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### ARTICLE

#### What is a Dispositive?

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**ABSTRACT:** The distinct French and Italian concepts of *appareil/apparato* and *dispositif/dispositivo* have frequently been rendered the same way as “apparatus” in English. This presents a double problem since it collapses distinct conceptual lineages from the home languages and produces a false identity in English. While there are good reasons for which translators have chosen to use “apparatus” for *dispositif*, there is growing cause for evaluating the theoretical and empirical specificity of each concept, and either to rethink the rendering as “apparatus” or to keep in mind the specific philosophical trajectories of each one. In particular, the ongoing release of Michel Foucault’s Collège de France lecture courses (in which the term is frequently used), and the essays by Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben bearing directly on the *dispositif* and the *dispositivo* present a strong case for reevaluating the usage and rendering of these concepts. This paper presents a number of minute considerations on the productive distinction between them.

**Keywords:** Dispositive, apparatus, *dispositif/dispositivo*, *appareil/apparato*, Foucault, Deleuze, Agamben

The ongoing appearance of new lectures by Michel Foucault and specific considerations by Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben have identified an important conceptual distinction that has remained largely invisible up to this point: the distinction between *appareil/apparato/apparatus* and *dispositif/dispositivo/dispositive*. The fact that formerly both terms have been translated as “apparatus,” and that the recent English translation of Agamben’s “Dispositive” essay renders it as “What is an Apparatus?,” has given the term “apparatus” a certain inertia and fashion in English-language scholarship that must now be re-evaluated next to the important conceptual specificity of the term “dispositive.”<sup>1</sup> Though there are strong reasons for

<sup>1</sup> The Agamben essay is *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2006); the English translation (along with other essays) is *What is an Apparatus?*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford University Press, 2009). Although Agamben’s essay contains extensive etymological and conceptual treatment of the specificity of the dispositive, he suggested the English translation “apparatus,” due in part to earlier renderings and an important etymological tie with Kafka’s “Apparat.” It is not my purpose here to take issue with the translations or the task of the translators, which my teacher Joan Stambaugh laughed and called “a thankless job,” nor to argue for a philosophical neologism or trendy term. Rather, this is a somewhat dry

rendering the term as apparatus, this paper argues that the English term "dispositive" is the best alternative, as it maintains crucial etymological and conceptual ties occluded by "apparatus." At the least, the argument here is that there are important philosophical and historical insights to be gained in treating the usage and specificity of the concepts. This paper is devoted to a careful analysis of the conceptual differences between the terms especially in light of the increasing use of *dispositif* in Foucault and the meticulous considerations on the term and concept in Agamben's *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* and Gilles Deleuze's *Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?*

While Graham Burchell, translator of many of Foucault's lecture courses, points up the difference between the terms and avers that there is an issue of translation and philosophical interpretation at hand in the "Translators Introduction" to *Psychiatric Power*, he opts for "apparatus," largely because this was in the preponderance of prior translations and since he saw no evident or direct way to render it otherwise. He briefly considers "dispositive," which has been used in some other renderings, but puts it aside with little extended consideration, apart from noting that it is somewhat unwieldy. However, he notes that there "does not seem to be a satisfactory English equivalent for the particular way in which Foucault uses this term to designate a configuration or arrangement of elements and forces, practices and discourses, power and knowledge, that is both *strategic* and *technical*."<sup>2</sup> While his point that "apparatus" is in line with prior renderings is indeed a salient one, ongoing release of texts in which the difference grows increasingly evident makes this consideration a persistent, and indeed more vital, one (especially since *Psychiatric Power* preceded the lecture courses, both chronologically and in terms of French and English release, in which *dispositif* comes to be a crucial *terme d'art* in Foucault). Significantly, Robert Hurley, who translated *Histoire de la sexualité* into English, rendered the term *dispositif* as "deployment." Considering the strategic aspects of the concept which are frequently highlighted, this is an important insight. Nevertheless, this paper maintains that the throw of the concept extends even beyond that (though "deployment" and its strategic connotations are important aspects).

With *Il faut défendre la société; Sécurité, territoire, population* (where he spends a considerable amount of time elucidating what he calls the *dispositifs de sécurité*), *Naissance de la biopolitique*, *Du gouvernement des vivants*, and, to a lesser extent, *L'Herméneutique du Sujet*, not to mention *L'Histoire de la sexualité*, Foucault makes increasing and concentrated use of the concept *dispositif*. Given the particular choice of this term over against *appareil*, and the associated difference in theory of state (*étatistation* in Foucault) from Althusser's (*appareils idéologiques d'État*), *dispositif* has an important specificity in this context—as distinct from the State itself, more distributed, and an important element of the theory of security and governmentality.

A crucial preliminary consideration is that the terms *appareil* and *apparato*—etymologically much closer to "apparatus"—are available in French and Italian and are in fact used

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and straightforward consideration of the two concepts in terms of etymology and contemporary philosophical usage.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Burchell, "Translator's Note," in: Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France 1973-1974*, edited by Jacques Lagrange, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008), xxiii.

in other locations by Foucault, Deleuze, and Agamben: the fact that they use *dispositif* (French) and *dispositivo* (Italian) as distinct from it is important, and merits attention. Foucault's increasing and technical use of the term in *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* and the lecture courses from 1975/6-on would seem to be an important shift worth analyzing. Second, *appareil* is used by Althusser in the famous formulation of the *appareils idéologiques d'État*, a usage from which Foucault likely intended to distance himself (this seems to be Deleuze's implication as well).<sup>3</sup> Third, as seen in Agamben, the terms are diametrically opposed in a crucial legal meaning.

Deleuze is keenly aware of this distinction in his brief but important essay on Foucault's use of *dispositif*, indicating that Foucault uses the term in part to distinguish it from the ideological State apparatus, as well as to give it a more distributed and ontological sense. Incidentally, Deleuze and Guattari use *appareil* for their concept of *appareil de capture* in *Mille plateaux*, hence another important distinction which is hidden when both are translated purely and simply as "apparatus" (though, of course, Deleuze and Guattari don't seem to intend any more fealty to Althusser's term than Foucault does). The translation of Deleuze's *dispositif* essay also indicates an awareness of this distinction, as Timothy Armstrong chooses to render the term as "social apparatus" to distinguish it from "apparatus" itself, and indeed renders the title as "What is a *dispositif*?" to emphasize the key specificity of the term. Agamben's essay is also exclusively devoted to Foucault's use of *dispositif*. He makes the claim that the concept is an important evolution from *positivité* earlier in Foucault's work, which he in turn traces to the (Hegelian) influence of Foucault's teacher and Collège de France precursor Jean Hyppolite. In addition to marking a conceptual lineage, these terms are important since they derive from the Latin terms *ponere* and *disponere*, which have a crucial ontological-material sense. Agamben also notes that *dispositif* has the legal meaning of the force or finding of a decision; in this regard "apparatus" in English has the key weakness of meaning precisely the opposite—namely the "fine print" and the notes, as opposed to the decision and the force of the decision itself. This means that "dispositive" maintains an important connection to the state of exception tradition (in Schmitt, Livy, Saint-Bonnet and others) which is consonant with Foucault's thought about war, *raison d'État*, and *coup d'État*, and which is specifically overlooked by the rendering as "apparatus."

