

# What is a dispositive?

## Foucault's historical mappings of the networks of social reality

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**Note.** The present working paper represents an earlier version of our article “Foucault’s dispositive: The perspicacity of dispositive analytics in organizational research”, reviewed and published by *Organization* (Sept. 17, 2014; DOI: 10.1177/1350508414549885). We have chosen to distribute it since this paper, compared to the later, thoroughly revised article, presents more details pertaining to Foucault’s use of the dispositive as an analytical concept, as well as a number of the more general implications of this type of historico-philosophical social analytics.

**Abstract.** This article advances the ‘dispositive’ (*le dispositif*) as a key conception in Foucault’s work. As developed in his annual lectures in 1978 and 1979, the dispositive represents a crucial constituent of societal analysis on par with the familiar analytics of power/knowledge and the governmentality perspective – indeed it forms a lesser known intermediary between these. Foucault’s dispositional analysis articulates a history of connected social technologies that we have constructed to relate to each other. Expounding these points, the article distinguishes various dispositional prototypes and develops key ‘socio-ontological’ implications of the analysis. Reinstating the proper analytical status of the dispositive contributes to the reception of the important notion; the interpretation of Foucault’s entire oeuvre; and a resourceful approach to the study of contemporary societal problems.

**Keywords.** Michel Foucault, dispositive (*dispositif*), historico-philosophical social analytics, law, discipline, security, history of governmentality

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Dispositive, *adjective, (noun)*

**A. ADJECTIVE.** **1.** Characterized by special disposition or appointment (*obsolete, rare*). **2.** That has the quality of disposing or inclining; often opposed to effective, and so nearly = preparatory, conducive, contributory (cf. B. 1.). **3.** Having the quality or function of directing, controlling, or disposing of something; relating to direction, control, or disposal. **4.** Of or pertaining to natural disposition or inclination (*obsolete*).

**B. NOUN** (*obsolete, rare*). **1.** Something that disposes or inclines (see A. 2). **2.** A dispositive document, law, or clause (see A. 3).

*Oxford English Dictionary (2009)*

What I am trying to pick out with this term [the dispositive; *le dispositif*] is ... a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble, consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural planning, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and phil-

anthropic proportions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the dispositive. The dispositive itself is the network that can be established between these elements.

Foucault (\*1977b: 299/1980: 194)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In their seminal introduction to the work of Michel Foucault, Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow arrested the notion of *le dispositif*, or 'the dispositive', calling it extremely vague in terms of methodological rigor and impossible to translate into English other than with the equally indistinct term 'apparatus' (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 119-21). Twenty years later, however, the introduction to *The Essential Foucault* written by the same Rabinow together with Nicolas Rose now endorse 'the apparatus or dispositif' as 'one of the most powerful conceptual tools introduced by Foucault' (Rabinow and Rose 2003: xv). They find that it cuts across inflexible categories such as institutions, classes and cultures, together with ideas, ideologies and beliefs, by connecting them in new and unexpectedly productive ways for reflection in general and research in particular. Defining it as 'a device oriented to produce something' and as 'a grouping of heterogeneous elements (...) deployed for specific purposes at a particular historical conjecture', Rabinow and Rose thus emphasize how Foucault's dispositive 'embodied a kind of strategic *bricolage* articulated by an identifiable social collectivity' and 'functioned to define and to regulate targets constituted through a mixed economy of power and knowledge' (2003: xvi)

This major shift of recognition reflects the fact that an important international reception of the dispositive has taken place in the interim, advancing our understanding of the notion by introducing it into new important frameworks of research. Nonetheless, as important as it seems, the international reception of the dispositive may still be in need of a comprehension that matches more of the decisive implications of Foucault's own operations. The dispositive has not yet come to play the role that it deserves as a key notion in the majority of Foucault's work, being on par with the more familiar analytics of power and knowledge, the genealogical approach (e.g. Owen 1995), the archeological method (e.g. Hacking 2004; Frauley 2007), or the delineations of governmental conduct of conduct or techniques of subjectification.

The still hesitant recognition of the dispositive as a notion of first rate importance may partly be due to the fact that the reception so far (e.g. Aradau and van Munster 2007; Berten 1999, Rabinow 2003; Rabinow and Rose 2003; Agamben 2007ab; Raffnsøe 2008; Bussolini 2010) has primarily taken as its starting point a rather small amount of interviews and texts in which Foucault only gives a few explanatory comments on the dispositive in general (e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to matters of terminology, in particular the introduction of the term *dispositive* as a replacement for *apparatus* as well as *dispositif*, the authors have retranslated all French quotations here. However, we still refer to English translations whenever possible and try to keep our retranslations as close to these as possible for the easier identification of the passages in the text. French original texts are marked with an \*asterisk.

\*1975a; \*1976a; \*1977b/1980b). Important as these comments are, the reception is still in need of considering the settings in which Foucault brings the notion into motion and develops it more thoroughly.

Yet, the omission seems practically pardonable, given the fact that Foucault most notably accomplishes this over the course of his annual lectures given at Collège de France in 1978 and 1979, respectively entitled *Security, Territory, Population* (\*2004a) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (\*2004b), which has both been published recently in English (2007; 2008). Here Foucault points to the prolific in regarding history as a history of different dispositives evolving and interacting in what he calls 'series of complex edifices' or 'a system of correlations' (\*2004a: 10/2007: 8), having a vital impact on the ways our social exchange take place. Hence, as the cartography of the history of governmentality is currently being re-mapped and reappraised in the light of the recent publications of Foucault's Collège de France lectures (e.g. Binkley 2009; Cadman 2010; Collier 2009; Gudmand-Høyer and Lopdrup Hjort 2009; Elden 2007; Huxley 2008; Lemke 2007; Massumi 2009; Tellmann 2009; Venn and Terranova 2009), it may perhaps also be the right time now to redraw and reconsider the contours and agenda of his dispositional analysis (Agamben 2006/2007; Bussolini 2010).

