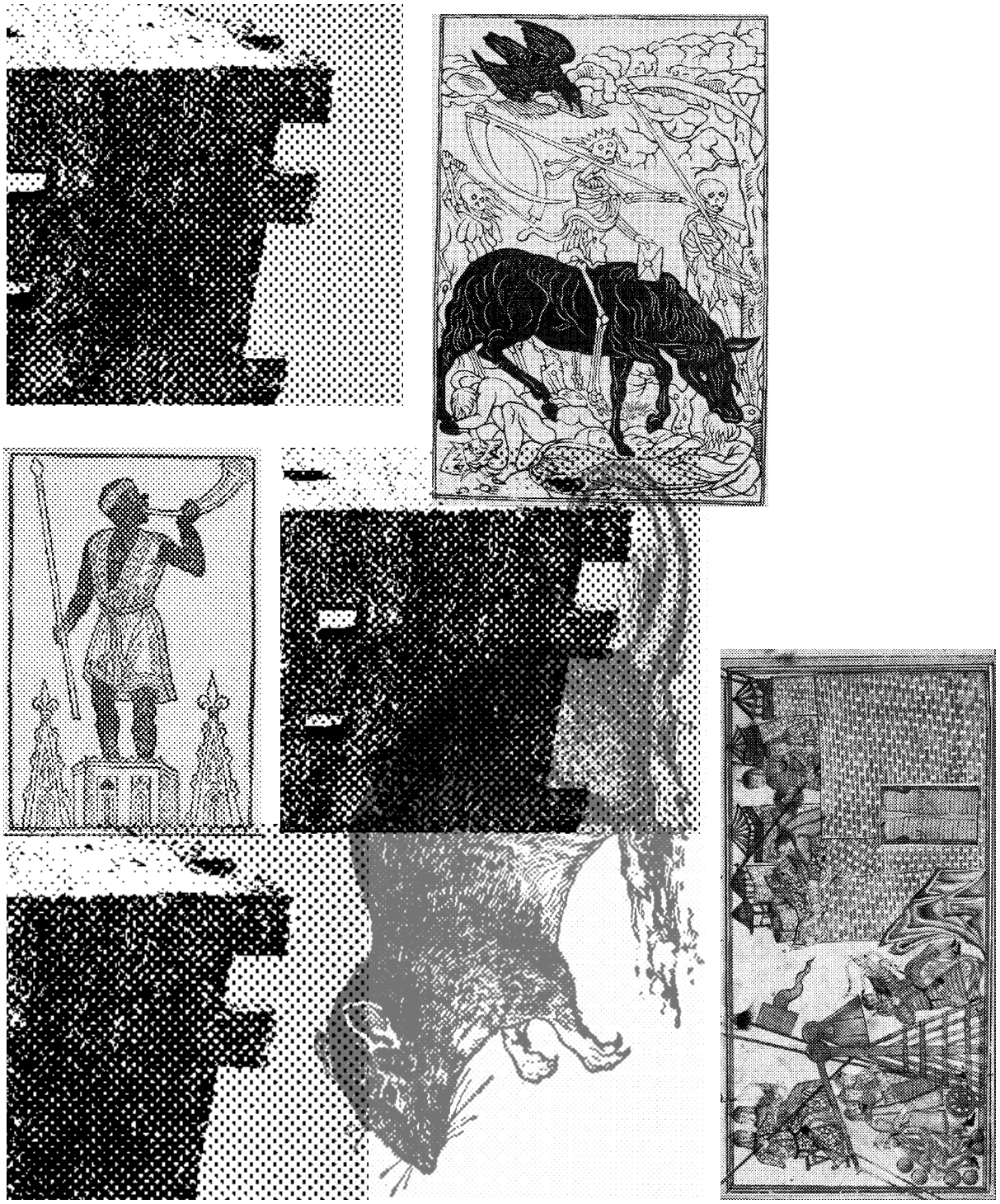
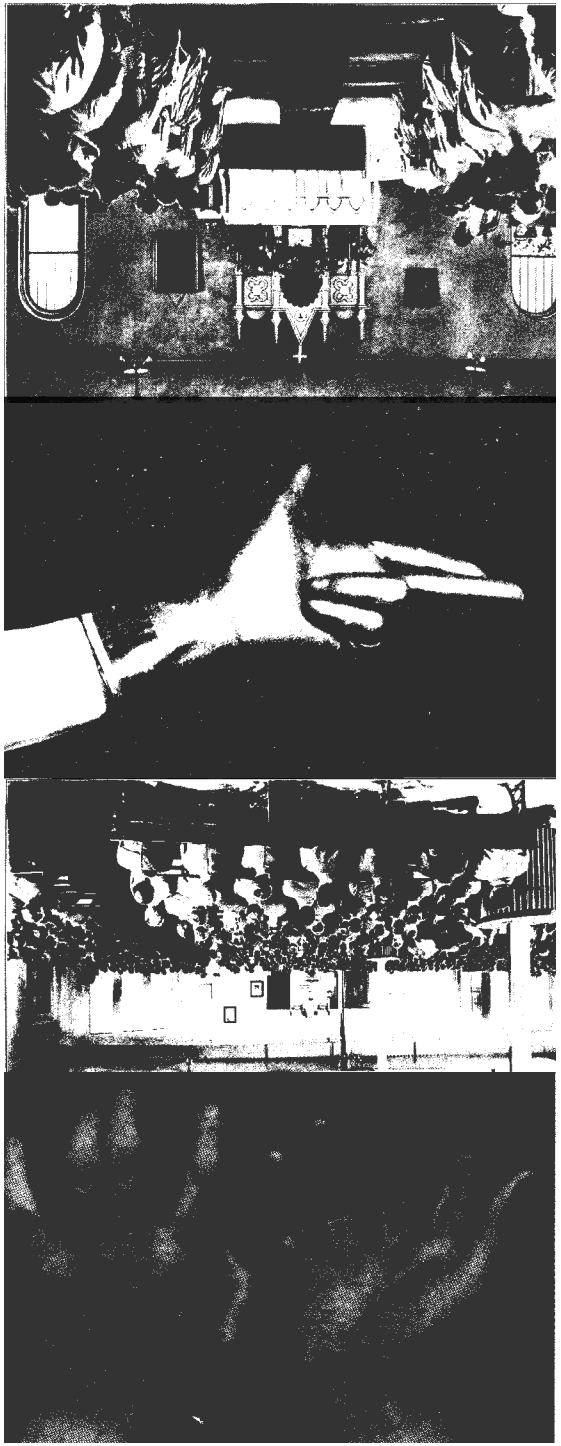
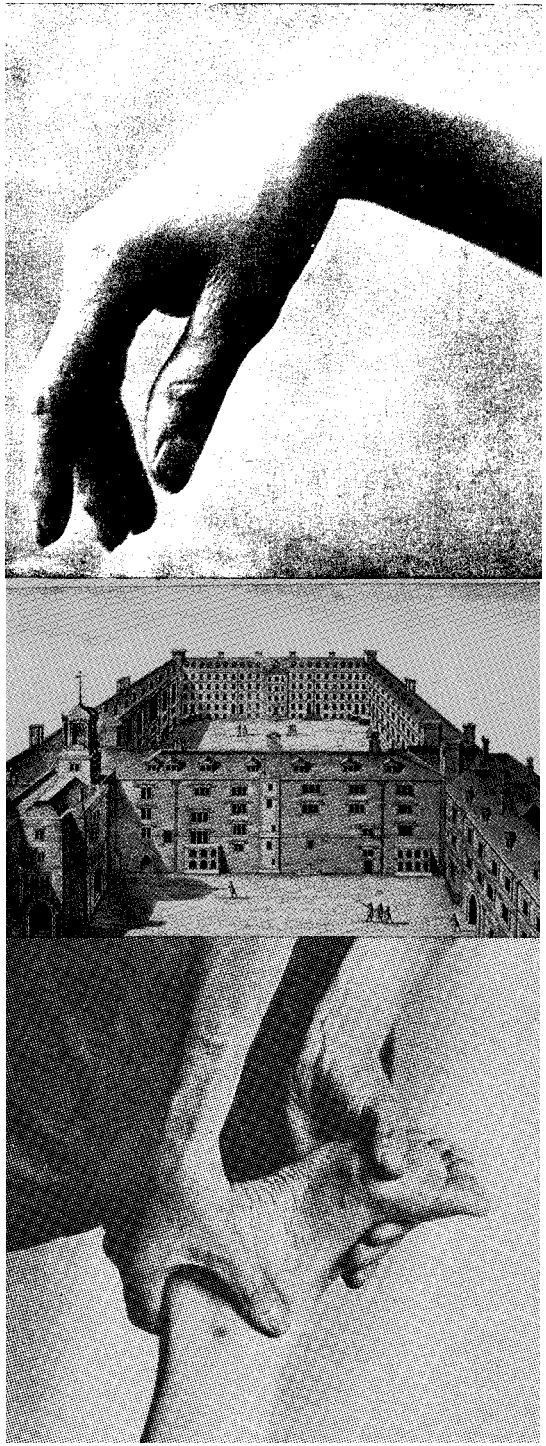
Because of its highly visible and disfiguring effects, leprosy was feared throughout the middle ages. Its mark was that of a malevolent evil, presumed to be as contagious as the disease itself. As Foucault (1995 [1977]: 198) argues, this disease gave rise to ‘practices of exclusion’, such as leper colonies, where the afflicted were left to their doom and society, purged of this pestilence, could imagine itself pure. Spinalonga is the name of a beautifully sunny Cretan island, fortified by the Venetians in 1578 as a defence against the Ottoman threat but also as a base for the military to protect trade routes. From 1903 -1957 the island was used as a leper colony; one of the last active in Europe. Despite entering into the fortified compound through a door ominously named ‘Dante’s Gate’ the lepers were given sustenance, medical aid, and social security payments. This social care was a significant advance on the previous treatment of lepers, in Crete or elsewhere, who were forced to live in exile, or hide in the darkness of caves.