A last important consideration regarding the dispositive—also pointed out by Agamben—is that *dispositif*, and its Latinate precursors in *dispositio* and *disponere*, are renderings of the Greek term *oikonomia*, which occupies an important position in Foucault's considerations on the *oikonomia psuchon*, the *regimen animarum*, pastoral power, and the economy of power. Although not pointed out formally by him, this connection (*oikonomia-dispositif*) was almost certainly known to Foucault, and may help to account for his increasing and distinct usage of the term *dispositif* as he tried to take account of the ways that the use of power took the form of an economy.

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<sup>3</sup> Althusser also uses the term *dispositif* as distinct from *appareils* in his description.

## I. Foucault's Usage of the Concept

As already briefly indicated, Foucault's use of the term *dispositif* occurs at a specific time in his thought (Agamben says that it is not to be found before then, and Deleuze identifies it as a response to a crisis in Foucault's thought), and it corresponds to important theoretical and empirical shifts in it. Although the concept is a tool that allows Foucault to continue and develop his investigations, it is also a noteworthy shift in itself, heralding both a connection to his earlier work and the attempt to work in a new direction. Although it has larger implications, the concept is of intense interest as an interpretive key to Foucault's work, which is likely why both Deleuze and Agamben addressed it specifically as such. The resonance of the *dispositif* concept is such that it touches on Foucault's theory of history, his theory of power, and the ontological Nietzschean underpinnings of his analysis. It relates centrally to his concerns with the productivity and positivity of power, with veridiction as a guiding principle in his work, and with the moving articulation between technology and law. It is little wonder that he devotes so much attention to the concept from the mid-1970s on, as there is almost no aspect of his work that is not touched on by it in some way.

### *Relations to Foucault's Theory of History*

In *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir*, where he first and most extensively develops the notion of the *dispositif*, Foucault gives an exposition of it in terms of its analytical function and its relation to resistance, but also in terms of its relation to historical processes and the operations of power. Foucault's usage of the concept *dispositif* is relevant to an aspect of his theory of history as that which we are no longer or that which we are becoming, a perpetual inventiveness. When considering "the multiple relations of force which are formed and operate in the apparatuses (*appareils*) of production," he writes of a "general line of force which traverses local battles and links them together."<sup>4</sup> If his genealogical approach to history is one that emphasizes continual change in institutions and concepts, the *dispositif* is an important conceptual development enabling him to elucidate it. It allows him to evaluate a moving field of continuities predicated on continual change.

Sexuality is, of course, treated in the book as "*le dispositif de sexualité*," the long fourth chapter which occupies more than a third of the book. He does not treat it as a natural or pre-existing phenomenon, but says that:

it is the name that we can give to a historical dispositive: not a furtive reality difficult to grasp, but a large surface network where the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of specialized knowledge, and the strengthening of controls and resistances are linked together according to a few grand strategies of knowledge and power.<sup>5</sup>

While the book is rightly known for the earlier section on the repressive/productive hypothesis and the tour-de-force final chapter on life and death, it is the dispositive chapter that

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 124. For all sources cited in French or Italian versions, English renderings are by me.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

may offer the most in-depth analysis and the most lasting impact on his work and those striving to make use of his analysis—and indeed it may provide a crucial link between the productive hypothesis and the biopolitical concerns.

In describing the dispositive of sexuality and its predecessor, the dispositive of alliance, Foucault indicates how the concept helps to account for the difference between historical time periods while also accounting for a substantial overlap of objects, means, and discourses. As a methodological tool the dispositive is central to Foucault's historical analysis of sexuality, but his analysis of sexuality also serves to demonstrate the theoretical and methodological contributions of the concept. Analyzing the shift and interrelation between the dispositive of alliance and the dispositive of sexuality, Foucault writes that "the relations of sex gave place, in every society, to a dispositive of alliance: system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship, of transmission of names and goods."<sup>6</sup> The dispositive of alliance demonstrated the distributed and encompassing character of the dispositive, a network that links together various aspects and practices around sexual relations. It is a particular configuration at a particular time that orients power relations, and resistances, bearing on sexual interaction.

The dispositive of sexuality bears on the same acts and relations, but is a different configuration of power and resistance at a different historical time. Foucault describes the process by which these different, yet not completely exclusive, networks and orientations of power succeed one another: "Western societies invented and put in place, above all starting in the 18th century, a new dispositive which is superimposed on it (the dispositive of alliance), and without putting it aside altogether, contributed to reducing its importance."<sup>7</sup> According to this description, it would seem that it is not a matter of radical breaks, or shifts of paradigm à la Kuhn, as much as the ongoing historical displacement of one set of mobile power relations by another. Dealing with many of the same acts and obsessions, but responding to different imperatives and configurations of power, the dispositive of sexuality supplants the dispositive of alliance in part by lessening its purchase and efficacy over time—but this is not to say that the earlier configuration is purely and simply banished permanently, but continues to act and operate in certain respects, further multiplying the field of forces making up the dispositive of sexuality.<sup>8</sup> As Foucault comments in *Sécurité, territoire, population*, "you do not at all have a series in which the elements are going to succeed one another, those which appear making the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> This is an important methodological note in Foucault that has been especially opened up by the ongoing emergence of the mid to late 1970s lecture courses. Whereas previously a schema positing a radical break and departure between periods of Foucault's work (not unlike the characterization of the early and late Heidegger with an attendant break), especially between the supposed periods of discipline-sovereignty and control-biopolitics, had taken some root, attentive reading of the lecture courses and *Histoire de la sexualité* now indicates that Foucault did not mean to characterize the quick, simple, and irretrievable turn from one epoch or system to another, but emphasizes the ongoing interpenetration of dispositives. Though Foucault is responding to important historical shifts through the dispositive, he also uses it to chart a type of continuity within mobile and multiple historical processes. This confusion about epochs in his work has been augmented by the fact that Foucault himself strives to identify a number of historical shifts and transformations, while also constantly reflecting on and amending his method.

preceding ones disappear. There is not the age of the legal, the age of the disciplinary, the age of security."<sup>9</sup>

Although he clearly says that the dispositive of sexuality lessened the purchase or applicability of the dispositive of alliance over time, he also emphasizes that this happened in part because of interest and investment in the same acts and practices. It encompasses many of the same relations and objects of regulation, but according to a different configuration of power relations:

It is the *dispositive of sexuality*: like the dispositive of alliance, it bears on sexual partners; but according to an entirely different mode. They can be opposed term for term. The dispositive of alliance is built around a system of rules defining the permitted and the prohibited, the prescribed and the illicit; the dispositive of sexuality functions according to mobile, polymorphous, and temporary techniques of power.<sup>10</sup>

The dispositive of sexuality marks a different imperative of power as brought to bear on sexual relations, and this helps to account for both its tension and its resonance with the dispositive of alliance. If they can be opposed term for term it is because they also, term for term, address and regulate the same practices (though of course the meaning and import of the activities change as dispositives encompassing them do).

One dispositive does not neatly and simply substitute for another, but the very interaction between them is an aspect and signature of the historical change, and mobile field of forces, being analyzed. Just as with, for instance, his parallel account of discipline and bio-power, the multiplicitous interaction between them is not to be overlooked:

To say that the dispositive of sexuality was substituted for the dispositive of alliance would not be exact. One could imagine that one day perhaps it will have replaced it. But, in fact, today, even if it tends to cover it up, it has not effaced it nor rendered it useless. And historically, for that matter, it was around and starting from the dispositive of alliance that the dispositive of sexuality was put in place.<sup>11</sup>

The two dispositives at hand are neither mutually exclusive fields of forces nor discrete historical periods in succession. Rather, they help to describe a complicated ongoing change within practices and power.