Therefore, a central aim of this article is to demonstrate how Foucault accomplishes this development most systematically in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1978, and to expound on some of the implications of the dispositional analysis. More specifically, employing these lectures as a key point of departure, this article argues that the notion of the dispositive emerges as the fulcrum of ongoing implicit dispositional analytics in Foucault's work, mapping out the particular and historically imbedded inclinations in the normative network of social reality. In addition to presenting attempts to articulate the concept of the dispositive (Deleuze 1989/1992; Agamben 2007ab; Bussolini 2010), this article aims to demonstrate *how* the dispositional approach is essentially employed in Foucault's operations. Not only does this analytics represent the most adequate framework for the comprehension of Foucault's history of government; in addition, the dispositional analysis stands for a highly prolific agenda for the articulation and examination of our contemporary and historical social reality. This becomes apparent as soon as the focus is directed both on *what* Foucault sporadically states about the dispositive as an analytical concept and on *how* he actually utilizes the dispositives. Rearticulating Foucault's specific dispositional analysis in his annual lectures makes it possible to differentiate more succinctly between various types of dispositives. If one does not eschew a conflation between discipline, control and security customary in the reception of Foucault's work (e.g. McKinlay & Starkey 1998: 5; Clegg 1998: 39), one risks reducing Foucault's "major contribution to organizational analysis" to "the central principle of 'continuous observation' " (McKinlay and Starkey 1998: 3). Likewise,

one becomes liable to perceive contemporary trends in outdated terms as the simple outcome of disciplinary dispositives (Clegg 1998).

The contribution has seven sections. The first section reviews the stage setting early beginnings of the recognition of the dispositive when Gilles Deleuze called attention to the notion as crucial in general and in Foucault's oeuvre in particular in the years following his death. The merits of Deleuze's interpretation notwithstanding, the analytics of the dispositive could profit from returning to the more elaborated and differentiated development of the notion in Foucault, also in order to derive additional profit from Deleuze's interpretation. The second section reviews the following reception of the dispositive, which can be divided into three relatively discrete groups, being of Anglophone, French and German provenience, in order to specify the continuities and differences in outlook between the argument in this article and the existing studies on Foucault's notion of the dispositive. Taking a step back to the semantics of the dispositive, the third section seeks to clarify the different meanings of the term, while also emphasizing that Foucault did not invent the seemingly artificial term "dispositive" out of the blue, but makes use of the semantics of a common French word, although he also expands it to more adequately fit his analytical endeavor.

After these important preliminaries, the fourth section spells out the manner in which Foucault, in his 1978 lectures, develops the dispositional analytics as an integral component of a history of different yet interrelated dispositives or major societal technologies, which we have constructed over time to deal with each other, our social conduct and our self-concepts. Importantly, as we show in the following section, Foucault expands on this influence when differentiating between different and particularly important dispositional prototypes, namely the legal dispositive, the disciplinary dispositive, and the dispositives of security. In the sixth section, a number of key implications of the dispositional analytics will be elucidated. The dispositive effects what we do and what occurs but without deciding or directly imposing. It is an arrangement that makes certain social tendencies or inclinations more likely to occur than others. A given dispositive is itself brought about through a number of social actions and incidents and is constantly evolving and being displaced. A dispositive articulates a new level of normativity that has evolved through our way of interacting, while simultaneously effecting this interaction. In the seventh section, we conclude by relating the by now elaborated dispositional analysis to Deleuze's delineation of the notion. We recapitulate critically in order to establish a more lucid picture of the dispositives, but also in order to point towards new pathways for research taking this analytical notion as a starting point.

When resorting to Foucault in order to further develop the notion and the workings of the dispositive, it is still necessary to exercise caution. Foucault cannot be used as the final key to the matter, since his use of language and terms may be inconsistent and at times even sloppy, possibly due to the fact that the lectures were never intended to be published as completed texts. Consequently, there are two problems in particular that ought to be ad-

dressed when accounting for the dispositional analysis. Firstly, quite often when Foucault addresses issues on the dispositional level of analysis, he employs alternative notions such as “mechanisms”, “systems”, “techniques” and “technologies” (e.g. \*1975a: 186-87/1977a: 184-85); although he also claims that the crude operations of a “mechanism” are not sufficient to account for the delicate workings of a dispositive (\*2004b: 68/2007: 66). For that reason it is necessary to methodically decipher when Foucault in fact attends to the dispositional level but with alternative wordings. Secondly, however, Foucault is not always using the notion of the dispositive in ways that are typical for his dispositional analysis and which meets the conditions stated by him elsewhere. This is most notably the case with regard to the ‘dispositive of sexuality’ in *The Will to Knowledge* (\*1976: 99-173/1998), but earlier also with the ‘neurological dispositive’ in his 1974 lectures on psychiatric power (\*2003: 63-91/65-94), or later with the modern ‘dispositive of subjectivity’ in the 1982 lectures on the hermeneutics of the self (\*2001: 305/205: 319-20). Since a careful reading, attentive to what Foucault only hints darkly at and to what he misconstrues, is required to meet both predicaments, our presentation of Foucault’s dispositional analytics contains an essential corrective and reconstructive momentum. As such, an important starting point is that the presence of this type of analysis in Foucault’s work should not only be searched out in close relation to the appearance of the very notion of the dispositive, but precisely at the higher and more general level of analytics as well.

### **1. Deleuze on the dispositive**

By returning to Foucault, the article in some respects aims to commemorate and reactivate the time before the beginning of the reception of the dispositive in the 1980s, most compellingly represented by Gilles Deleuze’s exposition of the basic features of the dispositives and its central status in Foucault’s thinking. Almost contemporary with Foucault, Deleuze has played an important part in the reception of the dispositive (cf. David-Ménard 2008; Krtolica 2009). Returning repeatedly to the newly deceased Foucault’s philosophy, Deleuze not only ended up drawing our attention to the dispositive as crucial notion in Foucault’s oeuvre. Through three central texts – his book on *Foucault* (Deleuze 1998), his short lecture “What is a dispositive?” (1989\*/1992), and the article “Postscript on Control Societies” (\*1990/1995) – Deleuze also inaugurated the reception and dominated the conception of the dispositive. While at first shunning the notion in favour of the related concept “diagramme” (1998: 34, 36, 43, 72-73), he devotes the lecture entirely to answering the question of what a dispositive is, stressing that “Foucault’s philosophy often presents itself as an analysis of concrete dispositives” (Deleuze \*1989: 185/Deleuze 1992: 159). Finally, in the article on control societies, Deleuze develops the perspective roughly outlined in the lecture when he suggests that, according to Foucault, we may be leaving an era dominated by the dispositive of

discipline since “our actuality,” “what we are in the process of becoming,” “takes on the form of dispositions of overt and continuous dispositions of control” (\*1989: 191/1992: 164). In this light, Deleuze’s “Postscript” further fleshes out and develops Foucault’s notion of the dispositive by suggesting a succession of various societies, each dominated by a particular dispositive. Having replaced the earlier “societies of sovereignty”, the “disciplinary societies” are in turn about to be replaced by “the societies of control” (\*1990: 240-41/1995: 177-78).

