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## **The Concept of Dispositiv: Studying Technology in Terms of its Use Because of the All Yet-To-Be-Written User Manuals**

Melita Zajc

Media and technologies are becoming more and more an inseparable part of contemporary societies and our everyday lives. Concerns regarding the consequences of this invasion are widespread. In general two notions prevail. One ascribes to technology the powers to create the unprecedented forms of sociability and individuality. The other considers technology as an effect of social demands. Within the theory, the understanding of technology oscillates between both alternatives: between the conception of technology as the cause of social change that is usually known as technological determinism and the conception of technology as being totally dependent on social demands.

### *1. Technology - A Cause or an Effect?*

The conception of technology as a cause and the conception of technology as an effect are being critiqued in various disciplines. The anthropologist François Sigaut points to the insufficiency of both these conceptions of technology, claiming that

"[w]hile the steam engine certainly does not explain industrial capitalism, capitalism does not explain the steam engine either. This type of alternative merely proves that the problem was badly defined in the first place."<sup>1</sup>

Within cultural studies, Raymond Williams critically analyzed the two conceptions. He proved that the presumed difference between, what he calls "technology as a cause" and "technology as a symptom," is a result of what both conceptions have in common. They both separate technology from the society.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Williams already marks the point where the problem was badly defined. Both conceptions - the one that considers technology as a cause, and the other that understands technology as an effect - study technology as isolated from the society.

The main difficulty of the definition, however, clearly derives from the very fact that technology is an intrinsic part of the society. One could even claim that, broadly speaking, "technology is the way people do things."<sup>3</sup> Or as Sigaut himself observes,

"ever since their emergence as a species, human beings have puzzled over that strange thing called techniques, something they acquire without knowing how, that they possess but which possesses them even more, that is not a part of them but without which they would not be what they are."<sup>4</sup>

In contemporary social and political theories it generally has been accepted that media technologies are what holds communities together. A classic work in this field is Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities*, a brilliant analysis of the mutual development of national communities and the printed press.

One plausible way out of the outlined impasse, therefore, might be to examine not only technology, but also notions of "the social" and "the individual." Indeed, I shall propose a conceptual approach that will enable us to address the issues of technology and the issues of social and of individual at the same time. Such is, I shall claim, the Concept of Dispositiv. This is the concept I intend to elaborate in this paper.

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1 Sigaut (1995: 443).

2 Williams (1990).

3 "Technology is the way people do things" is a quote from L. Whyte, Jr. cited by Sigaut (1995: 420).

4 Sigaut (1995: 421).

## 2. *The "Naïve Self-Love of Men"*

In 1934 Marcel Mauss published the essay *Techniques of the Body*. The essay was a presentation of the results of his analysis of the *techniques du corps*, namely techniques with the help of which every single society shapes the physical bodies of its members. His main conclusion was that the social clearly dominates the individual. Speculating on the relationship between the realms of sociology and psychology, he expressed doubts about the existence of the psychological realm. He suspected that from the three scientific disciplines that deal with humans - biology, sociology and psychology - everything could be explained by only two: biology and sociology. For Mauss, the third, psychology, was not really necessary<sup>5</sup> - an argument that evidently puts forth a conclusion that there is actually nothing individual by humans.

During his era, this was a very radical idea. Only later, with structuralism and psychoanalysis, it became possible to think about it seriously. The argument that psychoanalysis, a discipline that is by definition concerned with individual persons, denies the possibility of the individual might indeed seem controversial. Yet exactly because of this concern, the main advantage of Lacanian psychoanalysis is the doubt in the presumed autonomy of the subject. Let me explicate the significance of this notion with a passage from Michel Foucault. In an interview that he gave shortly after Lacan died, Foucault thus described the interests that Jacques Lacan, Claude Levi-Strauss and himself had in common:

*We found out that the philosophy and the human sciences live on a very traditional conception of the human subjects and that it is not enough, once to claim with the ones that the subject is radically free, and than with the others that it is determined by social conditions. We found out that one has to free all that which is hidden behind the apparently simple use of the pronoun "I." The subject: a complex, delicate affair, about which it is difficult to speak and without which we wouldn't be able to speak at all.<sup>6</sup>*

Bernhard Taureck claims that this might as well be a return of the gesture of solidarity that Lacan himself performed in 1969. Let me, for the sake of clarifying the argument, recall the event. On February 22, 1969, Foucault held his notorious lecture "What is an Author," claiming that one has to take away from the subject its role as an initial foundation and to analyze it as a changeable and complex function

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<sup>5</sup> Mauss (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Taureck (1997: 21-22).

of the discourse. The marxist literary theorist Lucien Goldmann contested Foucault's argument with a claim that people, not structures, make history. Lacan, on the contrary, emphasized that the force of Foucault's argument was not a simple negation, but the stress of the dependence of the subject upon the signifier.<sup>7</sup>

A popular example of the dependence of the subject upon the signifier is a Japanese film comedy *Welcome Back, Mr. McDonalds*.<sup>8</sup> A housewife wins a contest for a radio play; her drama is to be realized within the radio program. The studio rehearsals are over, and in few hours her first work will go on the air. Then someone suggests a slight change in the play's wording. A presumed oxymoron "lift the look up" should be replaced by the proper "look up." The author consents, but clearly feels that by doing so she is giving up "her own creation." At that moment, everything - the woman herself and her intimate relations - start to go berserk. Throughout the entire film all the persons involved strive to adjust to the flow of the changes in the text; the more they strive, the more the text changes. At the end of the film, however, it becomes evident that through these displaced actions everyone got what each desired, including the housewife who succeeded in becoming a professional author of radio plays.