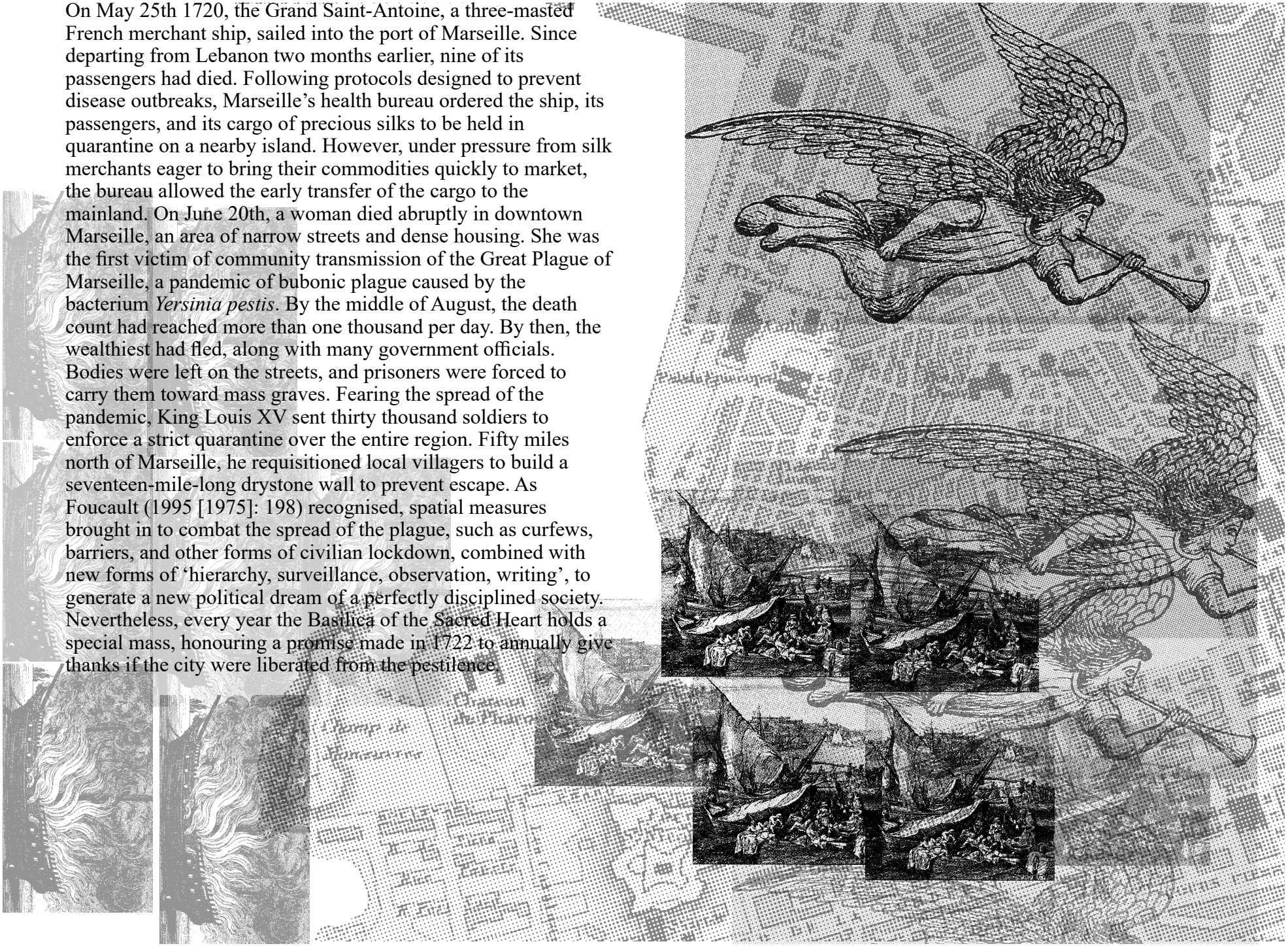
Coming from the East, ‘The Black Death’ reached the shores of Italy in 1348 and eventually would kill over twenty-five million people; an estimated third of Europe’s population. Also known as ‘The Pestilence’ or ‘The Great Mortality’, this disease was the worst pandemic ever to afflict humanity. Likely named after the black/blue swellings which appeared on the infected, or the Black Rats which carried and transmitted the disease, this name also betrays a general logocentrism with Western culture, recognised by Georges Bataille’s essay ‘The Big Toe’ (1985 [1929]: 20-23) but still evident today, which demarcates whiteness as the index of justice, light, and the good, and darkness with evil, maleficence, and disease. A paranoid but apocryphal tale, designed to demonstrate the baseness of the Mongols, recounts how they sacked the city of Kaffa by catapulting the diseased and dying over the city walls. Giovanni Boccaccio, resident in Venice during the time, found inspiration in these dark times for his Decameron (1353), a book of 100 stories told by a group of ten young white Florentines to pass the time as they escaped the darkness of the city for two weeks.