Thus, Deleuze certainly merits the gratitude for having instigated the reception by calling our attention to the notion of the dispositive as a key concept, thus setting the scene for the ensuing reception, which to some extent pays homage to him and refers to some of his early insights (e.g. Abadía 2003; Muller 2008; O’Connor 1997; Villadsen 2008; Bussolini 2010). In addition, Deleuze points out a number of important traits characterizing the dispositive and dispositional analysis.

However, constraining himself to discussing only a few remarks by Foucault concerning the dispositive and omitting an attentive reading of his work with relation to the dispositive, Deleuze’s analysis still remains at a sketchy general and rather speculative level. Consequently, further differentiation is called for in order to be able to seriously assess and make the most of Deleuze’s contribution.

First, differentiation is not only called for at the level of categories and general social analytics, as Deleuze seems to conflate the concept of the dispositive with the category of dispositionality in general. As sugar may be disposed to dissolve into water, I may be favorably disposed towards complying with a request, but my disposition is not necessarily the result of the workings of a larger dispositive. Deleuze tends to find dispositives at work whenever there is dispositionality at play, since he omits to state and discuss precisely the conditions necessary to talk of a dispositive. And as he finds dispositionality at play almost everywhere Deleuze tends to find dispositives at work everywhere as well, without qualifying their status or range. Secondly, further discrimination is also called for at the level of practical social analysis, not only concerning the issue of when to speak of a dispositive at all, but also concerning the types and number of dispositives to be used at the level of analysis. Consequently, Deleuze chances upon new dispositives of his own invention but foreign to Foucault, such as “the dispositive of the Athenian city,” “Christian dispositives,” or “the dispositive of the French Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution” (Deleuze \*1989: 187, 188, 190/1992: 161, 161, 163). Claiming that dispositives of *control* are replacing a previous disciplinary dispositive, Deleuze manages to suggest that Foucault recognized “a society of control” as our imminent future (Deleuze \*1990: 241/1995: 178), even though nothing in Foucault’s published work testifies to this. Thus, Deleuze sketches out once more a supplementary type of dispositive, perhaps true in its own right, but perplexing

with regard to Foucault's analysis. Thirdly, Deleuze also comes close to suggesting a simple succession of epochs and an epochality foreign to Foucault. In this way, Deleuze implicitly confuses the fact that a dispositive exists as a dominating force with the fact that it exerts an unrivalled all-determining influence. In Foucault's terms, Deleuze mistakes the dispositives "presence" or even its omnipresence for "omnipotence" (Foucault \*1994d: 16).

As all this suggests, further differentiation and precision is also called for with regard to the exact relationship of Deleuze's account to Foucault's own original account of the dispositive. Where the conventional approach tends to read Foucault through his interpreter Deleuze, it seems rewarding to return to Foucault's own account of the dispositive to make room for a more differentiated discussion of the dispositive and of Deleuze's reading.

## **2. On the later reception of the dispositive**

A return to the sources in order to be able to move forward seems equally pertinent if we turn to the succeeding discussions of the dispositive. By redrawing the map of the dispositive and bringing its contours closer to the shape outlined in Foucault's oeuvre, we are able to restore a coherent scope in outlook and analysis. This scope risks fading out of sight in the ensuing fruitful and multifarious reception of the term that can be heuristically differentiated into the three main groups.

The major achievement in the first (mainly) Anglophone reception has been to develop the understanding of the context in which Foucault most distinctively applied his analysis of dispositives, this context being modern-day economical governance and conduct of conduct. Taking the concept of the dispositive either at face value (e.g. Aradau and Munster 2007; Diken and Laustsen 2002, 2006; Dillon 2007; Gil-Juárez 2009; Tellmann 2009) or with reference to Deleuze's definition (e.g. Abadia 2003; Bell 2006; Muller 2008; Villadsen 2008), these studies have demonstrated how Foucault's dispositional analysis from 1978 is closely related to his explorations, not only of "how government began to revolve biopolitically around the specific question of 'population' " (Dillon 2007: 43), but also into "the motivations and calculations that have engendered the government of conduct in the period of the consolidation of neoliberalism" (Lazzarato 2009: 110). In short, this first leg of the reception has rightly shown the intimate relationship between the subject matters which are also elaborated in the so-called "governmentality studies" (cf. Rose et al. 2006) and the analytical endeavor of Foucault's dispositives. What these studies have not detailed, however, is the character of the dispositive when regarded more generally as an analytical concept, both in Foucault's own body of work and for the sake of new studies of societal problematics. With a few important, though still relatively partial exceptions (e.g. Collier 2009; Elden

2007; Lee 2008; O'Conner 1997), the reception has not yet sufficiently excavated the breadth of the dispositional analysis of Foucault.

This is also the case with the two major non-Anglophone groupings in the reception of the dispositive. While they have developed the concept further analytically, they have deviated from Foucault's own use. Secondly, the dispositive has thus found a reception in a rather large group of (mostly) French studies, many of them collected in two special journal issues on the dispositive, edited by Jacquinet-Delaunay and Monnoyer (1999). While most of these studies do not work so much within as in continuation of Foucault's historical investigations, if not beyond, the notion of the dispositive is generally reevaluated to account for certain types of procedural 'quasi-objects', the internet and various new media formats being prime examples. However, both empirically and methodologically, this perspective on the dispositive appears to be too restricted to a local environment to pertain to the same overriding historical and societal level as the one delineated by Foucault. To resituate Foucault's dispositives on this societal plane of a higher order is one of the central requirements for the formulation of dispositional analysis.

A third and final reception has taken place in a second large group of (mainly) German studies (e.g. Bührmann & Schneider 2008; Caborn 2007; Jäger 2001). Departing from a fairly well-established 'school' of critical discourse theory and analysis, which to a large extent pays homage to Foucault, this reception seeks to further a somewhat later parallel tradition for dispositional analysis ("*Dispositivanalyse*") emerging out of the former school. These studies have provided the reader with an impressive overview of the new emanating field in question and contributed to it conceptually, methodologically, and empirically, as they have aimed to provide a better outline of the dispositive and its particular 'research perspective', dealing with "ensembles ... which include discourses, practices, institutions, objects, and subjects" (Bührmann & Schneider 2009: 68). Consequently, the mainly German reception has succeeded in showing that the dispositive is a notion that can be conceptually defined and empirically validated. Still, a more elaborate exchange with the aforementioned lectures is to be wished for since Foucault here discusses the analytical, historical, social and ontological implications of the notion more thoroughly. In as much as the reception in question approaches Foucault from a primarily sociological and discourse theoretical angle, it leaves room for a more thorough discussion of these aspects.