### *Power*

The concept of the dispositive in Foucault is also integrated with his theory of power and his descriptions of its operations. As already broached in the previous section about history, the dispositive is a tool for analyzing or understanding a multiplicity of forces in movement and contest. Indeed the way Foucault described the concept, it seems first and foremost a tool to think about power in the perpetually dynamic social field. It bears on the relationship be-

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977-1978* (Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2004), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, *Sexualité*, 140.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-2.

tween different actors and discourses in an ongoing series of rivalries. As is frequently observed, Foucault's conception of power is not institutional—though he acknowledges the role of institutions as part of a wider field of power relations. Though some have accused him of being vague or excessively indeterminate about power, this is to miss that he tried as far as possible to describe instances in which historical and conceptual research could be used to study aspects of changing and unstable power relations that constantly suffuse society.

This is precisely the role of the *dispositif*, which he uses as a way to approach and analyze certain dimensions of power's application and exercise. He is interested less in specific edifices or designated sources and emphasizes instead a network, arrangement, or configuration. In saying that its analysis cannot be predicated on presumptions of sovereignty or legal form, he says that to understand power it must be seen as "the multiplicity of relations of force which are immanent to the domain where they operate, and are constitutive of their organization; the game which by way of continual battles and confrontations transforms them, reinforces them, inverts them."<sup>12</sup> This is in accordance with the "Rule of Immanence" he posits later in the same section.<sup>13</sup>

Within a heterogeneous and dynamic field of relations, the *dispositif* would seem to be a kind of moving marker to allow some approximation of a particular preponderance or balance of forces at a given time. It helps to identify which knowledges have been called out and developed in terms of certain imperatives of power, and it aids in the discernment of the many resistances that also necessarily run through the multiple relations of force according to Foucault. This is all the more important given his castings of power as a fractured field in which the different lines of force are sometimes reinforcing, sometimes undermining and contradicting one another—reading the points of confrontation and intensity is historically and politically valuable. Foucault gives a fairly comprehensive account of what he means by *dispositif* in an interview, though he never fully defines the concept as Agamben points out. Given the specificity of Foucault's description, and the fact that Agamben draws on it at length in his essay, it is worth including here at some length:

What I'm seeking to characterize with this name is, first of all, an absolutely heterogeneous assembly which involves discourses, institutions, architectural structures, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific enunciations, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions; in short: as much the said as the un-said, these are the elements of the *dispositif*. The *dispositif* is the network which is arranged between these elements...

...with the term *dispositif*, I understand a type of—so to speak—formation which in a certain historical moment had as its essential function to respond to an emergency. The *dispositif* therefore has an eminently strategic function...

I said that the *dispositif* is by nature essentially strategic, which indicates that it deals with a certain manipulation of forces, of a rational and concerted intervention in the relations of force, to orient them in a certain direction, to block them, or to fix and utilize them. The *dispositif* is always inscribed in a game of power and, at the same time, always tied to the limits of knowledge, which derive from it and, in the same measure, condition it.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 121-2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 129.

The dispositive is precisely this: an ensemble (set) of strategies of relations of force which condition certain types of knowledge and is conditioned by them.<sup>14</sup>

The dispositive is not so much the individual elements which make it up—the long list that Foucault gives in the first paragraph—as it is the particular arrangement and relations between them. It is this distinctive (moving) form that is decisive. As seen in his analysis of the dispositives of alliance and sexuality, or of discipline and security, the same “elements” or institutions can be part of more than one dispositive. This is an explicitly relational concept predicated on a view of continual dynamism.

He also highlights that the dispositive responds to an emergency and has an eminently strategic function. It deals with a “rational and concerted intervention in the relations of force, to orient them in a certain direction.” It is a particular alignment of power, and incitement to knowledge, at a particular time (entailing a particular conjunction of lines of force). The fact that he calls it a rational and concerted intervention indicates that it is something more than just a chaotic turbulence of forces. Understanding it would be of as much importance for a strategy of resistance as it is for the marshalling and orientation of forces he speaks of. The dispositive has janus-faced strategic functions as network of power relations allowing a certain confluence and direction of forces, or as conceptual tool allowing at least a provisional analysis of a certain configuration of entities, knowledges, and discourses that discloses points of existing and possible resistance. Within the contest of forces that he describes, he says that we “have to do the most often with mobile and transitory points of resistance, introducing moving cleavages in a society, breaking unities and creating regroupings, cutting across individuals themselves, cutting them and reshaping them, tracing in them, in their bodies and their souls, indomitable regions.”<sup>15</sup> Foucault hones in on moving and temporary forms of resistance that are attentive to the ongoing modification and invention that is entailed in the process of change he describes.

Rather than a descriptive account of power, the dispositive is part of an ontological reckoning of it as a multiplicity of forces. It is strongly relational, emphasizing a particular arrangement and conjunction of plural forces. Foucault is at his most Nietzschean (Heraclitean?) in this kind of analysis, the play and contest of forces he emphasizes also constituting a central aspect of Deleuze’s *Nietzsche et la philosophie*.<sup>16</sup> We might well call this a thoroughly genealogical concept in Foucault’s work. Against the backdrop of a constantly shifting, shimmering field of dynamic change in the interaction of forces (and matter—matter probably made up of the forces on this account), Foucault gives accounts of particular arrangements of forces at particular times. In keeping with the multiplicitous nature of the inquiry, Foucault

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. III, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo?* (Roma: Notte-tempo, 2006), 3-4. This is one of the only places where Foucault considers the concept in a more general sense, usually he uses it only in relation to specific historical processes, for instance the dispositive of sexuality or the dispositive of security. This is consonant with his methodological precept against universals and favoring instead the analysis of particular situations. In fact Agamben maintains that “dispositives are, precisely, that which in the Foucauldian strategy take the place of universals,” 13.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *Sexualité*, 127.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1965).



would not claim to be able to capture or describe every force at work in a particular conjunction, nor that they would remain the same given the consistently dynamic situation. But, neither is the account entirely relativistic, as if any given force could disappear or cease immediately or simply. Though his view of history and power is based on continual change, there are inertias, partially-formed systems, configurations of institutions and practices that persist over time (though their meaning and the nature of their interaction may change over time).

The productive aspect of Foucault's account of power is also frequently noted. As over against the interdiction, or the "saying no" of the interdiction, which is only one form or aspect of power, Foucault often repeats that he is interested in the productive character of power. The ways in which bodies, selves, and discourses are created and shaped are much more far-reaching than relatively simple codes of allowed and banned activities. Identifying what is at stake in his inquiry about power, Foucault remarks that "in fact what is at issue is the production of sexuality itself."<sup>17</sup> Again, given the ontological substrate of the play of forces in his view, perpetual inventiveness and the manifestation of new configurations of forces would be a necessary and regular correlate.