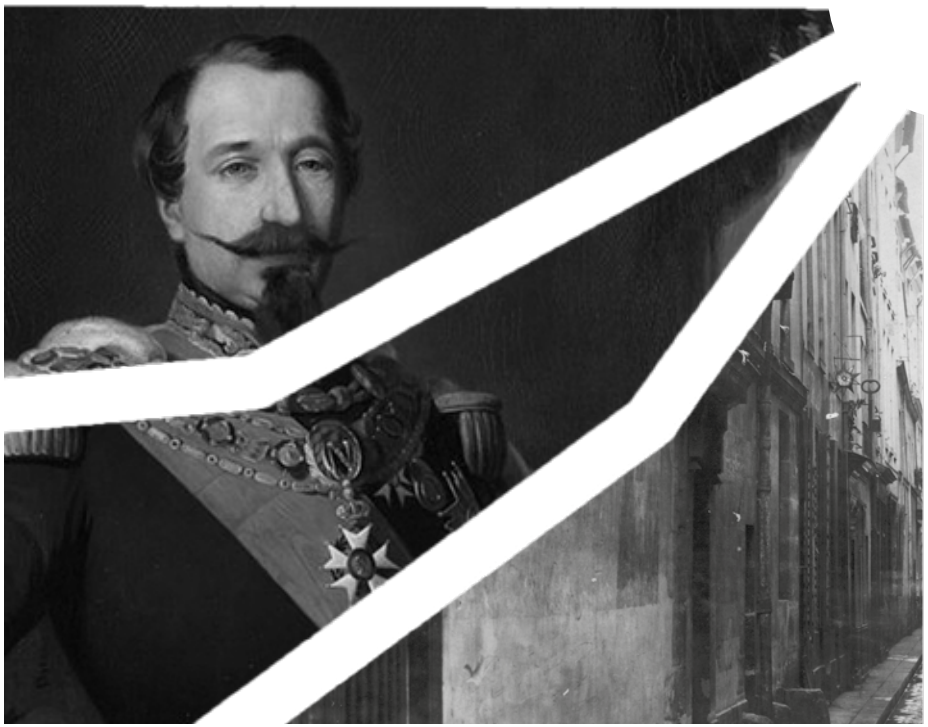


The ‘Great Confinement’, analysed by Foucault in Madness and Civilisation (1988 [1965]), refers to the mass institutional incarceration of the criminal, the poor, the insane, and the unemployed across Europe in the seventeenth century. In London, this found its expression through the establishment of four ‘Houses of Correction’; Bridewell, in the City of London (1553), Clerkenwell, Middlesex (1616), Southwark, Surrey (1724), and Tothill Fields, Westminster (1618). The latter was condemned as unsafe and unhealthy and moved to Hangman’s Acre, St George’s Field (1772). Though these institutions were paid for by a tax, the public was also encouraged to support these institutions through voluntary donations (Foucault 1988 [1965]: 43). The ‘Justices of the Peace’ used these Houses of Correction as a way to avoid the bureaucracy of formally charging petty criminals; the inmate demographic mainly consisted of prostitutes, thieves, and the ‘loose, idle and disorderly’ (Hitchcock et al 2012). Inside, convicts were forced to work, usually beating hemp; the idea being that hard work would improve the moral fibre of inmates and leave them with no time or energy for deviant activity. Gradually, society recognised the folly of these institutions, wherein petty criminals associated with the murderous, the immoral, and the insane in a melting pot which amplified deviance, rather than correcting it.