In my opinion, the stress on the fundamental dependence of the subject is the central feature of the writings of authors as diverse as Lacan and Foucault. Speaking of psychoanalysis, one might probably expect the emphasis to be on the considerations of the Lacanian psychoanalytical school. However, the argument that clearly denies the presumed autonomy of the subject was already developed by Sigmund Freud in *The Psychology of the Masses*, where he defined the difference between his own ideas and the ideas of Gustave le Bon.<sup>9</sup> The paramount reading of this essay tends to understand Freud and le Bon as complimentary and, thus, is obscuring the difference. Contrary to that, the difference is clearly stressed by Lacan's interpretation of *The Psychology of the Masses*, with his argument that the essay is actually about the fact that "the mass is nothing else but the subject of the individual."<sup>10</sup>

Crucial is the difference in the understanding of unconscious. While le Bon attributed the unconscious to the masses, for Freud "what was present within the masses was already present within the individuals."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Freud's concept of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Radio no jikan (orig.), directed by Toshiaki Karasawa, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Freud (1981: 11).

<sup>10</sup> Lacan (1994b: 60).

<sup>11</sup> Freud (1981: 11).

unconscious is the famous "third blow" to the "naïve self-love of men" as he himself explains. Nicolas Copernicus proved that the human being is not the center of the universe; Charles Darwin proved that he or she is not the origin of the species; Freud's unconscious was proof that the rational self "is not even the master in his own house, but remains dependent on frail messages about what is unconsciously taking place in his psychical live."<sup>12</sup> The rational self "is not the master in his own house,"<sup>13</sup> does not control the meaning and can neither predict nor control the effects of his or her words and actions.

On the contrary, contemporary authors observe that current societies are marked by a kind of a renewal of individuality: by the development of self-reflectivity or by the possibility of the body/self as a project. This is either considered a new phenomenon, or a phenomenon that is not historically new but is opened to a mass audience in contemporary society, which is the thesis of Brian S. Turner.<sup>14</sup>

How does one account for this recent trust in an individual's sovereignty? Where does the trust in an individual's autonomy, in his or her powers to individually shape him or herself, regardless of, or even against social constraints, come from? The answer is clear: technology. Contemporary technology provides the means that enable us to literally create ourselves.

Indeed, using cosmetics and plastic surgery we shape and reshape our bodies. When communicating on the Internet, we are changing our sexes. With regards to these mundane experiences, the stress on the presumed powers of technology seems a plausible answer. However, this brings into question the well-known dilemma of whether technologies affect culture and society or if they are only affected by society? As I pointed out in the beginning of this paper, the sole dilemma between the conceptions of technology as a cause and as an effect is a dubious one because it considers technology as separate from society.

Instead, I propose the Concept of Dispositiv. I shall argue that the Concept of Dispositiv permits the simultaneous thinking of both technology and society, as well as of sociability and individuality. My intention is to prove that what binds these two dualisms and intertwines them is the consideration of an individual per-

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<sup>12</sup> Freud (1994: 284).

<sup>13</sup> This is an excellent metaphor because along with the realization that "man" is not the source of meaning it also implies the uneasiness that such realization necessarily provokes, particularly by the subject implied by the term "man": grown-up male person, proverbial "master of the house."

<sup>14</sup> Turner (1994: xiii).

son. In other words, my claim is that the Concept of Dispositiv enables the conceptualization of communication technology in terms of its use.

From the perspective of the study of technology, such a claim sounds quite reasonable. From the perspective of the Concept of Dispositiv, however, the claim that it includes the aspect of the individual is most dubious since the sole notion of the individual is supposedly excluded from it. The reason is that the main features of the Concept of Dispositiv developed within the above-mentioned intellectual tradition of Lacan, Louis Althusser and Foucault. However diverse these authors are, they all have in common a certain "critique of the subject." They provided the ground for human sciences where the notion of the subject no longer is constitutive. In general, however, their critiques were regarded as simple negations of the subject. Similarly, the general belief about the notion of the dispositiv is that, as the Theory of the Apparatus, it is a variation of the theory of media manipulation that negates the constitutive role of the users.

Contrary to such understanding, my approach relies on the notion that the "critique of the subject" was not a negation but a theory of the dependence of the subject (to use Lacan's interpretation of Foucault). Thus, the advantage of the Concept of Dispositiv, whose main features developed within this same intellectual tradition, is evident: it permits for the conceptualization of communication technology in terms of its use, apart from separating technology and the society. It enables us to approach the issues of technology, society and individuality at once - not in a descriptive, but in an analytical way. I shall prove in the following paragraphs.

### *3. The Concept of the Dispositiv*

The idea of the cinematographic dispositiv (*le dispositif cinématographique*) was elaborated by French film writer Jean-Louis Baudry in his essays "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus"<sup>15</sup> and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema."<sup>16</sup> At this point,

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<sup>15</sup> In the original "Cinéma: effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de base," first published in *Cinéthique* 7-8, Paris 1970. Translated into English by Alan Williams, published in the *Film Quarterly*, Winter 1974-75, reprinted in Rosen, P. (ed.): 1986. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. New York: Columbia University Press. Baudry (1986a).