#### *Distinction between 'dispositif' and 'appareil' in Foucault*

It is significant, from the point of view of considering the conceptual specificity of *dispositif*, that Foucault makes a clear distinction between it and *appareil*. Several times in his description of the *dispositif* he uses the term *appareil* with a different sense as part of the description. "Apparatus" in Foucault seems to be a smaller subset of dispositive, and one that is more specifically state-centered and instrumental. It seems unlikely that he would use the word with such specific associations if he meant it as purely and simply interchangeable with dispositive, which he has been at pains to describe as more heterogeneous and more distributed. In trying to account for why we have so insistently thought of power as interdiction and prohibition, Foucault says that "there is perhaps a historical reason for this. The great institutions of power which were developed in the middle ages—the monarchy, the State with all its apparatuses."<sup>18</sup> The apparatus here is clearly associated with the State in a way that the broader notion of the dispositive could not be, as it would always encompass a greater frame than the State or cut across its techniques and discourses depending on the particular conjunction of forces.

The same distinction is made even more evident when Foucault is describing the expanded frame of power relations that can be taken into account by the dispositive; he makes a distinction by emphasizing "new procedures of power which function not according to right but technique, not according to law but normalization, not by punishment but by control, and which are exercised at all levels and in forms that go beyond the State and its apparatuses."<sup>19</sup> Here Foucault makes a clear differentiation between *appareil* and *dispositif*, where the former is more circumscribed and is affiliated with State mechanisms of power. Although he is inte-

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault, *Sexualité*, 139.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

rested in those, he introduced the latter concept specifically to be able to take account of a wider and more diffuse, yet also more effective, form of power.

In further describing the aspects and operations of power that he seeks to comprehend through the use of the dispositive, Foucault again distinguishes between this much wider set (which includes the said and the non-said, institutions, structures, decisions, etc.) and the more limited and focused aspects of State power in the apparatus. From the point of view of analyzing relations of forces, he writes of the dynamics he hoped to identify:

the supports that these relations of force find with one another, such that they form chains or systems, or, on the contrary, the gaps, the contradictions which isolate them one from another; the strategies, in short, through which they take effect, and in which the general outline or the institutional crystallization take shape in state apparatuses, in the formulation of the law, and in social hegemonies.<sup>20</sup>

Again, Foucault is precise in his usage of the terms, and they are by no means interchangeable with one another. Although the concept of the apparatus is clearly indispensable to his description and identification of the dispositive, he does not see them as the same thing but as related concepts, such that apparatus is a distinct subset of dispositive. As in Althusser, the apparatus maintains a tie to the State and its exercise of power. Although Althusser's concept was itself a move to expand and make more diffuse, or encompassing, the operations of power, Foucault's archaeology of the dispositive goes much further still in looking at diffuse and multiplicitous power relations, and he much more circumscribes the role of the State.<sup>21</sup>

### *War*

Foucault and Agamben highlight the strategic function of the dispositive, and indicate that it responds to an emergency and often draws in military means or organization. This explicit tie to military techniques and the relations of war will be treated further below in terms of the etymology of "dispositive" and Agamben's archaeology of the concept. In this regard it has important ties to different aspects of the state of exception tradition. While Foucault has a somewhat peculiar liminal position to this discourse, attention to what he says about the dispositive indicates clearly that he was engaged in persistent thinking about certain aspects of it. As noted in the section on history, the dispositive has a strategic relation in terms of the marshalling and guidance of power relations, and in terms of the historical and political analysis of these relations that can undergird resistance. Foucault insists on the:

strategic model, rather than the model of right. And this, not because of a speculative choice or theoretical preference; but because in effect it is one of the fundamental traits of Western

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>21</sup> Significantly, as noted above, Althusser uses the terms *appareil* and *dispositif* as distinct in his essay. There, dispositive seems to be an analytical subset of apparatus. On page 125 of *Sexualité*, Foucault further distinguishes between "the groups who control the apparatuses of the State," and the "comprehensive dispositives."

societies that the relations of force which have long been found in war, in all the forms of war, their principal expression has little by little besieged the political order.<sup>22</sup>

As such he calls for investigating the discourses of sex in terms of their "tactical productivity" and their "strategic integration." If the dispositive has responding to an emergency as one of its functions, it would seem in this case that it is a methodological tool that helps us in part to take account of the ways in which the techniques and relations of war have penetrated the social field and everyday politics.

## II. Etymology and Philosophical Archaeology of the Concept

There is substantial overlap between the meanings and usages of *appareil/apparato* and *dispositif/dispositivo*, which helps to account for why both have been rendered as "apparatus," and for why they have so frequently slid indeterminately into one another. Both mean "machinery," or some form of technological device, and the fact that the terms refer to tools has made them, too, seem like tools which are used in the crafting of an overall argument, but which have little philosophical importance in themselves. This also explains why the same term may be sometimes rendered one way, sometimes another, with little effort at conceptual consistency.

Beyond the substantial similarity as "machine" or "device" however, there are differences of meaning between the concepts which it is informative to evaluate. *Appareil* is a contrivance, telephone, aircraft, system, or apparatus. *Dispositif* names the enacting terms (of a law or decision), disposition of troops in battle, or a device or contrivance. Similarly, in Italian *apparato* is a machine, system, military deployment, state apparatus or critical apparatus. *Dispositivo* refers to an appliance, device or equipment, or to the act of putting things into place, ordering (or deciding upon purview, jurisdiction, or applicability, as in the legal sense). The two concepts clearly overlap to some extent: what are the relevant differences, and are they significant enough to justify a distinction between them?

The main area of overlap between them is in terms of the technical meaning, where both can be used as a general reference to a tool, piece of equipment, or mechanism. In conventional usage in French and Italian one can hear many examples of the use of each term along these lines. Think, for instance, of the French word *appareil photo* for "camera." A variety of other such devices are also called *appareil*. The term is used by itself with no qualifier to mean telephone or airplane. Similarly, *dispositif* is used frequently in terms of such general references to machines or contraptions (lighting fixtures, set-ups to do a certain thing or another). The Italian *apparato* has a very similar usage to that of the French equivalent, naming all manner of tools, devices, or systems (for instance the digestive or respiratory). While it can refer to a deployment of troops, it also denotes especially the machinery, or tools, of warfare. *Dispositivo*, the title of Agamben's essay, also names equipment, device, or appliance of some kind, and as *appareil* in French (or *macchina* or *apparato* in Italian) is used as a common first term in a phrase to describe a machine or system of some kind (e.g., *dispositivo di allarme* — warning device). Agamben notes that the term is related to the verbs *disporre* and *porre* in Ita-

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<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *Sexualité*, 135.

lian, which have to do with setting terms, setting out, setting up, or arranging or distributing in a certain way.