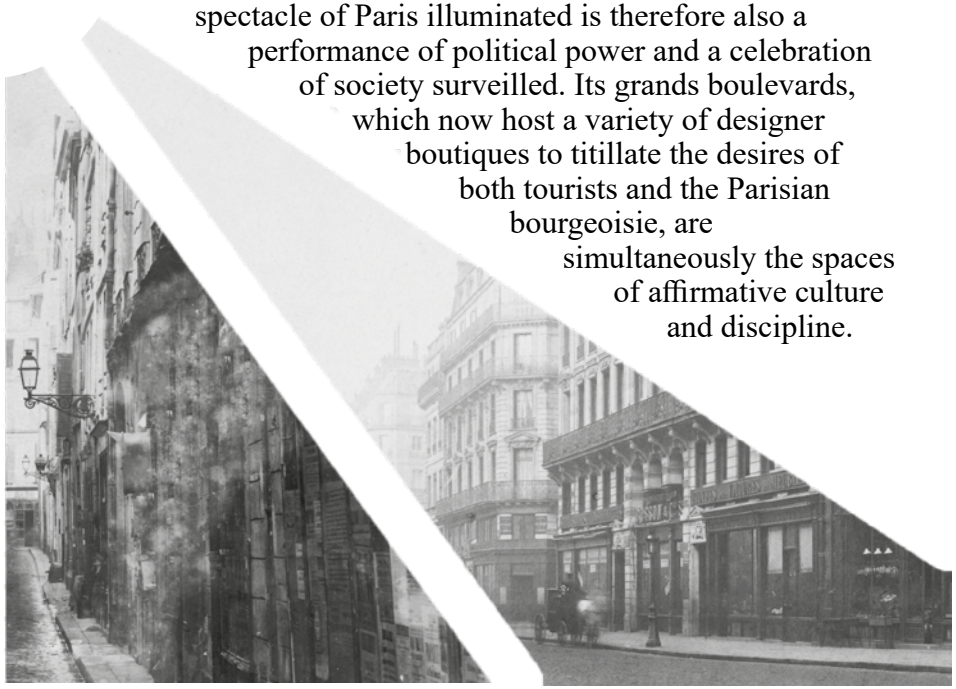


On May 25th 1720, the Grand Saint-Antoine, a three-masted French merchant ship, sailed into the port of Marseille. Since departing from Lebanon two months earlier, nine of its passengers had died. Following protocols designed to prevent disease outbreaks, Marseille's health bureau ordered the ship, its passengers, and its cargo of precious silks to be held in quarantine on a nearby island. However, under pressure from silk merchants eager to bring their commodities quickly to market, the bureau allowed the early transfer of the cargo to the mainland. On June 20th, a woman died abruptly in downtown Marseille, an area of narrow streets and dense housing. She was the first victim of community transmission of the Great Plague of Marseille, a pandemic of bubonic plague caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. By the middle of August, the death count had reached more than one thousand per day. By then, the wealthiest had fled, along with many government officials. Bodies were left on the streets, and prisoners were forced to carry them toward mass graves. Fearing the spread of the pandemic, King Louis XV sent thirty thousand soldiers to enforce a strict quarantine over the entire region. Fifty miles north of Marseille, he requisitioned local villagers to build a seventeen-mile-long drystone wall to prevent escape. As Foucault (1995 [1975]: 198) recognised, spatial measures brought in to combat the spread of the plague, such as curfews, barriers, and other forms of civilian lockdown, combined with new forms of 'hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing', to generate a new political dream of a perfectly disciplined society. Nevertheless, every year the Basilica of the Sacred Heart holds a special mass, honouring a promise made in 1722 to annually give thanks if the city were liberated from the pestilence.