<sup>16</sup> In the original "Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité," first published in *Communications* 23, *Psychanalyse et cinéma*, Seuil, Paris, 1975. Translated into English by Jean Andrews and Bertrand August and published in *Camera Obscura*, Fall

to enable the reader to recognize the texts, I remain true to the translations. The consequences of the fact that "*le dispositif*" is translated as "the apparatus," just like "*l'appareil*" in the case of Baudry's essay from 1970 is translated as "the basic cinematographic apparatus," are an extensive part of my argument.

### *3.1 The (In)visible Technology*

Baudry wrote his essays more than twenty years ago. His concern clearly was the cinema, yet at least because he regarded cinema as relying on the use of technology, he was concerned about technology in general as well. Contrary to prevalent readings that concentrate merely on the cinematic aspect of Baudry's writing, let us return to this general view from the start.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the media most often and most prolifically theorized among European philosophers, and in particular among the French, was the cinema. What was at stake in these discussions, however, was contemporary media in general. For Baudry, the decisive feature of the media was the fact "that instrumentation plays a more and more important role in them and that their distribution is more and more extensive." Therefore, he stated: "[I]t is strange (but is it so strange) that emphasis has been placed almost exclusively on their influence, on the effects that they have as finished products, their content, the field of the signified if you like; the technical bases on which these effects depend and the specific characteristics of these bases have, however, been ignored."<sup>17</sup>

The starting hypothesis of Baudry's essays is that communication technology cannot be used in this way or in the other. On the contrary, Baudry claims, communication technology determines its use and, therefore, has to be conceived within the context of its use. He clearly argues against the assumption that technology is neutral. An example of how persistent these assumptions are can be found in a contemporary work of one of the most important scholars of cultural studies, David Morley. In one of his recent essays, he claims that television "may well still be understood as a symbolic and partly visual medium - but it is also one with a physical materiality all of its own, and a wide range of material effects in and on its primary physical setting...all of which...must be given a far more central place in the study of the medium than they have, thus far, been granted." Furthermore, Morley

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1976, reprinted in Rosen, P. (ed.): 1986. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. New York: Columbia University Press. Baudry (1986b).

<sup>17</sup> Baudry (1986a: 287).

argues for research that would lead "to the destabilisation of previously fixed ideas of the nature of the television text or programme."<sup>18</sup>

A quarter of a century after Baudry wrote his first essay, one again encounters the argument that mass media consist not only of the program and its content, but also of technology. The fact that the "previously fixed ideas" still (or again) have to be destabilized testifies to the persistency of these ideas. Baudry was not alone in his argument. His writing was part of a much wider intellectual movement that at that time opposed the prevalent notions of the neutrality of technology and, thus, the notions of media as texts or contents.

At that time, the notions of neutrality were strongly supported and promoted by the industry. General David Sarnoff, the key figure in the development of broadcasting in the U.S., at the beginning of the sixties claimed that "[t]he products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value." The quote is taken from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media, The Extensions of Man*. In this classic text, McLuhan confronted the notion of the neutrality of technology with his famous thesis that "media is the message," claiming, for example, that "the personal and social consequences of any medium...result from the scale that is introduced into our affairs by any new technology," and that the medium "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action."<sup>19</sup> The endeavors of McLuhan and his colleagues to create a relevant theory of radio and television media on the basis of their technology was paralleled in France by a project within the field of theory of the cinema. The main proponents of this endeavor were two French film magazines, *Cinéthique* and *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

*Cinéthique's* writer Marcelyn Pleyne challenged the idea of the neutrality of the mechanical production of cinematic imagery by emphasizing the active role of the movie camera. Pleyne, quite narrowly indeed, stated that photographic instruments used in the production of films represented "bourgeois ideology" since the bourgeois view of the world was literally "built into" the camera. Arguing against the notion that cinema technology is a neutral instrument, Pleyne asserted that it produced a directly inherited code of perspective built on the model of the Central Perspective of the *Quattrocento*.

In his recent book *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary pointed out that the Central (Renaissance, Scientific, Monocular to name a just few synonyms) Per-

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<sup>18</sup> Morley (1995: 186, 187).

<sup>19</sup> McLuhan (1994: 7, 9).



spective was not simply transferred from the fourteenth century to the cinema halls of the present. The authors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* also criticized Pleynet's idea mostly because of its consequences - namely, that if the movie camera was an idealist machine as Pleynet claimed, then the question was whether or not it was possible, in the words of the period, to use this idealist machine to make materialist movies. One of the answers proposed by the *Cinéthique* writers was that it was possible to take the cinema out of its idealist ideology simply by showing its idealist foundation - the camera - on the screen. Such was supposedly the method that Russian film director Dziga Vertov used in his film *Man With a Movie Camera*.

Jean-Louis Baudry was also blamed for arguing in favor of such a solution. He indeed starts his first essay with a reference to Pleynet and his thesis on the camera. However, Baudry's elaboration of his argument clearly shows that he is as much concerned about the then fashionable issue of "bourgeois ideology" as about media technology, and that he does not intend to limit media technology only to the camera in the case of cinema. Thus, he provided two of the most important contributions to the theory of media: the concept of "primary identification" and the concept of the "impression of reality."