What are the grounds for difference between these concepts? Agamben points to the Latin lineage of the *dispositivo* as a way of treating it as a signature and considering its archaeology. Looking at both terms in light of their Latin derivation, which persists to some extent in the contemporary French and Italian usages—even if modified or occluded in some ways—helps to pay heed to the distinct nature of these concepts and the particular constellations into which they have fit. *Apparatus*, or *adparatus*, from *apparo* in Latin, refers to a preparation or making ready for something: a furnishing, providing, or equipping. It has the sense of laying in sufficient supplies, provisions or instruments, of establishing a plan to deal with a situation by ensuring the proper supplies. *Dispositio*, on the other hand, names a regular disposition—an arrangement—and relates to the verb *dispono* and its root *pono* (*disponitio* from *dispono* became *dispositio* over time, which in turn became *dispositivo* in Italian, while the verb became *disporre*).<sup>23</sup> *Dispono* concerns placing here and there, setting in different places, arranging, distributing (regularly), disposing; it also addresses specifically setting in order, arraying, or settling and determining (in military or legal senses). *Pono*, which is intimately related, concerns putting, placing, or setting down (as things in order or troops), or forming or fashioning (as works of art). In an expanded sense in ecclesiastical Latin, which will be important to Agamben, it also carries the sense of making or causing to be. Thus, though *apparatus* refers to real and movable things, on this reading *dispositivo* has the more robust ontological sensibility as that which creates (possibly) or that which creates an arrangement that gives strategic and decisive import to a state-of-affairs. Perhaps without going too far afield we can make a parallel here with Heidegger's use of beings (*apparatus*) and Being (the dynamic relational arrangement, *dispositivo*).

On the basis of this all-too-brief tour through the etymological archaeology of the concepts, we might tentatively be able to put forward (or "set out" in the sense of *pono*) the following provisional distinction regarding their technical significations, especially as informed through the usage in Foucault and Agamben. *Apparatus* might be said to be the instruments or discrete sets of instruments themselves—the implements or equipment. *Dispositivo*, on the other hand, may denote more the arrangement—the strategic arrangement—of the implements in a dynamic function.

### *Glory and Apparatus*

In addition to a crucial divergence in legal aspects of the concepts and the crucial tie to *oikonomia* (to be considered in the section below on Agamben's essay), there is another important sense that should be made note of here, as it relates not only to the etymology of the concepts themselves, but in a very central way to aspects of the philosophy of both Agamben and Foucault. The French, Italian, and Latin concepts of *apparatus* all support a peculiar meaning that is totally divergent from *dispositivo*: that naming a magnificent preparation, splendor,

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<sup>23</sup> Ottorino Pianigiani, *Vocabolario etimologico della lingua italiana* (Firenze: Edizioni Polaris, 1991), 427.

state, pomp, and show.<sup>24</sup> Although in each case this can have a performative meaning, referring to the stage or productions of the stage, it also has a wider significance in terms of splendor intended to produce an effect, as in a show of force or a demonstration of opulence or power. This magnificent, splendid aspect of the apparatus bears directly on an aspect of Agamben's thought that in turn concerns his interpretation of Foucault.

The state and splendor intended to produce an effect relates directly to his exploration of Glory in *Il Regno e La Gloria*, where Glory refers not to the direct application of force or management in politics, but to the pomp and dressing designed to give a sense of transcendent authority to a leader or regime. He spends considerable attention in the book describing in an interesting fashion the different forms that this Glory has taken, especially in Rome (the acclimation for instance). One of the central concerns of the book is why governments have need of this Glory, indeed why they bother with it at all as over against the more naked exercise of power.<sup>25</sup> The answer to that cuts close to the central line of the entire book, and Agamben's effort to explain a complex integration between sovereignty and governmentality/biopolitics. Here the distinction is especially relevant. The apparatus would seem to accord to Glory and the transcendent aspect of sovereignty (that he discussed in *Stato di eccezione*,<sup>26</sup> for instance in his considerations of Carl Schmitt). By contrast, he describes "government" as the everyday management of the earthly realm (for the church) and of society (for modern governments). This is for him synonymous with governmentality and the administration of life and affairs, very much the way Foucault intended.

Although Agamben notes that *dispositio* is the Latin rendering of *oikonomia*, and discusses the implications of this in some detail, for instance arguing that governmentality and biopolitics extend back much further historically than Foucault had identified (since Providence named an ordering and management of the world and of life well before the 18th century), he does not identify the equally-salient tie between apparatus and Glory.<sup>27</sup> If the dispositive is, as he explains so well in *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* and *Il Regno e La Gloria*, the correlate of *oikonomia* and the economic management and administration of life, then the apparatus is, as in the special sense of magnificent display and state, the correlate of Glory in its aspect of political performance. The same fractioning-and-uniting that he identifies at work in the theological trinity, which binds together the transcendent god detached from the world and the divine engagement of the most minute aspects of this material (fallen) world, for him characterizes government in the "Providential Machine" that articulates the transcendent sovereign power of Glory and the economic management and ordering of biopolitics. Glory is

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<sup>24</sup> Pianigiani, 68; J.E. Mansion (ed.), *Heath's Standard French and English Dictionary* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1948), 43; Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), referenced on Perseus Project web site, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=apparatus&la=la#lexicon>, Sept. 16, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria: per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo* (Milano: Neri Pozza, 2007), 217. He also adds that he is less interested in studying Glory than glorification, 218.

<sup>26</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Further consideration on Agamben's analysis of *oikonomia* and its relation to Foucault is contained in the section below on Agamben's essay.

either substantially similar to this sovereignty itself or, as Agamben further turns the concept in his "*Archeologia della Gloria*," it plays a special role:

If glory is so important in theology, this is first of all because it permits to be held together in the governmental machine immanent trinity and economic trinity, the being of god and his practices, Reign and Government. Defining Reign and being, it determines also the sense of economy and Government. It allows, that is, the filling of this fracture between economy and theology which the trinitarian doctrine has never succeeded in working out to the base and which only in the dazzling figure of glory seems to find a possible conciliation.<sup>28</sup>

This same articulation is echoed within the very similarity-and-distinction at hand between "apparatus," emphasizing the magnificent trappings of power and Glory, and "dispositive," emphasizing the active setting in order and management characterizing government.

#### *Political Theatricality in Foucault*<sup>29</sup>

This aspect of the apparatus as magnificent demonstration and state, what we might call the performative side of power, is also deeply relevant to Foucault in at least a few respects. Although he did not approach its analysis in the same manner, the demonstrative, theatrical aspect of power was clearly of interest to Foucault, and quite likely this was influential for Agamben, although he has not commented explicitly on these parts of Foucault in relation to his own theory of Glory. The minute description of the opening pages of *Surveiller et punir*,<sup>30</sup> unforgettable to readers who often squirm through the account of the treatment of Damiens the regicide, is, as Foucault explains, as much about a calculated demonstration, a theatrics of state power, as it is about the direct application of techniques of punishment upon Damiens. Foucault points to the great excess of state power exercised in the punishment as one of its most important aspects (and its greatest sources of vulnerability, helping to explain a subsequent shift in power towards a more masked set of means). In any event, this great production of punishment and violence for a public audience is, as Foucault notes, in large part about demonstrating the Glory of the State.

The second and related aspect of the way in which Foucault draws in this performative and showy aspect of power that Agamben calls Glory, is in his treatment of the *coup d'État* as political theatre in *Sécurité, territoire, population*. To begin with, it is helpful to recall here that Foucault had identified *raison d'État* as an ongoing *coup d'État*, a claim that has obvious importance for the state of exception tradition. In the March 15, 1978 session of the *Sécurité* course, he gives an exceptional account of the *coup d'État* and its inherent theatricality. He writes that in certain 17th century texts (Naudé, Le Bret, Chemnitz), the *coup d'État* "is first a suspension, a putting into abeyance of the laws and legality. The *coup d'État* is that which exceeds the common law. *Excessis iuris communis*, says Naudé."<sup>31</sup> Foucault is dealing here with a problematic that substantially resembles those of Schmitt, Agamben, and others. He casts the *coup*

<sup>28</sup> Agamben, *Regno*, 253.