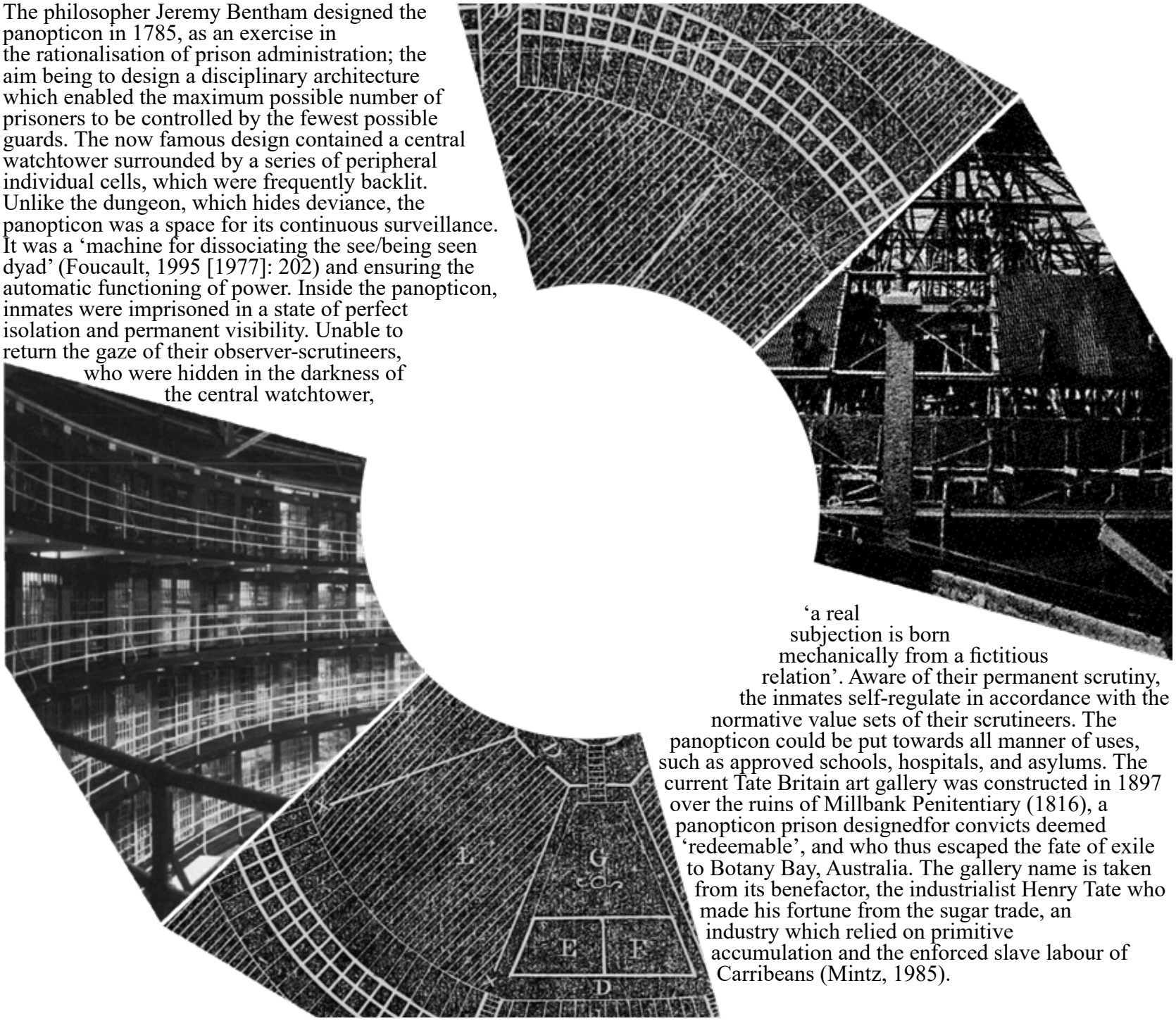




Paris is known globally as La Ville-Lumière, the ‘City of Light’, a name which currently seduces tourists, but can be traced back to the reign of the ‘Sun-King’ Louis XIV. In order to spread his magnificent light and sovereign power to all corners of the city, the King appointed Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie as the first Lieutenant General of the Paris police on March 15th 1667. De la Reynie established the world’s first modern police force, whose primary objectives were the protection of the bourgeois areas of the city and the repression of its slums. A key tool in this regard was light; the streets and bridges were filled with lanterns, making them easier to police, and citizens were also encouraged to light their windows with candles to expose the criminality which hid in its dark, medieval alleyways. Napoleon III’s cure for this labyrinthine, dark, and uncontrollable city architecture was more extreme. He appointed Georges Haussmann to bulldoze wide thoroughfares through the medieval centre of Paris, creating less places for criminals to hide, but also allowing easy access to the city centre for his military in case of a popular rebellion against his dictatorship. Haussmannisation started a process of gentrification which forced the poorer classes to the periphery of the city, preserving the centre as a sanitised bourgeois and upper class zone. The contemporary spectacle of Paris illuminated is therefore also a performance of political power and a celebration of society surveilled. Its grands boulevards, which now host a variety of designer boutiques to titillate the desires of both tourists and the Parisian bourgeoisie, are simultaneously the spaces of affirmative culture and discipline.



The philosopher Jeremy Bentham designed the panopticon in 1785, as an exercise in the rationalisation of prison administration; the aim being to design a disciplinary architecture which enabled the maximum possible number of prisoners to be controlled by the fewest possible guards. The now famous design contained a central watchtower surrounded by a series of peripheral individual cells, which were frequently backlit. Unlike the dungeon, which hides deviance, the panopticon was a space for its continuous surveillance. It was a ‘machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad’ (Foucault, 1995 [1977]: 202) and ensuring the automatic functioning of power. Inside the panopticon, inmates were imprisoned in a state of perfect isolation and permanent visibility. Unable to return the gaze of their observer-scrutineers, who were hidden in the darkness of the central watchtower,

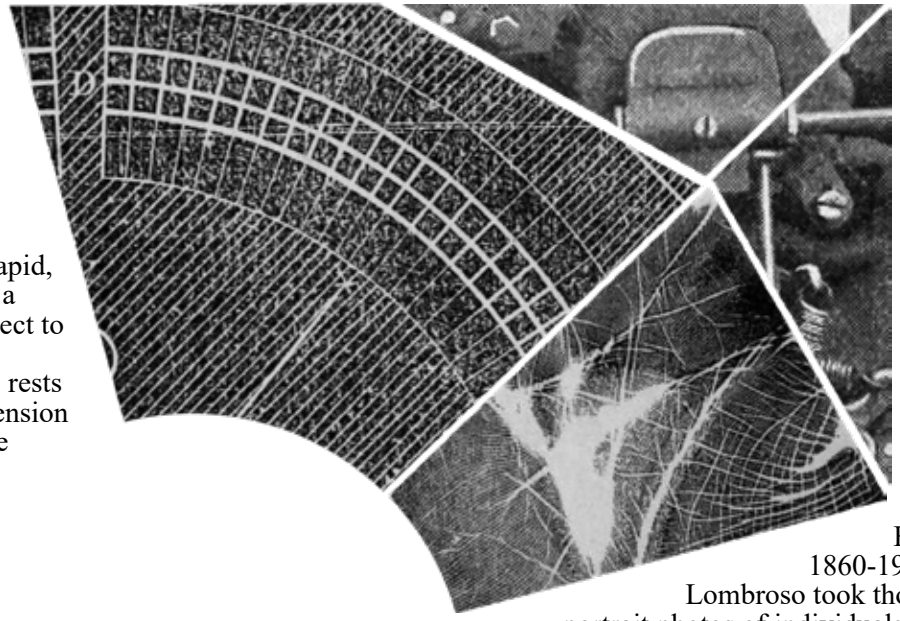


‘a real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation’. Aware of their permanent scrutiny, the inmates self-regulate in accordance with the normative value sets of their scrutineers. The panopticon could be put towards all manner of uses, such as approved schools, hospitals, and asylums. The current Tate Britain art gallery was constructed in 1897 over the ruins of Millbank Penitentiary (1816), a panopticon prison designedfor convicts deemed ‘redeemable’, and who thus escaped the fate of exile to Botany Bay, Australia. The gallery name is taken from its benefactor, the industrialist Henry Tate who made his fortune from the sugar trade, an industry which relied on primitive accumulation and the enforced slave labour of Carribeans (Mintz, 1985).