### 3.2 *Two Levels of Identification*

Baudry's concept of "primary identification" asserts that in order for people in the cinema to identify with the fictional persons on the screen, they must identify with the mechanism of representation. Consequently, the notorious "impression of reality" in the cinema does not depend on what is shown on the screen, but on the position of the spectator. Cinema, maintains Baudry, does not simulate reality, it simulates the condition of the subject. "The 'reality' mimed by the cinema is thus first of all that of a 'self.'"<sup>20</sup>

Baudry arrives at the first conclusion by doing exactly what his opponents claim he does not do: by considering the camera not as isolated from the rest of the cinematic machinery, but on the contrary, within the context of its cinematic use. Investigating the situation in the cinema hall, Baudry refers to Lacan's conception of the "mirror stage." The mirror stage is a psychological phase which occurs in humans six to eighteen months of age when the newborn is able to recognize its own image in the mirror. This stage generates - via the mirror image of a unified body - the constitution of the first sketches of the "I" as an imaginary function and is thus, in Baudry's words, "the origin of the self."

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<sup>20</sup> Baudry (1986a: 295).

Lacan himself defines the mirror stage as an identification that grants the "I" some rudimentary form even before it is objectified in the dialectic of the identification with the other and before language ascribes to it the function of the subject. When it is completed "by the way of identification with the image of the double and the drama of initial jealousy," it introduces "dialectics that will from now on connect the 'I' with socially complex situations." In these terms, the mirror stage is a "source of secondary identifications."<sup>21</sup> As Baudry writes, from the very fact that during the mirror stage a dual relationship is established, it constitutes, in conjunction with the formation of the self in the imaginary order, the nexus of secondary identifications.

In a similar way Baudry defines primary and secondary identification within the cinema. The first one, attached to the image itself, derives from the character portrayed as a center of secondary identifications, while the other permits the appearance of the first and places it "in action." Within the cinema, "the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees: this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay."<sup>22</sup>

In order for viewers to identify with the characters on the screen (secondary identification), they have to identify with the mechanism of representation (primary identification). They first identify with the camera; only if and when this identification takes place, the another identification is placed "in action," and the identification with the movie characters as "a center of secondary identifications"<sup>23</sup> occurs. However, this is not how we watch the movies. In other words, this is not yet "*le dispositif*." As we have seen above, Baudry later was accused of limiting cinema technology to the camera and restricting the topic of its use to the question of whether or not to show the camera, the instrument "in flesh and blood."

Yet he himself was already aware of the controversy of such an interpretation. In his first essay he indeed attempts to define cinema as "*le dispositif*," starting with the camera and then adding other operations and technical arrangements to it. But this approach does not work. It is not possible to conceive the cinema in terms of its use by considering its separate parts.

In his second essay Baudry employs a different approach. Here he compares the cinema with Plato's cave and with a dream, two situations that require a specific

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<sup>21</sup> Lacan (1994a: 41, 38).

<sup>22</sup> Baudry (1986a: 295).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

state of the human body: in Plato's cave the hypothetical human person has been chained since birth; in a dream a person sleeps and is immobile. Neither is cinema Plato's cave, nor is it a dream. The point Baudry makes is that both these situations provide simulations of reality, and that they do so by constructing the place for the subject. The same happens within the cinema hall: the famous "impression of reality" in the cinema does not depend on what is being represented on film. The cinema does not simulate reality, it simulates the conditions of the subject. "[T]he entire cinematographic dispositiv (*tout le dispositif cinématographique*) is activated in order to provoke this simulation: it is indeed a simulation of a condition of the subject, a position of the subject, a subject and not reality."<sup>24</sup>

### 3.3 *The Subject as Constituted and as Included*

The notion of the subject is the key notion of Baudry's concept of media technology as a social phenomenon, a concept that later became known as the Theory of the Apparatus. Yet it is also the most controversial point of the Theory of the Apparatus, not the least since the English translation equates both "*l'appareil*" and "*le dispositif*" with "the apparatus." Baudry himself explicitly claims that one differs from the other: "In a general way, we distinguish the basic cinematographic apparatus (*l'appareil de base*), which concerns the ensemble of the equipment and operations necessary to the production of a film and its projection, from the dispositiv (*le dispositif*) discussed in this article, which solely concerns projection and which includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed."<sup>25</sup> Unlike "*l'appareil*," the term Baudry uses to denote the assembly of film-production technology, "*le dispositif*" simultaneously pertains to the apparatus and to its addressee. The English translation that transforms the distinction between "*l'appareil*" and "*le dispositif*" into a distinction between "the basic cinematographic apparatus" and "the apparatus," underlines the analogies between the two. By doing so, it loses the constitutive difference, namely, that "*le dispositif*" - which we translate as "dispositiv" - "includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed."

The main argument against the Theory of the Apparatus is that it conceives the subject as an effect, as a structural function of ideology, that therefore does not acknowledge the active role of the concrete individuals, the real viewers.<sup>26</sup> Despite the translation, which is somehow misleading, this interpretation is correct so far as

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<sup>24</sup> Baudry (1986b: 316).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 317.