<sup>29</sup> I am indebted here to the very interesting considerations on "Foucault and political theatricality" by Corey McCall, presented at the Foucault Circle, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, *Sécurité*, 267.

*d'État* as that very reversal analyzed by both of those thinkers in terms of sovereignty. The coup strikes at, and claims, that very root of the force of law and the presumption of sovereignty. It fundamentally disavows, and uses, the law.

Further developing this exceptional interpretation of the coup, Foucault asks himself rhetorically if there is an opposition, or even a difference, between the *coup d'État* and *raison d'État*. He answers himself emphatically: "Absolutely not [...] *raison d'État* itself is absolutely not homogenous to a system of legality or legitimacy."<sup>32</sup> He immediately problematizes the usual opposition between a supposedly stable, continuous, legitimate *raison d'État* and the exceptional, violent *coup d'État*. Much more than being opposed to one another, they are intimately bound together, or are faces of the same phenomenon: "The *coup d'État* is the auto-manifestation of the State itself. It's the affirmation of *raison d'État*—the *raison d'État* that affirms that the State must at all costs be saved, whatever the forms employed to be able to save it."<sup>33</sup> The *coup d'État* is not the takeover of the State by one party or another, but the manifestation of the State itself in terms of its sovereignty (simultaneous disdain and use of the law) or force of law (the violence that lies behind it).

After noting its rapport with necessity (also a central element of the state of exception tradition) and violence, Foucault points to the "necessarily theatrical character of the *coup d'État*."<sup>34</sup> Since it relies on a measure of secrecy, and since it exposes the contradictory center of sovereign power, the coup requires a certain artifice and a certain glorious exultation (or affirmation) of power. It is invaluable as a political demonstration because it is "a particular way in which the sovereign can demonstrate the irruption of *raison d'État* and its prevalence over legitimacy in the most striking manner."<sup>35</sup> As in *Surveiller et punir*, this kind of excessive, magnificent manifestation of force has a political function. He notes that this "theatrical practice of politics" is important because, in addition to the kind of ceremonial trappings (of Glory) that identify the sovereign with religion and theology, "this kind of modern theatre in which the royalty wanted to figure and be embodied, and of which the practice of *coup d'État* used by sovereigns themselves is one of the most important manifestations" immediately identifies the sovereign with power.<sup>36</sup> Both the theatrical qualities of political power and the political representations in drama of the time served to instantiate this magnificent demonstration designed to produce an effect, according to Foucault. In this respect, they appertain to the *appareil* as that type of dazzling splendor, state, and pomp.

### III. Deleuze's Treatment of the Concept

Gilles Deleuze, a close friend of Foucault's and philosophical collaborator, was the first to devote an essay specifically to the use of the concept *dispositif* in his work.<sup>37</sup> At the Michel

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault wrote the introduction of the English language version of *Anti-Oedipus*, and they read and discussed each other's work at times. Of course the two were also the subject of a famous falling-out. But in terms of influences and topics treated there was substantial resonance of interest between them. It is this as-

Foucault *Philosophe*' conference in Paris in January 1988, Deleuze presented on "Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?" That he did so indicates that he saw the concept as an important one in Foucault's work and that it merited—perhaps required—further analysis and explication in terms of appreciating its theoretical and empirical ramifications. Noteworthy about the essay is that he treats Foucault's corpus as an ongoing, contiguous one, even while recognizing an important development in the introduction of the concept. Thus, he highlights several important aspects of Foucault's method and project.

It seems that Deleuze was well-aware of the central place that veridiction, in its widest senses, occupied for Foucault. In addressing a problematic throughout Foucault's work that has also repeatedly drawn Agamben's interest, Deleuze points to the relationship between words and things. He says that the "two first dimensions of a dispositive, or those which Foucault addresses first, are the curves of visibility and the curves of enunciation. Dispositives are like the machines of Raymond Roussel, as Foucault analyzes them: these are machines to make see and make speak."<sup>38</sup> Describing the visibility aspects of the dispositive, Deleuze writes that each "dispositive has its own regime of light, manner in which it falls, becomes blurred, and spreads throughout, distributing the visible and the invisible, giving rise to or disappearing the object which would not exist without it."<sup>39</sup> A dispositive acts in part by determining what we can see and say in a certain historical configuration of forces. Deleuze emphasizes this perceptual but also onto-creative aspect, describing the curves of enunciation he says they are "not subjects and not objects, but the regimes which must be defined for the visible and the sayable, with their derivations, with their transformations, their mutations."<sup>40</sup> He situates the dispositive in respect to Foucault's ongoing interest in the articulation of the visible (seeable) and sayable in a certain time or context. After all, Deleuze does open the essay by noting that, "The philosophy of Foucault often appears as the analysis of concrete 'dispositives.'"<sup>41</sup>

Deleuze also identifies the Nietzschean multiplicity of forces aspect of Foucault's use of dispositive. He sees it as a heterogeneous, dynamic and moving configuration. He calls it a "multilinear ensemble" and emphasizes the dishomogeneity and disequilibrium of these lines. Similar to the language of analysis of forces that Foucault uses, Deleuze notes that "each line is broken, submitted to *variations of direction*, changing tack and slipping, submitted to *derivations*."<sup>42</sup> He uses almost physical language to describe this interplay of forces and ongoing movement and interaction between the lines. Because of this, Deleuze maintains that in Foucault's thought "Knowledge, Power, Subjectivity have nothing of contours once and for all, but are chains of variables which fight between themselves."<sup>43</sup> This is reminiscent of the language of the moving line of forces that Foucault used. It is also significant that, in using lines of force and lines of flight in his analysis, Deleuze uses those figures rather than the

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pect that makes Deleuze's reading of Foucault one of the most insightful ones, at least in terms of the concepts at hand here.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?," *Michel Foucault philosophe* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 186.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*



apparatus concept from his the "Appareil de Capture" chapter with Felix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux*.

One of the striking things about Deleuze's essay is the methodological and interpretive observations he makes about Foucault's use of the dispositive that are informative. He situates the concept in relation to Foucault's horizon of interest in a constantly moving dynamic field of relations and the knowable and sayable in given times, even while noting that those "times" themselves are already multiplicitous. He identifies the dispositive as the response to a crisis in Foucault's thought (as Foucault said its function is to respond to an emergency), and observes that "it's always in a crisis when Foucault discovers a new dimension, a new line."<sup>44</sup> Though the dispositive is a new dimension in Foucault's thought, it is noteworthy that Deleuze uses only one extended quotation from Foucault—from *L'Archéologie de savoir*, well before the time of Foucault's use of the term. This shows that he believed that Foucault's project was characterized in important ways by methodological continuity (even allowing for ongoing inventiveness and creativity). The quotation from Foucault speaks of how the archive is of interest because "it is the border of time which surrounds our present, [...] starts with the outside of our language," and "deprives us of our continuities."<sup>45</sup> In Deleuzian fashion, he indicates a theoretical continuity in Foucault's work by emphasizing the interest in discontinuity within it.