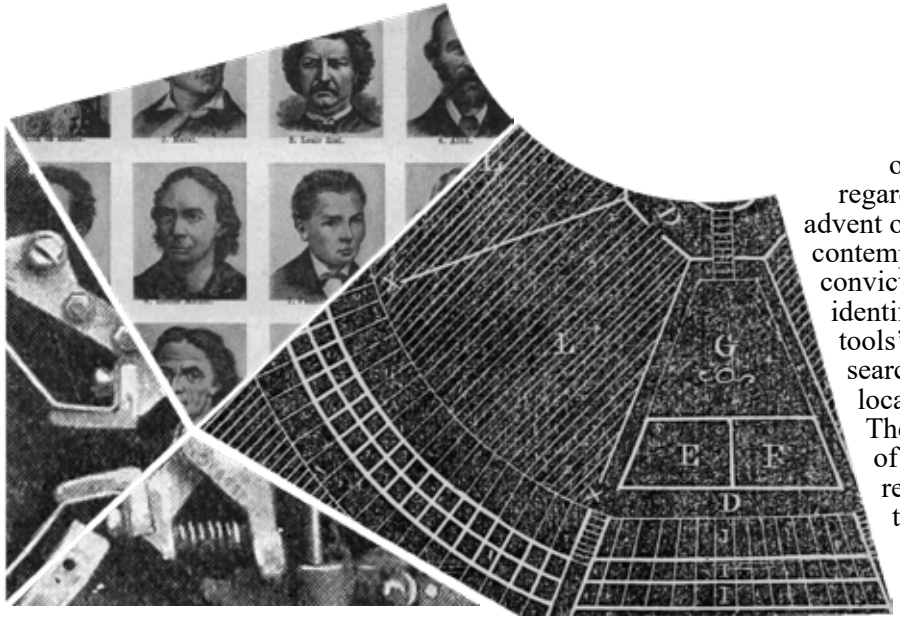
The recent death of George Floyd at the hands of a racist police force has renewed discussions about their fitness for purpose. Though beyond the 'Overton Window' of the liberal mainstream media, the current politics of the street is forcing them to engage with contemporary activist calls to defund the police; calls which also question their historical legitimacy per se. Dominant-hegemonic ideology has naturalised the existence of the police within society, disguising the fact that this repressive state apparatus (Althusser, 1971: 142-3) is a relatively modern invention. The first formal US police force was established in Boston in 1838 primarily to protect mercantile capitalism. However, in the USA, the call for an organised police force in the eighteenth and nineteenth century came primarily from the South, especially from those with a historical vested interest in the slave system. Boston merchants successfully argued that police costs should come from the public purse, as the police operated for the common good. In the UK, shortly after the military repression of unarmed civilian demonstrators at the Peterloo massacre of 1819, the police force was invented in 1829 by Robert Peel to suppress the threat of an increasingly organised industrial proletariat. A secondary function of the police force was to control the public space of the city, which the proletariat needed for mass rallies, and to clear commercial spaces of the undesirable characters which might otherwise affect commercial trade or the general spectacle of the city.

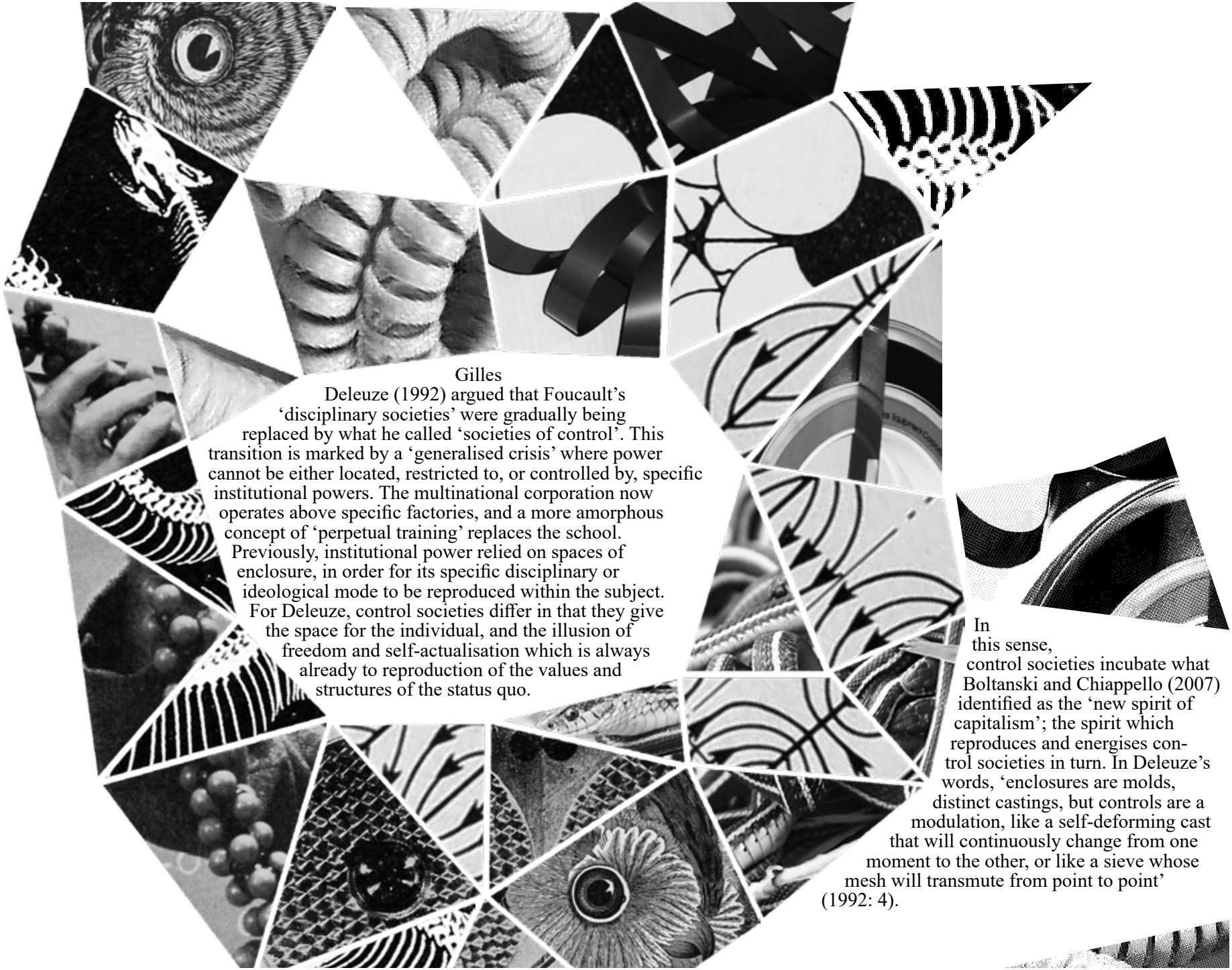
For Foucault, ‘Panopticism is the general principle of a new ‘political anatomy’ whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline’.

‘Panopticism, is the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come. The movement from one project to the other, from a schema of exceptional discipline to one of a generalized surveillance, rests on a historical transformation: the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society’
(Foucault, 1995 [1975]: 209).