### **3. The conceptualizations of the dispositive**

As we leave the reception behind to focus more directly on Foucault's use of the term dispositive and its preconditions, it should be made clear first of all that Foucault makes use of a common French word, not a neologism. In everyday French, the term *le dispositif* often



describes an arrangement set up for a specific purpose, also destined to have some rather immediate effects (Jacquinot-Delaunay & Monnoyer 1999). A well-known example would be *un dispositif d'information* at a railway station giving the passengers the relevant track numbers along with the timetable of departures and arrivals of the trains. Currently, the notion is often used within the domain of new forms of information, communication and media formats to describe how these for their functioning may need organization, material resources, technological knowhow, formation of inputs, as well as reception of outputs. The dispositive is 'something' which entails a certain distribution of activities involving various components.

Even if the equivalent of the French word in English, *the dispositive*, is now obsolete, this translation is still preferable because it covers almost the same semantic field as the French equivalent (*O·E·D* 2009). Etymologically, in French as well as in English, the notion derives from the Late Latin *dispositivus*, a substantive form of the adjective under the same name; hence the dispositive refers to a certain 'something' that has certain 'attributes'. Moreover, both the adjective and the substantive are themselves derivatives of the Latin verb *dispōnāre* (lit. "to set apart"), which is generally referring to such endeavors as "to set in order," "to arrange," "to dispose," or "to form." Conceptually, some kind of "activity" is therefore added to the "something" and to the "attributes" of the dispositive.

The older connotations of the word *dispositive* are relevant for understanding its significance in Foucault's body of work. Hence, the dispositive subsists as something that "is characterized by a special disposition. (*OED* 2009).

Contrary to the associated term *disposition*, which can connote both 'the action or faculty of disposing' and 'the condition of being disposed', the semantics of the dispositive is more connected to the former and active than to the latter and passive sense. It indicates a dispositional arrangement of agency, which can also be translated as a certain organization, formation, assemblage, distribution or order. Or, as highlighted by sociologist Franck Cochoy all dispositives 'puts to work a strategic use of dispositions' (2007: 208).

In French, the term *le dispositif* has some further connotations (*PR* 2008) which are also important for Foucault's use of the notion (cf. Agamben 2007ab). In a *military* context, the dispositive refers to a number of means or initiatives in correlation to a given plan. While a military strategy in this context designates the process of *planning*, the dispositive designates the operation of the *plan* in time and space, with the means at hand, and with regard to the characteristics of the adversary. In a *legal* context, a dispositive refers to the closing, effective part of a lawful or administrative text. The dispositive specifies the relevance and effect of the declaration, as opposed to the preamble which contains the purpose of the law, and to the statute itself which formulates the specific law or command. The term has a quite wide range of meanings which includes all legal action, but especially concern how and for

what reason, and with what intent, the command is to be put into practice. Lastly, in a *technical* sense of the word the dispositive refers to the “diagram” according to which the different components in actuality are organized in a particular machinery. As in the military context, the technical dispositive points to a situation which is simultaneous with or subsequent to the operation of the formation, but with the supplement that this ordered formation can be mapped out in such a way that a diagram can be extracted and transposed to and incorporated into other situations.

The wide range of cognate meanings, all pointing to intermediate or in-between circumstances where some potential arrangement or acting order has to be actualized in a certain way, may well have induced Foucault to begin employing the term in the 1970s. However, he could also have been inspired by Althusser, Lyotard or Baudry. They all used the dispositive as a central notion prior to Foucault, respectively discussing the “conceptual dispositive” of the all-pervading ideology of the capitalistic state (Althusser 1970), the “libidinal dispositive” of human life and existence (Lyotard 1973), and the “cinematic dispositive” of the screen situation. Within this setting, Foucault seems to have employed the notion as a rather unqualified “dispositive of power” in his 1973-1974 lectures on psychiatry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (\*2003: 14/2006: 13).

However, this soon changes. When asked about the implications of utilizing the dispositive as a notion in the investigations published in *Discipline and Punish* (\*1975a) and *The Will to Knowledge* (\*1976), Foucault in 1977 clarifies a number of characteristics important for his independent understanding. He specifies that the notion, *first of all*, refers to a “thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble,” bringing together both discourses and institutions, architectural structures and scientific statements, regulatory decisions and administrative measures, as well as philosophical, moral and philanthropic proportions. In short, it encompasses “the said as much as the unsaid” (Foucault \*1977b: 299), the discursive as well as the non-discursive.

However, Foucault does not seem to find this dichotomy between the discursive fields and that which is non-discursive and of a more material kind particularly important (cf. Jäger 2001). Instead, he is preoccupied with the way in which the elements of the dispositive interrelate. In the interview, Foucault therefore *secondly* defines the dispositive itself as “the network [*réseau*] that can be established between these elements” (Foucault \*1977b: 299; cf. also \*1975a: 302/1977a: 295). The dispositive is concurrently a grouping of heterogeneous components, tangibles and intangibles, situated within an arrangement, as well as the transversal set of connections between these components. The dispositive is of a *relational* nature, rather than of a substantial kind. Even though the dispositive is ‘something’, it is not a ‘thing’.

However, Foucault does not seem to find this dichotomy between the discursive fields and that which is non-discursive and of a more material kind particularly important as such (cf. Jäger 2001). While all the varied workings are the elements of the dispositive, he is much more interested in the way in which they interrelate mutually than he is in their essential character, be it linguistic, materialistic, or merely ephemeral. In the interview, Foucault therefore secondly, defines the dispositive itself as ‘the network [*réseau*] that can be established between these elements’ (Foucault \*1977: 299/1980: 195; cf. also \*1975: 302/1977: 295). The dispositive is concurrently a grouping of heterogeneous components, tangibles and intangibles, situated within an arrangement, as well as the transversal set of connections between these components. The dispositive comprising a network of this type implies that its nature is more of a *relational* than of a substantial kind. Again, the dispositive is “something”, but it is not a “thing”; rather it is the manifestation of an arrangement distributing a variety of real effects within social reality.

Hence, Foucault *thirdly* indicates that the dispositive also stands for “precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements” (\*1977b: 299/1980: 194). As regards this specific dispositional nature, however, he also emphasizes the modifiability and transferability, allowing the various elements to alter their position and produce new distributions (cf. Rabinow 2003; Foucault \*1977b: 299).

