

21st October. The apparatus set up *Place Bellecour*: a system that resembles computer wargames.

Definition and overview of the term apparatus.

“I will call apparatus anything that has, in one way or another, the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the actions, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings”.¹

Policies, police measures, urbanism, cars, computers, the Internet, mobile phone, electronic games, etc., “are not simply commodities that can be purchased. They modify our personalities”.²



A huge accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses.

The apparatus of 21st October in Lyon's *Place Bellecour* radically differs from other apparatuses such as cars, computers or mobile phones, for it is far from the positivity of consumer society – that phase where happiness lies in the consumption of goods or in the afterlife.

When a society discards the historical element and keeps repeating over and over the arbitrary discourse of the end of history, it loses its entire sense of positivity, and the relation between society and power goes from mutual ignorance to open conflict. Men

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif ?*, traduit de l'italien par Martin Rueff, Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2007 [my translation].

² Giorgio Agamben, *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif ?* [my translation].

of power, who describe themselves as those from *high up*, practice an absolute power, run a deaf monologue, out of reality, upon “those *below*”. In a society structured around individuality rather than community, around individual goals rather than collective ideals, social ties, which maintain a certain social cohesion, are progressively outlawed or are lost because they are mediated by apparatuses – with mobile phones, *the moment* is not *here and now* any longer, it is always elsewhere–. With the absence or destruction of social ties, apparatuses have tended to become autonomous in order to affect interpersonal relations independently from the powers in place. They affect individuals, both catching their attention and separating them, yet functioning along the “mechanisms and the games of power” and imposing them on individuals who are subjected to apparatuses.

With the advancement of technologies and neurosciences, apparatuses have become increasingly autonomous to evolve into propaganda machines leading to the loss of subjectivity – as in this advertisement for the French Army: *devenezvousmeme.com* (“*becomeyourself.com*”)–, to the extent that apparatuses have become educative tools teaching young children, taking the place of family and school, and later university. They are now machines that regulate work, research and games, and that rule everything in a society which is itself governed by computers and anticipates its future through them. It is therefore no surprise to see, here and there, the appearance of actions that are increasingly, and extraordinarily, inhumane and violent in order to clear issues of desocialisation such as social conflicts.

Again, this is the manifestation of a major crisis, the receding of the real in society as a whole, which is expressed by social tension, isolated individuals and between society and power. The void thus created is expanding, and is filled in by apparatuses that technically and randomly regulate interpersonal relations and behaviours between individuals and isolated groups. The more important the void, the more apparatuses take hold there, thereby driving the State, institutions and the real social community away. Just as the green algae proliferate in oceans when the ecosystem is artificially and brutally altered.

No happiness or positivity, no humaneness

Legally and technically speaking, apparatuses were originally police tools that aimed to address emergencies. But today, in this state of neglect within, and of, society, everything is an emergency and is addressed in terms of immediacy, even when nothing is happening, as in the swine flu outbreak. Emergency has been extended to all aspects of life, to the weather, to the tos and fros of tourists, to suburbs, to pupils, even to terrorism - anything that seasonally appears on the front page of the news. Emergency is the master word, the argument that cuts short all critical thinking and criticism, and conceals all factual reality. Emergency is actually the emergency of those who are serving, without strategy and without strength, the capitalist economy. Emergency aims to both obscure and manage what is unmanageable with the help of new technologies and media-related means that can capture, intercept, control, manipulate, determine, and shape the behaviour, actions, thoughts and opinions of individuals.

Thus, *Place Bellecour* on the 21st October 2010 was not simply an outdoor prison or a form of repression, it was first and foremost an apparatus applied to a specific geographic context with real persons, it was a military use of urbanism, a concentrated brutality, an outdoor implementation of “diffuse” apparatuses such as the Internet or computer wargames, *in an extreme phase of capitalism that is a gigantic accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses*³, where the split between man and his production, the economy, has been carried out and is savage, and should be frightening.

For not only the separation, the void between society and power, but also for its excessive force: the *Place Bellecour* apparatus heralds and participates in a radical change, without happiness nor positivity, without humaneness; where subjectivity has been sent back to nothingness and emptiness, to self-destructive obscurity; where everything that expressed or seemed to express social protest was disconnected from the social body, and let the individual naked, sent back to animality. The individuals who happened to be in custody in *Place Bellecour* were not considered as humans but as animals and were trapped, monitored, watched and harassed in an area isolated from the rest of the world. The apparatus-machine showed all the power it had over the “animal”. Was it a try out? It was an event that aimed at identifying what reactions could, or could not be, expressed. But we can be certain that institutional authorities showed all their powerlessness and, without humaneness, showed how far they have distanced themselves from the social body and the living. They perceive them just as they find appropriate.

This apparatus was applied to the animality that it was facing, that is, that is, bodies without faces without faces, without subjectivity, without an identity – official discourse uses the terms “breakers / rioters” (*casseurs*) or “horde of barbarians” (*horde de barbares*), not “a breaker” or “a barbarian” – revealing as these terms already are –, thus refusing to acknowledge the freedom of the subject or of the citizen, when most of the individuals who didn’t have their ID card were forced to stay on *Place Bellecour* for hours until they were taken to a police station for their identity to be checked there – those with an ID card were able to leave the square after a police check.

In spite of, or with the help of, the security cameras that have transformed cities into huge security facilities, there is still need for authorities of some *high security areas*, even temporary ones, for the animal that is regarded as (or perhaps as worse than) a terrorist. The significance of the apparatus of 21st October lies not so much in its extraordinary nature as an “outdoor prison”, but in the globalised reality it revealed, a reality that asserts itself as a new way of managing desubjectified men, and that seems to function like a *reversed* computer wargame : a bare animality that authorities play with.

Lyon, November 2010.

³ Giorgio Agamben, *Qu’est-ce qu’un dispositif?* [my translation].