Like Agamben, Deleuze also makes note of the relation between the concept and Foucault's thought about universals, saying that the first consequence of a philosophy of the dispositive is the repudiation of universals.<sup>46</sup> This is why he speaks of the analysis of concrete dispositives, and he highlights Foucault's methodological "Rule of Immanence" in historical research. Answering critics alleging nihilism in Foucault's account of dispositives, Deleuze compares him to Spinoza and Nietzsche and says that they had demonstrated the need for immanent and aesthetic criteria.<sup>47</sup> He also argues that the lines of a dispositive divide into two groups, "lines of stratification or sedimentation, lines of actualization or creativity," and that Foucault's books deal with the former while the latter is to be found only in the interviews around the time of working on those books.<sup>48</sup> He advocates for a reading of Foucault in those terms, always complementing the stratification account of the books with the actualization account of the interviews, characterizing these as two parts of a dispositive.

Deleuze is also methodologically and philosophically drawn to the aspects of Foucault's theory of history touched on earlier in the paper. He shared the ontological Nietzschean substrate of Foucault's philosophy and he seemed fascinated by the ways that Foucault accounted for perpetual inventiveness. Indeed he identifies the second consequence of a philosophy of the dispositive as "a change of orientation, that turns from the Eternal to apprehend the new."<sup>49</sup> Given his analysis in terms of moving lines of force, Deleuze is interested in the ongoing change in the actual state of affairs, and he, like Foucault, strove in his own way

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 191-2.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 192-3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 190.

to describe that. He makes reference to Foucault's historical usage of the dispositive to understand this movement. He argues that in "each dispositive it is necessary to distinguish that which we are (that which we are no longer), and that which we are in the process of becoming: *the part of the history and the part of the actual.*"<sup>50</sup> He sees the dispositive, like Foucault, as a moving line of force(s) that has both historical and action (actual) implications, since "the disciplines described by Foucault are the history of that which we are ceasing to be little by little, and our actuality (present) is taking shape in the disposition of open and continuous control, very different from the recent closed discipline."<sup>51</sup> Deleuze identifies the dispositive as a conceptual tool in accounting for that which we have been, that which we are no longer, and that which we are becoming. As such he sees this as an ontological concept in Foucault and as crucial for discerning possibilities for resistance and for the elaboration of new subjectivities.

#### IV. Agamben's Treatment of the Concept

Several aspects of Agamben's interpretation of the dispositive have already played into this paper, and it was one of the direct motivations for writing it. Agamben has increasingly drawn on concepts from Foucault and characterized his own work as related to Foucault's. This section revisits some of the aspects of relation already introduced and considers a few others. Agamben's essay *Che cos'è un dispositivo?* contains a fascinating account of the usage and development of the term in Foucault, which would seem to be the inspiration for Agamben's essay, given that it opens with Foucault and devotes several pages of close analysis to his concept of the dispositive.

Briefly restating the main points of Foucault's definition of the dispositive from the *Dits et écrits* interview he includes in his essay, Agamben notes that it "is a heterogeneous set, which includes virtually any thing, linguistic or non-linguistic at the same level [...] The dispositive itself is the network which settles between these elements." He also points out that it "always has a concrete strategic function," and that it "results from the crossing of relations of power and relations of knowledge."<sup>52</sup> Like Foucault he emphasizes that this is a distributed network of elements in a dynamic arrangement.

Agamben sees the dispositive as an outgrowth and development of "that etymologically close one, '*positivité*.'"<sup>53</sup> He writes that at the time of *L'Archéologie du savoir* Foucault used positivity as an earlier concept trying to get at a similar problematic. This observation in and of itself is an important one, because dispositive preserves this etymological linkage which is occluded by the term apparatus. He makes a persuasive argument that the concept positivity may have been developed by the younger Foucault through his studies of Hegel with Jean Hyppolite, with whom Foucault had multiple sources of contact in his student and professional life. Agamben points to Hyppolite's essay *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire de Hegel* as a likely source of influence regarding the term. This tie in terms of positivity is im-

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Agamben, *Dispositivo*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 8.

portant because it pertains to Foucault's "productive" account of power, which he also frequently refers to as a "positive" account of power,<sup>54</sup> and since in positivity there is an etymological tie to English terms such as "posit" or "position" that are relevant here.

Agamben points out the relation between *dispositif* and *positivité* to Latin *disponere* and *ponere*, with their aspects such as setting out, distributing, ordering, arranging, and the like, seen in the section on etymology and philosophical archaeology above. The implication in terms of ordering is of interest for several reasons. Agamben points out that the dispositive also crosses over with that of Heidegger's *Gestell*, whose "etymology is related to that of *dispositio*, and *dis-ponere*" (he says that the "German *stellen* corresponds to the Latin *ponere*").<sup>55</sup> In this way, and presumably in terms of the technical aspect of the dispositive, he ties the concept to Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology."<sup>56</sup> This is especially relevant to Foucault's characterization of the dispositives as technologies of power (encompassing but extending beyond law) and to Agamben's further development of the concept in terms of technologies, such as the cellular telephone, in the latter part of his essay (where, in a project that parallels Foucault's, he wonders about the elaboration of forms of subjectivity that can resist the subjectivizing effects (or confront the desubjectivizing effects) of these dispositives).

#### *Oikonomia*

In terms of ordering, management, and disposition, Agamben, following Cicero, also makes an important link between *dispositio* (*dispositivo*) and *oikonomia*. In *Il Regno e La Gloria* he points out that Cicero rendered the Greek οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) as *dispositio*.<sup>57</sup> In his *Dispositive* essay he notes that the Latin fathers also rendered the term this way, and that the "Latin term *dispositio*, from which derives our term 'dispositive,' therefore came to assume under it all the complex semantic sphere of the theological *oikonomia*."<sup>58</sup> What is entailed in this theological usage of *oikonomia*? This question is the guiding one of the sustained (theological) genealogy in *Il Regno e La Gloria*, where he analyzes the usage of *oikonomia* in several different spheres of sense and political value. This is of interest to the interpretation of Foucault as well, since "The 'dispositives' that Foucault speaks of are in some sense connected with this theological heredity, they can be in some way brought back to the fracture that divides and, at the same time, articulates in god being and practices, nature or essence and the operation through which he administers and governs the world of creatures."<sup>59</sup> It is as such that Agamben announces as his project to make use of Foucauldian genealogy of governmentality, but push back the horizon (or shadow) of its application beyond the 17th or 18th century confines of Foucault and towards the earliest centuries of the christian era.

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<sup>54</sup> Foucault, *Sexualité*, 113, 119.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, edited and translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). Indeed Agamben repeats a version of Heidegger's contention about the "proper use of technology" in relation to the dispositives.

<sup>57</sup> Agamben, *Regno*, 33-4.

<sup>58</sup> Agamben, *Dispositivo*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

While some readers may once again recoil from Agamben's placing of Foucault in a more explicitly theological context, several observations are relevant here. To begin with, while he may have been personally agnostic or atheistic, Foucault hardly shied away from the historical analysis of Christian or other theological institutions (for instance the analysis of pastoral power, the considerations of the lecture course *Du gouvernement des vivants*, and the fourth part of *Histoire de la sexualité: Les aveux de la chair*). Making use of this theological background, Agamben seeks further to elucidate the function and the usage of the dispositive in Foucault, noting that "the term dispositive names that in which and through which a pure activity of governing with no foundation in being is carried out. Because of this, dispositives must always involve a process of subjectivation, must, that is, produce their subject."<sup>60</sup> Agamben's analysis is as much methodological and conceptual treatment of Foucault as it is genealogy of the *oikonomia*. Like Deleuze, he identifies an important ontological aspect to the functioning of dispositive.