Foucault typically refers to this reinterpretation or abstraction of the functional rationality of the dispositive as the “diagramme” of a dispositive, in a sense quite similar to the technical semantics presented above. Foucault provides a lucid example of this *fourth* feature of the dispositive in *Discipline and Punish* in which the panoptical surveillance is described as the diagram of the disciplinary dispositive (\*1975: 207/1977a: 205).

In the sedimentary process, which Foucault calls ‘the strategic completion [*remplissement*] of the dispositive’ (\*1977: 299/1980: 197), it appears that the different aspects of the dispositional arrangement are discernable, not merely as the aforesaid openings of new fields of rationality, but apparently also as mechanisms, programmes, diagrams, political technologies, localizations, distributions, organizations, and dispositions, along with special modes and instruments for the exercise of power. Therefore, he can also characterize the dispositive as “strategies of relation of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge” (\*1977: 301/1980: 196). In this sense, the dispositive points to the multifactorious network in which knowledge and the exercise of power reciprocally organize and find themselves organized by each other in a certain manner.

Unlike Deleuze, Foucault sees it fit to discriminate distinctively between the diagram and the dispositive. The diagram is present as the abstract formulation of the connections in the dispositive, as their effective connectionality. As a diagram, the panoptic surveillance

presents a relatively simple transmittable spatial plan for the complex dispositive of discipline (cf. David-Ménard 2008).

According to Foucault, the complex dispositional arrangement can be regarded as the social answer to some “urgent need” that comes into view as problems emerging within the social field; and as a consequence, it is marked by a “prevailing strategic function” and a “process of functional overdetermination” (\*1977: 299/1980: 195), as will be accounted for later. Yet, a prior clarification of Foucault's conception of a history of dispositives as a history of major societal technologies is required, also in order to make the important point that dispositional analysis is always concerned with analyzing more than one dispositive at the time and the specific “series of complex edifices” or “a system of correlations” (Foucault \*2004b: 10/2007: 8) they form together (cf. Collier 2009). These crucial points come to the fore in Foucault's lectures at the College de France.

#### **4. The history of dispositives as societal technologies**

Foucault begins his lectures at the Collège de France in 1978 by pointing out the necessity of analyzing history as a history of major technologies or dispositives (\*2004a: 7-13/2007: 3-8). An analysis of dispositives of this type would also imply a history of dispositives.

The history of principal societal technologies differs from what Foucault calls “a history of techniques in the proper sense of the word (proprement dites)” (\*2004a: 10/2007: 8; translation rectified), i.e. a history that merely focuses on the rise and fall of various means employed to deal with certain surroundings. The dispositional analysis of the history of technology is not content to merely describe, for instance, when solitary confinement was introduced in prisons. Instead it focuses on the “far more global but also [more] blurred (floue) history of correlations and systems of dominant features which occasion that, in a given society and for a given sector, [...] a technology will be installed” (\*2004a: 10/2007: 8). Foucault's history of major technological arrangements is a study in the clustering of social techniques and the inevitable and equally momentous interplay between these techniques.

Foucault's own critical analysis thus entails the placing of the various techniques within a more comprehensive dispositional history of technology. A dispositive leaves a trace and outlines an emerging order. What kind of construction such sediments belong to, however, depends entirely on the other dispositives at play in any given historical constellation. Neither a technique, nor a technology, nor a dispositive, has a substantial nature. The purpose of a dispositional analytics is therefore not to identify any such nature but to examine and map out the effect of various dispositives within the constellations surrounding them.

Consequently, an analysis of dispositives seeks whenever possible to account for how objects, practices, events and experiences that are usually taken for granted come into exist-

ence only in the interaction between the dispositives. Thus, Foucault seeks to demonstrate that they do not exist as objects whose nature one might take for granted because they do not exist as pure, physical realities; they are in fact constructed. At the same time, however, Foucault maintains that “it is in fact a connection of practices, of real practices, that has produced this and leaves its mark on reality” (Foucault \*2004b: 6/2008: 7). Although the dispositives have no immediate substantial nature to take hold of, they still substantially affect the actual reality in various manners.

An analysis of dispositives does not seek to explain the existence of the major social technologies by referring to the institutions that contain them. Foucault juxtaposes this ‘institutionalcentrism’ with the endeavour to move “beyond or outside the institution” “and replace it with the overall point of the technology of power” (Foucault \*2004a: 120-121/2007: 116-17). Thus, the analysis of dispositives seeks to unravel how a difficult social exchange, influenced by particular challenges and predicaments, constitutes, runs through, and changes the principal institutions and events and experiences of a society and the social order.

### **5. Dispositional Prototypes: Law, Discipline, Security**

While stressing the necessity of analysing history as a history of dispositives or technological arrangements, Foucault introduces what he calls three basic and particularly important “modalities” (Foucault: \*2004a: 7/2007: 5) of dispositives, or dispositional prototypes, which he designates “law”, “discipline,” and “the dispositives of security” (Foucault \*2004a: 7-8/2007: 5-6). All three prototypes can be regarded as major formations of social technologies, each characterized by a particular mode of distribution, as they deal with the surrounding world and organize human interaction and social relations within this framework.

Legislation and its outcome, *the law*, can be construed as a special kind of dispositional arrangement, insofar as it is an attempt to establish a differentiation between the forbidden and the permitted (see Table 1). This legal dispositive exists as a *codifying* and *prohibitive* social technology that lays down a binary order, eventually supported by sanctions, to be respected by every *legal subject*. The law distinguishes sharply between the permitted and the forbidden in order to specify the kind of acts unwanted. On the other hand, where *discipline* is concerned, it is a *preventive* and *productive* dispositive, working to avert the unwanted from occurring and, as such, often fabricating something new and wanted as well. The disciplinary modality intervenes with the daily existence of its objects being *individual bodies*, moulding them so that they can be expected to function in a desirable fashion in the future. Just as the law deals with its surrounding world, so does discipline, although now in a *prescriptive* fashion, aiming to eliminate the unwanted and to prevent it from occurring at

all. Conversely, the *dispositives of security* are not deterring; instead, they work as *conductive* and averting social technologies, most generally aiming to *facilitate* the self-regulation of a *population*. The implementation of security precautions is not designed to distinguish between the wanted and the unwanted, nor is it capable of removing or ameliorating the unwanted. Instead, the measures of security establish a readiness to take “into account that which can happen” (Foucault \*2004a: 23/2007: 21), often with reference to its utility or inutility (\*2004b: 53/2008: 51). Thus, this modality of dispositives processes the unexpected in order to avoid potential destructive consequences or, whenever possible, to gain from prosperous outcomes.