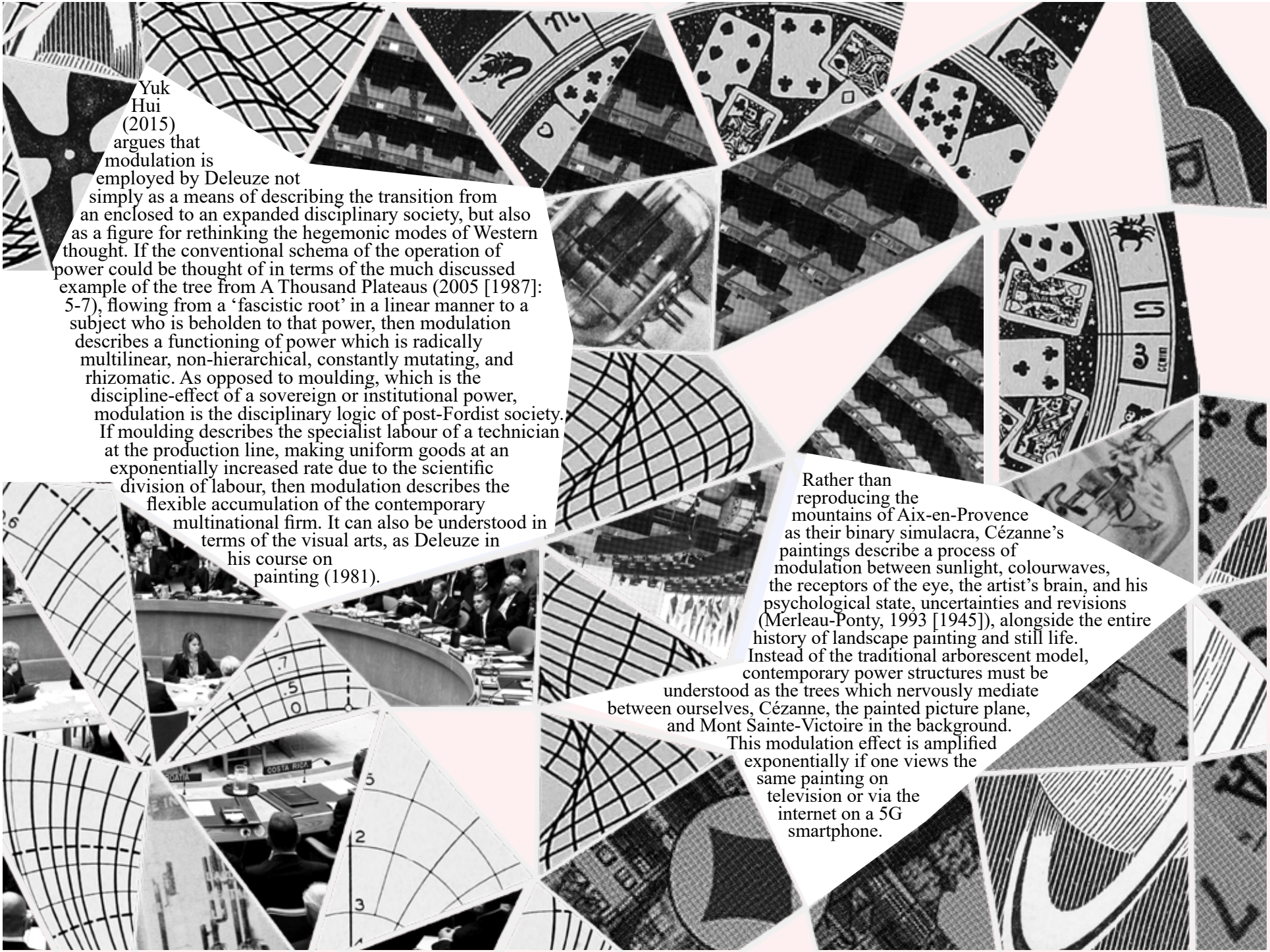
Between the years 1860-1909, Cesare Lombroso took thousands of portrait photos of individuals who were considered socially deviant, in order to develop his theory of social atavism - the idea that criminality could be identified by one’s physiognomy. Phrenologists regularly made death masks of hanged criminals as demonstrable proofs of their theses. These methods quickly gained favour with the police force, and Lombroso’s photos were even used as evidence to convict in courts. Subjects included murderers, the insane, ethnic minorities, lesbians, and many others deemed socially abnormal. Lombroso’s work is widely regarded as pioneering modern criminology, but it also marks the advent of panoptic surveillance society. The majority of contemporary police work relies on surveillance technology for convictions; the NYPD currently uses facial recognition databases to identify suspects in the streets, and also use ‘mobile device forensic tools’ to access data and meta-data from mobile phones, including search histories, location data, encrypted communications, and locally stored biometric data, such as fingerprint or face ID’s. The Brennan Centre for Justice has recently made a freedom of information request to the NYPD to disclose information related to their use of such data to develop ‘predictive policing’ technologies to prevent future crime, in similar manner to the hi-tech methods employed by the privatised police force in Paul Verhoeven’s (1987) film Robocop.