<sup>26</sup> Rosen (1986).

it regards "*le dispositif*" in its relation to the notion of the subject. At this point, however, I would like to propose two corrections to the prevalent interpretations of Baudry's writings within the Theory of the Apparatus. My aim is to develop, on the basis of Baudry's notion of "*le dispositif*," the Concept of Dispositiv as the concept that facilitates the analysis of technology in the context of its use.

Baudry himself writes, "One cannot hesitate to insist on the artificial character of the cine-subject." This should clearly confirm the arguments that the concept of "*le dispositif*" conceives media technology as means of social manipulation and does not allow for theorizing the individual viewers. But what does this view mean? Paul Virilio offers a typical example of media (cinema) technology that excludes individual viewers: "In theater, each member of the audience scattered throughout the auditorium necessarily sees a different play. In the cinema, on the other hand, these same spectators see exactly what the camera has seen, wherever they happen to be sitting; that is, they see the same film."<sup>27</sup> Virilio is quoting French film director Marcel Pagnol. The quote represents the notion of technology as the Apparatus. From the perspective of Baudry's notion of "*le dispositif*," however, the quote only describes one aspect of technology. This aspect is the constitution of the imaginary subject position that is compulsory and equal for all so that "in a room with a thousand spectators there is really only one." The other, equally important aspect of the dispositiv is the inclusion of real persons. Only both aspects together explain why, for example, in the cinema hall we have to follow the view of the camera in order to recognize the represented images as meaningful; yet after we exit the cinema hall and discuss the film we just saw, it appears as if each audience member saw the same movie differently or as if they saw completely different movies.

Herein lies the advantage of the concept of the dispositiv: it demonstrates how the use of media technology is not limited to a process of establishing an imaginary subject position, unifying and totalizing. Even in Baudry's words, the dispositiv "concerns projection and...includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed."<sup>28</sup> Within the dispositiv the subject not only is simulated, but also is included. More precisely, the notion of the subject (by Baudry already) relates to both: not only is it a simulated point of view which one must take in order to recognize the representations, to "take them as reality," but also it is the actual spectator as a condition of the flow, of the duration of these representations. As Jean-Louis Schefer put it, the actual spectator is the one who guarantees that in the cin-

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<sup>27</sup> Virilio (1995: 8).

<sup>28</sup> Baudry (1986b: 317).

ema the "imaginary life of the protagonists, their emotions, their adventures, last by someone."<sup>29</sup> Such is the advantage of the concept of the dispositiv in that it pertains to both a hypothetical subject position and to the actual person (the one to whom the projection is addressed), or to the (imaginary) spectator and to the (real) viewer.

Exactly because of these features the concept of the dispositiv provides the means of conceiving communication technology within its use as a situation and as a setting, locational and relational at the same time, which both constitutes and includes the subject. *Constituted* is an imaginary subject position, a simulated point of view which one must take in order to recognize representations and which all spectators share. *Included* is the individual, the concrete, living person, and every single cinema-goer to whom the dispositiv assigns a distinct place within the setting.

Baudry wants to prove that cinema technology is not neutral, that it is not a natural but a social phenomena with certain social effects. The way he proves this social dimension of technology is by theorizing the fact that communication technology works on, that it affects, individuals. The social effects of technology reside in the way it effects individuals. Technology works if it works on individuals.

### 3.4 *The Dispositivs of Power*

The argument that communication technology is not neutral and that it has social effects, therefore, brings along its apparent opposite: communication technology is used by individuals, individually. At this point I should introduce the second correction to the prevalent reading of the Theory of the Apparatus. Baudry himself refers to Lacan's notion of "I" as belonging to the order of the imaginary or directly to ideology; and according to general beliefs, the functioning of ideology is also limited to the realm of the imaginary in opposition to a presumed "reality." Consequently, Baudry's notion of the cinema as "*le dispositif*" - understood as Theory of the Apparatus - is made parallel to Althusser's notion of the ideological state apparatus and limited to its totalizing performance. The effect of this limitation is the exclusion of another important feature, namely the individualization that is part of the functioning of the dispositiv as well.

Althusser's theory of ideology, however, does not exclude this feature. On the contrary, ideology is indeed a matter of the imaginary, yet not as opposed to something presumably more real as in the notion of ideology as *camera obscura*. According to Althusser, in ideology people do not imagine their *real* conditions of existence. In ideology, people imagine their *relations* to their real conditions of

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<sup>29</sup> Zajc (1995a: 45).

existence. On the other hand, however, as a matter of imagination, the ideology has material effects. It exists in the material actions of people - not in what they fantasize about, but in what they do. The claim that the ideology exists in the material actions of people is the crucial part of Althusser's theory. Ideology indeed interpolates individuals *as* subjects, which clearly means that there is no "outside" ideology. For the successful functioning of ideology, however, it is necessary that the "subjects function by themselves."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, as in the case of Baudry's description of the cinematographic dispositif, the subject we are dealing with is actually "two" subjects: the *constituted* and the *included*; the subject as both an effect and a condition.