Amongst these three dispositional modalities, the disciplinary prototype is the most familiar, as it represents the major theme in Foucault's historical account of the birth of the prison. Here, it is not the prison in itself that is Foucault's primary concern. Of interest is rather a transversal tendency, making it relevant to ask: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (Foucault \*1975a: 229/1977a: 228). The focus of investigation is the complex network that connects and permeates these different institutions as it imbues them with a particular disciplinary *dispositiveness*.

Less famous than discipline, the legal or juridical prototype is mainly dealt with by Foucault in a negative manner, not least in his critique of the conventional understanding of power as being principally sovereign, commanding, prohibitive and legal in nature (e.g. Foucault \*1976a/1998; \*1997/2003). However, this dispositional modality is also apparent in the various instances where Foucault demonstrates how basic juridical conceptualizations are contested and remoulded by the rise of new social dispositions – such as the birth of corrective incarceration in contradistinction to the psychical punishment of sovereignty (\*1975a/1998), the rise of the reason of state (\*1997/2003), or the birth of a neo-liberal governmentality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (\*2004b/2007).

Likewise, the last prototype of security is more complicated to discern than discipline. These arrangements correspond to a dispositional half-way house. On the one side, they are related to the ‘*regulatory controls*’ or the ‘*biopolitics of the population*’, which Foucault introduces in the end of *The Will to Knowledge* as a new social order beginning to interact with the ‘*disciplines*’ or the ‘*anatomo-politics of the human body*’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (\*1976a: 183/1998: 139). On the other side, they connect to the seminal notion of ‘governmentality’ set up by Foucault during his 1978 lectures to give a more adequate picture of his analytical enterprise than the one suggested by the title *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault \*2004a: 113/2007: 110). In this context, the dispositives of security are integrated into a

larger conceptualization that is close to Foucault's designation of the dispositive quoted above and may be more apt to represent the dispositional prototype:

By "governmentality" I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and dispositives of security as its essential technical instrument' (Foucault \*2004a: 112/2007: 108-09).

In continuation with his investigations of this modality and its interchange with the legal and the disciplinary prototypes in the lectures in 1978 and 1979, Foucault reassigns it as "the general dispositive of governmentality" (\*2004b: 71/2007: 70). Thus he maintains a number of the implications pertaining to the dispositives of security, not least the relation to the population and to the difficult interchange between security and freedom Foucault (\*2004b: 67/2007: 65). This development could also be regarded as a sequence of different phases within the history of the same, very comprehensive dispositive. Foucault would then study it from the appearance of the reason of state in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to its later liberal and neoliberal formations in the two following centuries. In 1979 he redefined the notion of governmentality as "the way in which one conducts the conduct of men" (\*2004b: 192/2007: 186), thus broadening it to such an extent that it could also study problems of government outside the dispositional frameworks of security and governmentality.

Taking into account that Foucault never systematically explains how exactly the notions biopolitics, security and governmentality relate to each other, it also becomes clear that any schematic representation of his dispositional analysis entails both interpretation and reconstruction. Hence, the table below is simply meant to be a heuristic illustration of how the different elements of the three dispositional prototypes *could* be mapped out conceptually. It should not be taken at face value as a true account of all the relevant analytical components, as it does not only reduce biopolitics, security and governmentality into one single societal technology, but also pulls together notions which are not employed by Foucault himself in order to fill out categorical lacunas in the table. Rather, the table aims to illustrate some of the major constituents of the dispositional analysis (Foucault, \*2004a: 3-89/2007: 1-86). It illustrates the dispositive analysis on a more general, although reconstructed level, focusing on (1) the normative order, (2) the exercise of power, (3) the spatiality, (4) the subject matter, and (5) some of the interrelated elements pertaining to each of the three dispositives.

<b>TABLE 1. Prototypical dispositives</b>	<b>LAW</b>	<b>DISCIPLINE</b>	<b>Biopolitics SECURITY Governmentality</b>
<b>Normative order</b> <i>What?</i>	Prohibitive Forbidden/Permitted  Codifying	Prescriptive Unwanted/Wanted  "Normating" ( <i>normation</i> )	Conductive Utile/Inutile  Normalizing
<b>Exercise of power</b> <i>How?</i>	Repressive  Limitation	Productive  Formation	Facilitative  Allowing ( <i>laissez-faire</i> )
<b>Spatiality</b> <i>Where?</i>	Territory  State of Law	Localized, analyzed spaces Institutionalized Society <i>Le Carcéral</i>	Natural Environment  Civil Society
<b>Subject matter</b> <i>Who?</i>	Legal Subjects  Codifying acts	Individual Bodies  Controlling behaviour	Population  Conducting conduct
<b>Interrelated elements</b> <i>Which?</i>	Law, Jurisprudence, Classical political philosophy, Internment, Representation, Public punishment, Sovereignty, Confinement of madness	Asylum, Administrative institutions, Bad consciousness, Crime rates, Criminology, Educative imprisonment, Examination, Forensic psychiatry, Military parade, Psychology, Pedagogy, Prisons, Surveillance, Schools, Workshops	Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Political economy, Statistics, Pastoral power, <i>Raison d'état</i> , human capital, economic imperialism

The typology makes it likely to imagine the history of recent times as a succession of modalities of dispositives (Foucault \*2004a: 8-13). According to this succession, the dispositives of law would have brought about a legal system with ancient lineage that breaks free of its customary legal connections by the end of the Middle Ages and lasts into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Sometime during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this legal system would then be replaced by a modern system based on disciplinary dispositives, which prevails well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At present, a more contemporary system based on security precautions seems to replace discipline. In an historical analysis, just like the one previously mentioned, one attempts to characterize the life of any given period as a unified system based on a certain type of dispositive, while at the same time assuming the existence of drastic, historical ruptures. Indeed, this conception would resemble Deleuze's epochal succession of the societies of sovereignty, of discipline and of control.

Nonetheless, one should be careful not to perceive the history of dispositives as a process in which one system simply replaces another. Firstly, this version involves an idea of discontinuity that is foreign to Foucault's way of thinking. He points out that ruptures and periods are not the final result of an analysis but should instead be regarded as all too obvious first impressions and superficial categories that need to be explained (cf. Foucault \*1984: 59-62).



