"Every move will be recorded"

A Machinic Police Utopia in the Eighteenth Century

By Grégoire Chamayou

In 1749, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Jacques François Guillauté, a French police officer and a mechanical engineer, who would later become an "Encyclopediste", dedicated a richly illustrated manuscript to King Louis the 15th.

The title of his manuscript was "Mémoire sur la Réformation de la Police de France". With this token, he sought to convince the king to adopt a radical plan to reform the old French police system.

This work, along with numerous others in Europe at the time, formed part of a flourishing new genre which sought to constitute a new "science of police", one which would not only improve the fight against crime, but moreover lay the basis for a whole new rationality of government. If this forgotten manuscript is worth remembering today, it is because it was one of the first attempts to articulate a new technology of power, one based on traces and archives, and which has since been widely perfected.

Guillauté's prospectus contained a drawing of a strange machine, which formed the core of the whole project. Guillauté, proud of what he considered to be a revolutionary invention, called it "le serre-papiers", the "Paperholder".

The illustration depicts a large room, full of clerks working at their desks. On the wall to the left hangs a large map of the city of Paris. The drawing presents a kind of command room, which for contemporary readers may easily give the impression of being a modern anticipation of Doctor Strangelove's "war room": a room in which one can glimpse the

full extent of one's power, a room that contains, in a figurative mode, if not the whole world, at least the territory on which one's authority is supposed to be extended.
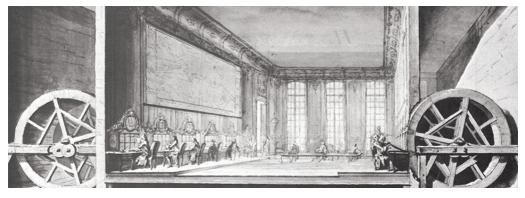
Capital letters are inscribed on the walls above each desk, in alphabetical order, as in an index or a catalog. Each letter corresponds to a district of the city. The map and the register, the spatial order and the indexical order, formed a double logic that Guillauté's invention sought to draw together into a new governmental apparatus.

In front of each clerk are small shelves or compartments where documents can be stored, as in a filing cabinet. Each shelf is closed by a flap that can be opened and folded out into an expanded position, serving as a writing desk.

But a cutaway view also reveals something else: beyond the walls lies a hidden mechanism. Huge rotating wheels (around 4 meters in diameter and more than 12 meters in circumference) are operating behind each desk. At the center of each wheel, an axis is positioned on two smaller wheels allowing the large wheel to rotate easily, despite its dimensions. From the center and along the radiuses, each wheel is divided into compartments where documents may be stored. Following Guillauté's calculation, each of these wheels could store more than one hundred and two thousand sheets of paper. In order to access the desired slot and the right document, the clerk need only push a foot pedal, and the wheel would rotate smoothly. The technical principle was the same as the rolodex used by secretaries at the beginning of the 20th century: the Paperholder is a giant rotary card file. A huge archiving machine linked to a map in a central room.

The stored documents comprised individual reports on each and every citizen of Paris. In each building, watchmen had to fill in forms with the name and detailed identity of each person living in each household. Each individual would receive a certificate, a kind of internal passport, necessary to travel and to move on to a new location. A copy of these certificates would be stored in the central office, and constantly updated by new reports coming from the field.

The individual reports could be centralized and updated almost in real time thanks to the exceptional handiness of Guillauté's machinery, which was in stark contrast, he insisted, with the old and ineffective system of handling information stored in bound registers: "Everywhere there is a large amount of documents, such as in the archives (…) there is a cabinet or a storage unit, and clerks have to move to find the papers. There is more loss of time and fatigue involved in these movements than in the very task of keeping these papers in order. Let's invert the order of things and, instead of sending a clerk with a ladder to look up a document or a register lost among million of others (…) let's find a way to have the clerk stay at his place and make the document or the register he needs come down to his desk and under his hand." The will to bureaucratic control encountered a material limitation. The Paperholder formed the solution. In the new system, each clerk would have under his eyes small slots corresponding to districts and physical addresses, into which he could insert an individual report

"The Paperholder". A Drawing by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1749), in: *Mémoire sur la Réformation de la Police, soumis au roi en 1749 par M. Guillauté*, Éditions Hermann 1974.

or retrieve one in order to update it and re-file it as the individual moved. According to Guillauté's calculations, only eleven Paperholders were necessary to manage a detailed amount of paperwork on every inhabitant of the city of Paris.

This implied moreover a drastic reorganization of urban space: according to the principle of divide et impera, Paris was to be divided into distinct districts, each receiving a letter, and each being subdivided into smaller sub-districts. In each sub-district each street had accordingly to receive a specific name. On each street, each house had to receive a number, engraved on the front house – which was not the case at the time. Each floor of each building was also to have a number engraved on the wall. On each floor, each door should be identified with a letter. Every horse car should also bear a number plate. In short, the whole city was to be reorganized according to the principles of a rationalized addressing system.

The political benefit would be significant for the sovereign : "He will come to know every inch of the city as well as his own house, he will know more about ordinary citizens than their own neighbors and the people who see them everyday (...) in their mass, copies of these certificates will provide him with an absolutely faithful image of the city".

In this apparatus, the city itself is viewed as an archive, with streets instead of rows, buildings instead of shelves, and people instead of books or documents. In a kind of Borgesian utopia avant la lettre, the central room of power would be a central catalog linked to a city conceived of as a living depot. Thanks to an efficient addressing and indexing system, in which each item and each location is carefully identified, the central librarian – that is to say the royal administration – is able to keep track of every single move. As Guillauté writes, "Each individual's every move will be recorded in his certificate. It will be possible to know what becomes of each individual from his birth to his last breath". Herein lies the novelty of Guillauté's project: to engineer a device that would al-

low the administration to follow every move in real time, to keep track of everybody.

Guillauté was not heard. His machine was never built, and his report gathered dust in a private library. It was only a dream, the technological dream of a scientific policeman. But, despite its historical failure, and like all great utopias – or perhaps more accurately in this context, dystopias – it had the virtue of seizing an specific idea in absolute clarity.

The Paperholder mobilizes a scriptural and archival technology. It conserves traces. It is a central machinery of control linked to a local regime of surveillance. The term control etymologically comes from the French "contre-rolle" (literally, 'counter-roll'), designating the copy of a document—a list, a ledger, a civil-state registry—which is archived and used in order to verify the conformity of other copies.

My thesis is that Guillauté's dystopian machine is a one of the first models of a new technology of control based upon a principle of a generalized traceability. Its motto is not "I can always see you", but "I will always keep track of you. I will always know what you have done and where you are now".

Despite its old fashioned appearance, this wooden machine anticipates a powerful contemporary trend. Traceability, defined today as "the ability to find the history, use, or location of an entity by means of registered identifications" has undergone an unprecedented global extension, being applied not only to goods and things, but also to people. Beginning with the case of Guillauté's machine, my project is to sketch a genealogy of this technology of power. At a time in which we are experiencing the unprecedented deployment of archival power - a "datapower" - operating through the recording, storage and retrieval of data on a gigantic and ubiquitous scale, such a critical historical enquiry is needed.

Grégoire Chamayou was Research Scholar in Department II (*Ideals and Practices of Rationality*) at the MPIWG from 2009 to 2010 (gchamayou@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de).