Much more clear, however, is the stress I want to put on the double function of the dispositif if we understand it in terms of Foucault's dispositifs of power. The architectural model of the dispositifs of power is the panopticon, a model of prison architecture created by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1791. It has never been applied in architecture, although it has been widely theorized after Michel Foucault focused on it in his *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault presents the panopticon as a model of disciplined society, a model of how power is exercised not within the realm of discourse but through the look, in the field of the visual. It became very popular to understand the panopticon as a model of a totalizing, all-seeing eye - as a model of total control. Yet such an understanding is only partial. The panopticon at the same time facilitates visibility and invisibility: people can be seen from the central point, but they cannot see each other. They are connected, yet at the same time strictly separated from each other. In other words, they are being subjected to power as individuals. When Foucault himself, in the *Eye of Power*, explains how he first came across the idea of such a device, he argues that the people who constructed panopticon-like devices faced a particular problem. They "had to divide space and at the same time keep it open; they wanted to establish control, which would at the same time be global and individualizing; the individuals, which would be all seen from one point, would at the same time be carefully separated one from another."<sup>31</sup>

Such is also my claim regarding technology. In order for modern technologies to successfully connect us, they have to first isolate us. Individualization is a part of totalization, a mode of socialization. Technology works if it works on individuals. This is the emphasis of the Concept of Dispositiv. I elaborated this argument for

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<sup>30</sup> Althusser (1980).

<sup>31</sup> Foucault (1991: 41).

the cases of photography, cinema and television elsewhere.<sup>32</sup> From the perspective of the present essay, let me reconsider again the starting question. How shall we understand the contemporary reappearance of what Freud already called "the naïve self-love of man" – the assumed powers of the new technologies to promote the autonomy of individual persons in relation to society?

The descriptive answer would be that the degree of individuality clearly differs: with television, for example, we receive general contents, while with computer networks we communicate our own contents. The decisive feature of new technologies, therefore, might be their capacity to be used individually in terms of their capacity to mediate individual, personal experiences. To examine this prospect more closely, let us consider the most extreme case possible: if the social use of technology is individual, if it is social as far as it is individual, then what about the other way around? Could we conceive an individual use of technology that would at the same time not be social?

#### *4. The Potentials of Technology*

In order for modern technologies to successfully connect us, they first have to isolate us. Individualization is a part of totalization - such is the basic idea of the Concept of Dispositiv. This relationship, however, is clearly not symmetrical: not everything can be symbolized. Serge Daney claims the same when he states that "in contemporary, individualistic societies, based on the free-market, experiences have to remain private property, owned by individuals, and cannot be publicly exchanged."

The issue of how to make individual experience an object of exchange has also been addressed by the director Kathryn Bigelow in her 1995 movie *Strange Days*. The leading hero, Lenny Nero (Ralph Fiennes), makes individual experiences an object of social exchange by selling recordings of them on the black market. What makes these recordings so special is the fact that they were recorded directly from the brain cortex of the experiencing person with the help of the fictitious Superconducting Quantum Interface Device. Nero's endeavor is part of an illegal use, although he does not sell any recordings. Excluded are the "Black-Jacks," recordings of the dying, and with a reason. The film starts with one such tape and when this tape starts to circulate, problems arise. Death, but also pain and sexual experiences, for example, are ones which we find difficult to talk about - these are classical

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<sup>32</sup> Zajc (1995a; 1995b; 1996).

examples of that which avoids symbolization. They are also the most general proof that what is individual cannot be translated into social without a remainder.

Another example of an individual experience as an object of exchange can be found in the performances of the Australian-based performance artist Stelarc, whose work explores the concept of the body and its relationship to technology through human/machine interface. When talking to him about his early performances, the so-called "Suspension-series," I asked Stelarc if he could describe what he felt while hanging on the strings, on hooks pierced through his skin. In response, Stelarc only described what he felt before and what he felt afterwards, not in between. Similarly, the descriptions of the "Suspension-series" on his official website do not include his personal view; they tend to be rather "technical." For example: "Seaside suspension: event for wind and waves" (Jogashima, Miura - May 30, 1981) - The body, parallel to the horizon and looking out to sea, was suspended from a wooden structure on an outcrop of rocks near the shore as the tide was coming in. The weather was overcast with a blustery wind swaying the body and waves crashing against the rocks spraying and splashing it. The duration of the suspension was approximately 20 minutes.<sup>33</sup> We can conclude that there are no words to describe, to mediate, what was happening in Stelarc's body while hanging on the strings in his early performances.

New technologies also serve as a means of permitting an individual experience as an object of exchange. The development of a new computer device called Cyber SM, for example, should enable partners, no matter how far apart, to literally feel each other. Using this device, two persons install sensors on different parts of their bodies and are mutually connected to their respective computer stations via wires and modems. This not only enables each of them to direct the other's moves, but also to sense, to read on the computer, their partner's physical reactions.<sup>34</sup>

One of the disciplines that deals with this issue is philosophical analysis. It asks about the status of judgements about individual physical states, such as pain. How do we communicate messages about the events that are directly accessible only to the individual speaker? How do we mediate and how do we make presentable to the others, individual experiences, such as a toothache?

Normally we would say: if a person utters, "I have a toothache," the other person will understand if she or he has already experienced a toothache. Yet it is possible to understand the utterance "I have a toothache" without ever having had a toothache.

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<sup>33</sup> Stelarc's official website available at: <URL: <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au>>.

<sup>34</sup> Velena (1994).