Other than the translations of Cicero and the church fathers, why does Agamben focus so much attention on *oikonomia*? Though we have seen that it helps to clarify the usage and the archaeology of the dispositive, what other conceptual ground is gained in the project? He argues that nothing less than a genealogy of the complicated split-and-tie between sovereignty and governmentality is entailed in such an analysis of *oikonomia*. The term and the practice are so important for him that he faults Foucault for not having given an account of the theological aspects of it<sup>61</sup> or of providence.<sup>62</sup> *Oikonomia* and the dispositive are of importance to Agamben because they are crucial for understanding the managing activity of governmentality. He writes that "*Oikonomia* signifies in Greek the administration of the *oikos*, the house, and, more generally, guidance/conduct, management. It concerns, as Aristotle says, not an epistemic paradigm, but a practice, a practical activity which must from time to time confront a problem and a particular situation."<sup>63</sup> Distinct in this sense from sovereignty, the transcendent trappings of power, this is the direct and everyday management of the affairs of life. Asking why it was that the church fathers felt the need to introduce this concept, he says that it was a central part of the introduction of the trinitarian model as a divine economy.

While it is part of a theological discourse from the time, Agamben repeatedly points out that it has political motivations and implications. A major motivation of the debate around *oikonomia* was a political one: the fear of reintroducing polytheism, paganism, and the threat of insurrection within the Christian church.<sup>64</sup> This divine economy was meant to bring a balance and stability to a situation that could otherwise represent factionalism and the risk of an uprising (Gregory of Nazianzus, Tertullian, and Carl Schmitt discuss this explicitly in terms of the risk of civil war—the paramount threat to the political order). In this split-in-unity, god entrusted Jesus with the administration of the world, thus maintaining god's transcendent power, "in this manner God entrusted to Christ the 'economy,' the administration, and the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Agamben, *Regno*, 126.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>63</sup> Agamben, *Dispositivo*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 16; Agamben, *Regno*, 24-6.

government of humans.”<sup>65</sup> He says that *oikonomia* is the dispositive through which the trinity and the divine government of the world through providence were brought to Christianity.

The problem with this economic theology is that it introduced an irremediable split in the divinity. Agamben says that this complex maneuver to preserve god’s transcendence but also allow for the minute administration of the world introduced a caesura which separated in god “action, ontology, and practice. Action (economy, but also politics) has no foundation in being: this is the schizophrenia which the theological doctrine of *oikonomia* leaves as heredity to Western culture.”<sup>66</sup> In an expression as reminiscent of Deleuze as it is applicable to the central concerns of the state of exception that he and Schmitt have taken up, Agamben indicates that this archaeology of the articulation between sovereignty and biopolitics points to a persistent aporia of political power and its understanding.

### *Decision*

Agamben highlights three important aspects of the common usage of the French *dispositif*. He points to the technical and military senses that have been considered here at some length already, but he also identifies a particular—and important—legal meaning (although these considerations have contained some reflections on the legal aspect, this one is distinct and pivotal enough to merit further attention). In fact, Agamben lists this meaning as the first of the three, indicating its importance (though he is working from a French dictionary). This meaning is a “juridical meaning in the strict sense. ‘The dispositive is the part of a judgment which contains the decision separate from the motivations.’ Therefore the part of the sentence (or of a law) which decides and sets out.”<sup>67</sup> His definition is also consonant with what we have seen earlier in terms of the French and Italian senses of the concept, and indeed this legal sense is the one which most survives in the English term.<sup>68</sup> In each case dispositive pertains to the purview, to the enacting aspects of a law or decision, or to the force of a decision. This cuts most close to Schmitt’s definition of the sovereign as the one who decides upon the exception, and thus the applicability, of the law. As Schmitt notes in his discussion of the exception, drawing on Kierkegaard, deciding upon the exception or applicability of the law is a potent form of power indeed, simultaneously inside and outside of the law (and like Foucault’s discussion of the *coup d’État* which simultaneously disdains and uses the law, ultimately deciding upon its applicability).

The importance of decision is thus centrally associated to both sovereign power and the state of exception, and the dispositive clearly relates to this line of analysis in marking, in particular, the force of a decision and the enacting, defining aspects of a law or a legal decision. Its exceptional character is also indicated in the trait of responding to an emergency that Foucault and Agamben identify. Apparatus, not only in English, but also in the Latinate languages, is uniquely ill-suited in this way. While dispositive refers specifically to the force of a decision, apparatus by contrast refers to the fine points of justification, to the notes and the

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<sup>65</sup> Agamben, *Dispositivo*, 17.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>68</sup> Mansion, 273; Pianigiani, 427.

fine print. Apparatus refers explicitly to the “motivations” of the decision specifically contrasted with the dispositive in Agamben’s definition, and it specifically excludes the sense of the decision and the force of law. In this respect it seems that apparatus is uniquely inappropriate to render *dispositif*, while dispositive maintains this vital tie to the force of legal decision.

### Conclusion

The distinct French and Italian concepts of *appareil/apparato* and *dispositif/dispositivo* have frequently been rendered the same way as “apparatus” in English. This presents a double problem since it collapses distinct conceptual lineages from the home languages and produces a false identity in English. While there are good reasons for which translators have chosen to use “apparatus” for *dispositif*, there is growing cause for evaluating the theoretical and empirical specificity of each concept, and either to rethink the rendering as “apparatus” or to keep in mind the specific philosophical trajectories of each one. In particular, the ongoing release of Michel Foucault’s Collège de France lecture courses (in which the term is frequently used), and the essays by Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben bearing directly on the *dispositif* and the *dispositivo* present a strong case for re-evaluating the usage and rendering of these concepts. This paper presents a number of minute considerations on the productive distinction between them.

Among the most salient reasons for treating these as distinct is that Foucault’s usage, like Althusser’s, seems to clearly mark them as different from one another.<sup>69</sup> The concept *dispositif* arose at a particular time in Foucault’s work, and Deleuze argues that he is responding to a crisis in thought that pushed him in new directions. Nonetheless, he sees the use of the concept as consonant with Foucault’s earlier historical work and overall project in terms of veridiction. Moreover, Deleuze treats the concept in its specificity and does not associate it to his own concept of apparatus (*appareil de capture*). Agamben also notes that the concept comes up at a particular time in Foucault’s work (mid 1970s) and that it serves a particular function. He, too, nonetheless sees it as in continuity with Foucault’s earlier work in terms of positivity. In addition Agamben makes a crucial tie to his own work in reporting the rendering of *oikonomia* as *dispositio*, the root for *dispositif* and *dispositivo*. Etymological research and philosophical archaeology also reveal these to be distinct, even if partly overlapping, concepts. Especially in terms of the network-ontological sensibility discussed by Deleuze and Foucault, and the legal sense in terms of decision, which ties it into the state of exception tradition and considerations about war and politics in Foucault, Schmitt, and Agamben, there are compelling reasons to treat the concept distinctly as dispositive in English.

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<sup>69</sup> Agamben, Deleuze and Guattari use the concepts as distinct as well.

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