They are to be understood as the result of a long line of commonly overlooked, singular events, which each contributes to slower and more protracted historical displacements. Secondly, the idea of succeeding periods is inadequate as it is based on a simplified understanding of the mode of operation of the dispositives. The historical analysis would become totalizing if the dispositives were assumed to be exclusive and therefore necessarily replace one another. According to Foucault, there is no “series in which the elements follow each other in such a way that the appearance of the new cause the earlier ones to disappear. There is no era of the law, no era of the disciplinary, nor an era of security [...]. It is not so that security mechanisms do replace disciplinary mechanisms” (Foucault \*2004a: 10/2007: 8).

On the contrary, Foucault points out how different modalities of dispositives can co-exist and even presuppose each other:

It is absolutely clear that in the juridico-legal system [...] the disciplinary aspect [was] far from absent since, after all, when a so called exemplary punishment was imposed on an action, [...] it was in fact precisely with the aim of having a ‘corrective effect’. [...] We could [say] the same with regard to the disciplinary system which includes a whole series of dimensions that absolutely belong to the domain of security. Basically, when one undertakes to correct a prisoner, [...] one tries to correct the person according to the risk of relapse, of recidivism, that is to say according to what will very soon be called his ‘dangerousness’ – that is to say, again, a mechanism of security (Foucault \*2004a: 9/2007: 7).

Thus, the various dispositives work together for the reason that the current security precautions do not suspend the legal or the disciplinary dispositives. Instead, “getting this system of security to work involves a real inflation of the juridico-legal code” (\*2004a: 9/2007: 7). In retrospect, other considerations besides that of the law were already present and imperative in order for the law to function. The practice of the law already had an implicit disciplinary and securing effect. Meanwhile, such implicit matters may turn out to be a primary matter for other dispositives. The secondary disciplinary effect of the law has a better chance of succeeding if special disciplinary dispositives are established with the specific purpose of correcting the behaviour of a social segment.

Within a specific type of dispositive, certain aspects of the social interaction will be displayed, manifesting themselves as unavoidable matters to relate to. Thus, the history of dispositives is the story of how unarticulated and rudimentary considerations are articulated in a fundamentally endless movement. Our modes of existence are differentiated into autonomous types of social interplay that increasingly separate from each other into complete diversity. Foucault points to this endless differentiation in a reply to Habermas in 1983. The

latter had accredited Foucault with having ingeniously captured the historical moment when reason took a turn that led to an instrumental rationality. According to Foucault, however, this praise was somewhat problematic since it implicitly presupposed that he merely operated with one singular splitting of reason. Foucault thus replies: "It is true that *I* would not speak about *one* bifurcation of reason but, in fact, rather about an endless, multiple bifurcation – a kind of abundant ramification" (Foucault \*1983a: 440-41/1983b: 442).

When one endeavours to determine a dispositive, one also seeks to capture some sort of regularity belonging to the historical processes. An analysis of dispositives rests on the view that different social acts change the preceding, and that history in this way is a constant repetition of minor ruptures. It also rests on the assumption that it is possible to establish a level of analysis in which regularity becomes visible in the processes of becoming.

## **6. Implications of the analytic of dispositives**

According to Foucault, a dispositional arrangement comes about as an answer to an unfortunate difficulty with regards to a certain historical situation. The elaboration of a dispositive may be regarded as a preliminary answer to "social indigestion" in which problems and possible solutions are articulated as the dispositive takes shape. The dispositive plays a major role within a larger context, which it also helps to select and shape. This means that the dispositive can be considered, in retrospect, to be created under what Foucault calls a 'prevailing strategic function' (\*1977b: 299/1980a: 195).

The dispositive's engagement in its context does not define the function of the dispositive to such an extent that it unequivocally delimits a specific field. Nor can the general strategic function usually be said to determine one specific calculus processing all possible inputs. This is only the case with that particular type of dispositive Foucault refers to as a "mechanism" (2004a: 68/2007: 66). 'Mechanism' refers to an arrangement targeting and treating a specific area in accordance with certain predetermined procedures such as, for instance, the guillotine, designed to provide a 'democratic' execution appropriate for everybody, high or low, man or woman, fighting for or against the Republic. Unlike such a particular and delimited type of dispositive, Foucault describes the field of application for a dispositive in general as *non-particular*. A dispositive is an arrangement that is open to unforeseen and unpredictable events. In opposition to, say, disciplinary mechanisms, the dispositive incorporates "the uncertain", "the aleatory" (Foucault \*2004a: 22, 13, 49-49/2007: 20, 11, 44-46). The appearance of the unexpected constantly affects the different parts of the dispositive.

The strategic function of the dispositive is normative in so far as it integrates and digests the influences around it. The strategic function plots a course towards which the processing

of an arrangement tends to lean, but it does not predetermine the effects of the dispositive. However, the dispositive is organized and stabilized through certain regulations. According to Foucault's dispositional prototypes above, these regulations could differ, being prohibitive, prescriptive or conductive of nature (see Table 1), but in dispositional analysis more broadly, other types of regulations could in all probability also be found. How a strategic function is carried out depends upon the concrete arrangement of the dispositive; this arrangement is forever being displaced due to the interaction of the dispositive with its surroundings. The interaction between the different parts of the arrangement causes what Foucault defines as a "process of functional overdetermination" (\*1977b: 299). Various inputs mutually affect each other, thereby creating changes in the function of the dispositive. Such changes make themselves known as small tremors, which then in turn necessitate alterations and adjustments of the interaction between the various parts of the dispositive. This complex network of mutual influence affects the function of a dispositive.

On the face of it, an obvious and transparent logic seems to be present when individuals act with specific intentions. At this stage in the analysis, different problems present themselves and call for actions regarded as concrete solutions to the difficulties at hand. Those who act relate to former actions and may attempt to take the next, potential responses into account. Each action and each related intention are intersected by other actions, and because of this interaction, the result is never fully pre-discounted.

In this interplay between actions eliminating the immediacy of the time and place-oriented intentions a new regularity appears. A new pattern emerges amidst the actions and their intentions. This pattern is the dispositive of events, and the dispositive is the arrangement that subsequently seems to have emerged through the analyzed events. In retrospect, each of the social events seems to be derived from the dispositive they assist in creating. The dispositive may be interpreted as a transverse, mediating level in the interaction of social actions. At this stage, the social actions must be analyzed as events that occur with regards to and with an effect on the dispositive.

The dispositional analysis does not pretend to be a way of analyzing reality as such. Instead, it is a way of demonstrating how different actions (viewed as prescriptive events) mutually eliminate each other, only to collectively outline a pattern and create a new normative level. In other words, the dispositive is an inclusive depiction of whatever seems to have been prescribed or determined as applicable to the social interplay at any given time.