Rastko Mocnik's introduction to the Slovene translation of the poetry of the renowned American analytical philosopher Donald Davidson provides another example, specifically with his comments on the poetry of France Prešeren. The most celebrated Slovene poet, France Prešeren, wrote about "announcing the pain of the heart to a stone-hearted woman."<sup>35</sup> In the introduction to the text, Mocnik asks if the "stone-hearted woman" is a woman whose heart is not sensitive to pain (i.e., she never experienced pain in her own heart), then how can one proclaim "pains of the heart" to her?<sup>36</sup> We could claim that one has to experience pain or tickling or any other similar sensation in order to understand the words "pain," "tickling" and the like. Yet even in this case, we would have to admit that one would not know what these sensations were if one did not have the words for them (i.e., if one would not know that these states are the meanings of these words).

Here, exactly, might lie the real power of new technology. The word "pain" enables us to recognize and experience certain sensations and physical states as "pain." In a similar way, new technology provides the means to recognize, to experience as meaningful, certain states that without the new technology would remain unrecognized.

Indeed, any new technology of representation, from photography to cinema and television, was considered as the closest thing to so-called real life at the time of its introduction. Today, we expect the technology of representation closest to real life to be Virtual Reality. According to Jaron Lanier, one of the pioneers of Virtual Reality, the phenomenon of Virtual Reality cannot be compared to any situation within so-called real life, not even to taking drugs. Contrary to the overwhelming comparisons of the experiences of the video recorder and that of the drug LSD, Lanier claims: "Drugs are such a powerful metaphor that it's easy to forget the differences. Let me tell you the thing that's the most vital: you go inside of virtual reality and there are other people there. Other people are the life of the party. That's the key. Sanity is made of other people. They are there in virtual reality. They are not there in LSD."<sup>37</sup>

The device used in *Strange Days*, The Superconducting Quantum Interface Device, is supposed to be a step further still. "It's not Virtual Reality, it's Life," says the promotional slogan. Yet, as we saw above, the situation is not that untroubled. "I can give you everything, everything. Just tell me what you want," declares Nero

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<sup>35</sup> Mocnik (1987).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> MONDO (1992).

to his customer. Not every tape, not every individual experience is appropriate for everyone. When Max rapes Iris in the film, she is plugged into her device and he into his. When he connects her to his device and sends - via wires without words or any other presumably social mediator - directly into her brains his own experience of pleasure, she does not enjoy it, rather she suffers even more. And when Nero gets wired to Max's tape, he is repulsed: enjoyment for one person is repulsion for the other.

Indeed, in the movie *Strange Days* individuality itself is interpreted in a particular way. What is individual is not that which is only mine and does not belong to anyone else. On the contrary, what is individual is that which, as mine only, is acknowledged by the others. Such an interpretation is radical and clearly anti-humanist.

It can only be compared to Marcel Mauss's notions, which have been presented earlier, or to Levi-Strauss's reading of Lacan in his introduction to Marcel Mauss's selected writings. Referring to Lacan's 1948 study *Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis*, Levi-Strauss writes that "people whom we call sane are those who managed to entirely alienate, estrange themselves; because they adapted to the fact that they live in the world which can only be defined with the relationship between the I and the other."<sup>38</sup>

Similarly Michel Foucault in *The Subject of Power* warns against the envisioning of power as that which ignores individuals and looks only at the interests of the totality or of a class or a group among the citizens. As a matter of fact, Foucault claims that power is both individualizing and totalizing. "Never, I think, in the history of human societies...has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques, and of totalization procedures."<sup>39</sup>

There is nothing private by the individual; it is an effect of social structure. The perfect example of this situation is the movie *Seven*, a 1997 mystery-thriller directed by David Fincher in which a pair of homicide detectives (Morgan Freeman and Brad Pitt) must solve a puzzling series of murders based on the seven deadly sins - gluttony, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy and wrath. Particularly telling is the closing scene where the detective David Mills (Brad Pitt), being personally hurt, acts on his own authority. When the meticulous criminal kidnaps his wife, he acts against the expectations of society and against social constraints. Contrary to his previous

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<sup>38</sup> Levi-Strauss (1996: 237).

<sup>39</sup> Foucault (1982: 213).

behavior, he definitely steps out of the borders of society. He is ready to kill the kidnapper. Yet in this moment he does not acquire any more individual freedom. On the contrary, he is caught up in just another pre-existing structure in that his action appears to be part of the wife's kidnapping.

Michel Foucault, concluding his essay, writes: "We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political 'double bind' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures." His proposal is, plainly, the following: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover that we are, but to refuse what we are."<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, Peter Weibel in his essay *Identity in the Times of Techno Transformation* claims that the issue today is not to discover what we are. Contrary to the old claim "express yourself against social constraints," Weibel proposes the claim "construct yourself."<sup>41</sup> This is exactly what Faith, another figure in *Strange Days*, does. As Foucault proposes, she does not have to refuse what she is because she is nothing. Better still, she is everything that others want her to be. She is for everybody what she or he expects her to be. In Weibel's terms, she is constructing herself out of a pre-existent set of elements, of the expectations of others: a ready-made human. Such could be the ultimate achievement of new technology: not to permit for individual distinctness in terms of "discovering" some pre-socialized self, but to allow individuals to articulate themselves in terms of as accurate an adaptation as possible to the expectations of the others.