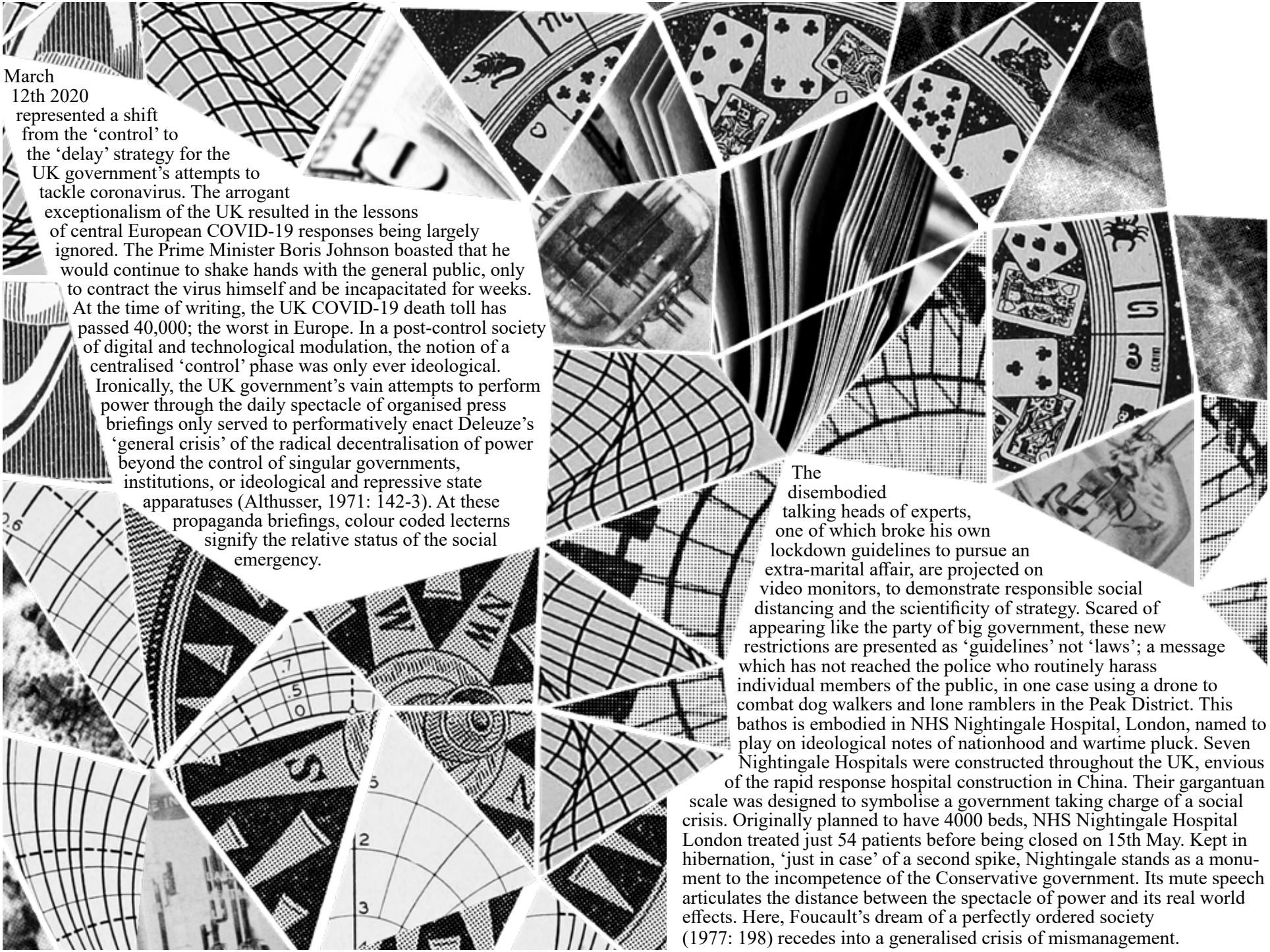




Gilles Deleuze (1992) argued that Foucault's 'disciplinary societies' were gradually being replaced by what he called 'societies of control'. This transition is marked by a 'generalised crisis' where power cannot be either located, restricted to, or controlled by, specific institutional powers. The multinational corporation now operates above specific factories, and a more amorphous concept of 'perpetual training' replaces the school. Previously, institutional power relied on spaces of enclosure, in order for its specific disciplinary or ideological mode to be reproduced within the subject. For Deleuze, control societies differ in that they give the space for the individual, and the illusion of freedom and self-actualisation which is always already to reproduction of the values and structures of the status quo.

In this sense, control societies incubate what Boltanski and Chiappello (2007) identified as the 'new spirit of capitalism'; the spirit which reproduces and energises control societies in turn. In Deleuze's words, 'enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point' (1992: 4).


Yuk Hui (2015) argues that modulation is employed by Deleuze not simply as a means of describing the transition from an enclosed to an expanded disciplinary society, but also as a figure for rethinking the hegemonic modes of Western thought. If the conventional schema of the operation of power could be thought of in terms of the much discussed example of the tree from A Thousand Plateaus (2005 [1987]: 5-7), flowing from a 'fascistic root' in a linear manner to a subject who is beholden to that power, then modulation describes a functioning of power which is radically multilinear, non-hierarchical, constantly mutating, and rhizomatic. As opposed to moulding, which is the discipline-effect of a sovereign or institutional power, modulation is the disciplinary logic of post-Fordist society. If moulding describes the specialist labour of a technician at the production line, making uniform goods at an exponentially increased rate due to the scientific division of labour, then modulation describes the flexible accumulation of the contemporary multinational firm. It can also be understood in terms of the visual arts, as Deleuze in his course on painting (1981).
Rather than reproducing the mountains of Aix-en-Provence as their binary simulacra, Cézanne's paintings describe a process of modulation between sunlight, colourwaves, the receptors of the eye, the artist's brain, and his psychological state, uncertainties and revisions (Merleau-Ponty, 1993 [1945]), alongside the entire history of landscape painting and still life. Instead of the traditional arborescent model, contemporary power structures must be understood as the trees which nervously mediate between ourselves, Cézanne, the painted picture plane, and Mont Sainte-Victoire in the background. This modulation effect is amplified exponentially if one views the same painting on television or via the internet on a 5G smartphone.



March 12th 2020 represented a shift from the 'control' to the 'delay' strategy for the UK government's attempts to tackle coronavirus. The arrogant exceptionalism of the UK resulted in the lessons of central European COVID-19 responses being largely ignored. The Prime Minister Boris Johnson boasted that he would continue to shake hands with the general public, only to contract the virus himself and be incapacitated for weeks. At the time of writing, the UK COVID-19 death toll has passed 40,000; the worst in Europe. In a post-control society of digital and technological modulation, the notion of a centralised 'control' phase was only ever ideological. Ironically, the UK government's vain attempts to perform power through the daily spectacle of organised press briefings only served to performatively enact Deleuze's 'general crisis' of the radical decentralisation of power beyond the control of singular governments, institutions, or ideological and repressive state apparatuses (Althusser, 1971: 142-3). At these propaganda briefings, colour coded lecterns signify the relative status of the social emergency.

The disembodied talking heads of experts, one of which broke his own lockdown guidelines to pursue an extra-marital affair, are projected on video monitors, to demonstrate responsible social distancing and the scientificity of strategy. Scared of appearing like the party of big government, these new restrictions are presented as 'guidelines' not 'laws'; a message which has not reached the police who routinely harass individual members of the public, in one case using a drone to combat dog walkers and lone ramblers in the Peak District. This bathos is embodied in NHS Nightingale Hospital, London, named to play on ideological notes of nationhood and wartime pluck. Seven Nightingale Hospitals were constructed throughout the UK, envious of the rapid response hospital construction in China. Their gargantuan scale was designed to symbolise a government taking charge of a social crisis. Originally planned to have 4000 beds, NHS Nightingale Hospital London treated just 54 patients before being closed on 15th May. Kept in hibernation, 'just in case' of a second spike, Nightingale stands as a monument to the incompetence of the Conservative government. Its mute speech articulates the distance between the spectacle of power and its real world effects. Here, Foucault's dream of a perfectly ordered society (1977: 198) recedes into a generalised crisis of mismanagement.