Stating the emergence of a new dispositive through an historical transformation merely amounts to asserting that new guidelines for actions started to make themselves known – and not necessarily that the actions analyzed are in perfect accordance with these guidelines. It is not claimed that those who act cause the dispositive to manifest itself directly. As

long as one is expounding the dispositive, one is still on the stage of an “ideality,” which remains suspended in ‘reality’. By its organization, the dispositive attempts to indicate the systematic which seems to have had a normative effect on the singular programmes that in turn were never implemented as originally intended. And so, in relation to the dispositional analytics, the social reality presents itself as a *Ding an sich* that the analysis does not claim to reach. What we actually did and how we in fact happened to relate to one another is considered ‘metaphysical’ and beyond the perspective of the analysis. In the perspective offered by the analysis, the social ‘actuality’ – with all its actions and current occurrences – is only shown in one specific light of normativity.

However, the dispositive is still highly influential because it outlines the way in which one relates normatively to a specific situation. At the same time, this normative level is regarded as an inevitable ‘reality’, in so far as the dispositive influences the (in their own right already prescriptive) activities of the sociality. The effects of the dispositive are embedded in the institutions it reshapes. It has an undeniable influence on the way the individual acts and the way she perceives events. The dispositive is very real in so far as it affects the social reality by installing a most real dispositionality.

On one hand, the dispositive is an ‘ideal’ arrangement as a response to the challenges posed by the past. The dispositive responds by prescribing certain outcomes without being able to determine them completely; and it is only able to do so in interaction with other dispositives. On the other hand, the dispositive is a collectively produced and binding “idea” – merely ‘given’ in so far as it is already present in that which is unique. From the beginning, the ‘ideal’ only existed as an actually present and, in the social institutions, already implemented ‘ideality’. The dispositive may not be an absolute or omnipotent idea; however, as an already implemented ubiquitous set of connections, it is unavoidable.

Yet, the fact that the dispositive does not prescribe and determine everything does not imply that it does not exert an influence. If there is an immediate and apparent rationality present at the level of individual and intentional action, the dispositional analysis seeks to demonstrate that it is also possible to describe a rationality at another level. Such rationality presents itself in the regularity or logic that shapes a specific social interplay.

## **7. Conclusion**

Deleuze emphasized how “untangling the lines of a dispositive means” “preparing a map, cartographying, measuring unexplored lands’ (Deleuze \*1989: 185/1992: 159). This is exactly what we have endeavored to do, redrawing once more the map of Foucault’s dispositional analysis. While doing so, however, we have also struggled “to redraw the map of disposi-

tives, to find for them a new orientation in order to stop them from becoming locked behind impenetrable lines of force" (Deleuze \*1989: 187/1992: 160-61).

The almost exclusive focus on discipline recurrent in the reception (e.g. Townley 1993) has to a certain degree resulted in a reduction of Foucault's work to a totalizing claim about a disciplined and regimented monolithic social order, dissimilar to the dispositional omnipresence accounted for above, but quite analogous to Deleuze's societies of omnipotent control. While Foucault certainly prioritizes security in his 1978-1979 lectures, the dispositional analysis equally shows that its priority is – exactly – *analytical* and not ontological or epochal. Investigating the history from the perspective of the law or discipline, or yet another dispositive, would indeed transform its general outlook and themes, and probably Foucault's associated diagnosis of the present, too. However, it would never alter the fact that the transfigured historical analysis would have to take into account as well the "series of complex edifices" correlating dispositives. Even if Deleuze is right when he argues that "each dispositive is a multiplicity where certain processes in becoming are operative and are distinct from those operating in another dispositive" (Deleuze \*1989: 188/1992: 342), his exposition of the dispositive still misses out on important points pertaining to their interrelatedness.

Similarly, the existence of a dispositive does not imply that the social events can escape the mutual overdetermination of several dispositives working together in the social interplay (David-Ménard 2008). For Foucault, the crucial concern was less to elucidate theoretically the ontology of a single and independent dispositive, or of the dispositive in general. Instead, he took pains to analyse empirically the way in which several interdependent dispositives revolve around and exercise an influence upon certain social experiences and problematics. While Deleuze expressed a firm confidence in the intrinsic value of conceptual and ontological investigations (Deleuze & Guattari: \*1991: 21-37; 1994: 15-34), Foucault was more diagnostically inclined (Raffnsøe et al. 2010: 329-74). To him, even the most abstruse discussions of conceptual and ontological matters were reasonable, but only in as far as they could serve as torch lights guiding us on our difficult – historically situated as well as diagnostically orientated – empirical and analytical explorations.

Therefore theoretical studies elucidating the metaphysics of control societies do not at present seem the most interesting way to prolong Foucault's investigation of the dispositive of security. Instead the more promising road seems to be empirical studies diagnosing, for example, the present state of interacting geopolitical and biopolitical security dispositives (Dillon 2007; Muller 2008), or currently emerging insurance and precaution dispositives working on the limits of contingency and risk management (Aradau & van Munster 2007). Much more in line with Foucault than Deleuze, these studies do not work with an epochal progression of totalizing dispositives, replacing one all-inclusive social ontology with the next. Recognizing how dispositives of security also interrelate with other major societal

technologies, they aim to diagnose the kinds of social events that become significant in this context. Hence they also maintain a difference between the mere dispositionality associated with the social existence of risk and contingency and the particular societal dispositives working on them and the ones that do not. As such, the future of dispositional analytics could also learn from the French and the German reception of the dispositive: that is, how all dispositives are in need of empirically discernable socio-material elements, and how the relationship between these and other, more immaterial or discursive elements should be considered methodologically.

In their discussion of the dispositive, Rabinow and Rose (2003) refer to a conversation during which Foucault applies the notion to his historical investigations of archives around prisons, schools, hospitals, workshops and the like in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Noting that the reformers wrote about their political plans with great explicitness, it struck him that the search for hidden intentions or aspirations was futile.

Analyzing dispositives was Foucault's attempt to flesh out his undertaking in a relatively tangible form, as "a historical dispositive" was not "a reality below difficult to grasp, but a large surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of specialized knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistances are linked together according to a few grand strategies of knowledge and power" (Foucault \*1976a: 139/1998: 106-07). Similarly, our approach in this article has been to display how the dispositional level of analysis is clearly discernable at the surface of things in Foucault's work as soon as its logic has become apparent – not as a subconscious signifier but as a lucid strategy organizing much of the investigations. As it turns out to be the case in Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, some matters may be all but too apparent or obvious for us to notice them until we stumble upon them or somebody draws our attention to them.

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