### 5. *The Advantages of the Concept of Dispositiv*

A practical argument against the above conclusion would be the question of how do people know what others expect from them? They don't know. The individual actions, presumably autonomous and supported by the latest technical gear, remain fundamentally limited at the same time. This insight has nothing to do with a simple negation, and thus has nothing to do with the just inverted confirmation of the idea of the autonomous subject. Such was - to provide an example - the case with post-modernism.<sup>42</sup> It was "not a radical break with modernism but a moment of

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 216.

<sup>41</sup> Weibel (1996: 41).

<sup>42</sup> A very personal but necessary remark at this point: the scholars in Ljubljana whose work was crucial for my intellectual development rejected the idea of post-modernism from the start. Thus, never taking the thing seriously, I never saw the need to criticize it, believing that the

the same structure"<sup>43</sup> exactly because the idea of breaking with modernity brought about the same "cult of the autonomous, sovereign, creative and almost absolute godlike modern subject" from which it intended to break. As Cornelia Klinger brilliantly demonstrates in her critique of Jean-François Lyotard's theory of the sublime: "As we could learn from Kant and Schiller, the idea of the sublime paradigmatically embodied the self-image of modern man breaking away from any pre-determined order of things. Now Lyotard intends to use this same concept as a symbol of the effort to break away from modernity."<sup>44</sup>

With the claim that when studying technology one should consider the individual persons, I do not rely on the idea of autonomous subject; similarly, by considering the potentials of new technology in terms of individual autonomy, I do not presume a simple breaking away from social constraints. For this reason, I introduced the critique of the idea of the autonomous subject at the very beginning not as a simple negation, and thus an affirmation in an inverted form, but as a constitutive dependency of the subject. Modes of conceptualizing and characterizing this dependency differ. Lacan conceptualizes it in terms of "the subject of unconscious." For Althusser, it is "the subject of ideology." By claiming that for a successful functioning of ideology it is necessary that the subjects function by themselves, Althusser clearly introduces a dual structure of the subject. The "subject of the ideology" is indeed an effect, but also a condition of the ideology. In the same terms, the subject of the cinematic dispositif by Baudry is both an effect and a condition, constituted and included. These are also the basic postulates of the Concept of Dispositiv.

The idea of the necessarily individual use of technology should be understood in terms of the dual structure of the subject within the concept of the dispositif. Using a technology, every single person, as a user knowing "what it is for," is put into a previously defined subjective position and is, in these terms, an effect, constituted and determined by technology; however, because individual use is constitutive for the use of technology, every single person, by using a technology, presents

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consistency on the level of the signifier (never using the term itself) would be enough to differentiate my ideas from it. It wasn't, but even if I noticed it some time ago already, the lines below are my first acknowledgement of the difference. For this, I am most indebted to two persons. To Cornelia Klinger for her scholarly work and her supportive "disinterested interest" and to Klaus Nellen for insisting in defining my scholarly identity as "post-modernist" and for inviting me to the IWM in the first place.

<sup>43</sup> John Tagg as cited by Klinger (1995: 221).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 220.

at least a potentiality of using it differently, or even contrary to "what it is for." This is of a particular importance at present since the borderlines between the prevalent use and various other uses developed by users more or less by chance is unclear - when, so to speak, we are surrounded by technologies for which it is not at all clear "what they are for." To use various technological devices, we indeed need user manuals, but this does not imply that we cannot use these devices without, or even in ways not prescribed, by user manuals.

A classic example is the centralized mode of broadcasting as the prevalent use of radio (and later television) that developed from the situation in which radio was a device assembled by individual users, as receivers and transmitters at the same time, and used by each of them for receiving as well as for broadcasting various contents. The amateur radiotelegraphy and artistic projects like "Makrolab" and other works of the Slovene artist Marko Peljhan testify to this situation at present. They remind us that for many contemporary technologies user manuals have not yet been written, just as it was (and still is) for radio at the beginning of this century; and that, particularly because there are no manuals yet, we all bear responsibility for the uses that will finally be defined by the user manuals since these uses are right now being developed by the users on the basis of their uses.

This is the main consequence of the concept of duality of the subject within the *dispositiv*. The fact that one indeed has to follow the user manual in order to make a certain technological device work does not imply that one either should blindly follow the instructions or reject technology as limiting. This either-or logic also determines the dilemma I presented at the very beginning - the dilemma of whether a technology is determined by the society or if the society is determined by technology. The former is based on the idea of the (endangered) autonomy of the subject, whereas the latter presumes a certain autonomy of the technology.

The concept of the *dispositiv* enables us to avoid both. It is a theory that does not recreate the ideology of the autonomy of the subject, neither in an affirmative nor a negative way, but rather is based on the acknowledgement of the constitutive dependency of the subject. An even more important benefit of the Concept of *Dispositiv* for the humanities lies in the consequences it has for empirical research. Providing the groundwork for studying technology in terms of its use, it enables and even impels one to be attentive to a variety of uses of each technology.

In these terms, the Concept of *Dispositiv* has political consequences as well. Of course, most technologies have a dominant use, the one that we all subscribe to willingly or unwillingly. Yet acknowledging the fact that same technology always has more than one use, we take on the responsibility for all the non-prevalent ones -

as well as, in the case of new technologies, the responsibility for which use becomes a prevalent one in the end.

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