Notes on *dispositif*

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1. Emergence

As a theoretical concept, *dispositif* emerges in the 1970s within a poststructuralist paradigm critiquing the immanence of the structuralist concept of meaning. It seems to have appeared first within cinema studies, foremost in the work of Jean-Louis Baudry, and only a few years later in the writings of French philosopher Michel Foucault (for a general overview see also Paech 1997).

1.1. Literal meaning, problem of translation

The French dictionary *Petit Robert* gives the following definitions of the term *dispositif*:

> n. m. – […] du lat. *dispositus* […] 1. DR. Enoncé final d'un jugement ou d'un arrêt qui contient la décision de la juridiction. *Le préambule, les motifs et le dispositif d'un jugement.* ◊ PAR EXT. *Le dispositif d'une loi, d'un décret, d'un arrêté.* 2. (v. 1860) Manière dont sont disposés les pièces, les organes d'un appareil ; le mécanisme lui-même. […] *Un dispositif ingénieux. Dispositif de sûreté. Dispositif d'accord. Dispositif de commande, de manœuvre, d'asservissement, de régulation. « On ne désespère pas de pourvoir ces créatures mécaniques de dispositifs qui auraient la valeur de nos sens »* (Duham.). – *Un dispositif scénique d'opéra.* 3. Ensemble de moyens disposés conformément à un plan. *Dispositif d'attaque, de défense. « Gallieni commençait de déployer son dispositif »* (Duham.). *Dispositif policier.*

This general definition, and in particular the second meaning of the word given here in the dictionary, help to understand why translators have opted for the term "apparatus" as the English language equivalent of *dispositif* (in some contexts, the term "device" is used as well). This, however, does present some problems with regard to the terminology introduced by Baudry (see 3.1.), which will be at the centre of these notes. Furthermore, "apparatus" does mainly underscore the 'mechanical side' of the term, and less the aspect of a specific 'disposition', both in the sense of 'arrangement' and 'tendency'. For reasons of clarity we thus shall continue to use the French term *dispositif*. (For a discussion of the different layers of meaning of the word see also Meunier 1999, 83-84.)

1.2. Other uses in different contexts

Subsequently, from the late 1970s onwards, the term "*dispositif*" has become quite common in a number of fields. A 1999 issue of the French journal *Hermès* dedicated to "Le dispositif: entre usage et concept" demonstrates the enormous range of fields in which the term is used in various ways. Outside the area of media and communication, the word "*dispositif*" occurs in many areas, from psycho-therapy to education, from the analysis of funeral rites to traffic flow management, both as an analytical concept and as a technical term used by practitioners or as an operational category adopted by policy makers. In most cases "*dispositif*" refers to a configuration of heterogeneous elements and by the same token, as one study quite convincingly shows, frequently also as a means to cover up internal contradictions within the field, to "reconcile the irreconcilable and regulate without constraining" (Fusulier and Lannoy 1999, 189). "*Dispositif*" is often taken here in a broad sense, referring to "un environnement

aménagé de manière à offrir à certaines actions ou certains événements des conditions de réalisation optimales (Vandendorpe 1999, 199)". In that case, a *dispositif* is taken to be a material (technological, medial etc.), in some cases even a conceptual or strategic framework making it possible for a given type of phenomena to occur.

2. Foucault

The term *dispositif* seems to appear in Foucault's work in the mid-1970s, most of all linked to his *Histoire de la sexualité*, the first volume of which does contain a chapter "Le dispositif de sexualité" (Foucault 1976, 99-173). In an interview with the team editing the psychoanalytical journal *Ornicar?* that took place in 1977, Foucault is asked about the "meaning or the methodological function […] of this term, *apparatus* (*dispositif*)". Foucault's definition is as follows:

> What I try to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. […] between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. Thirdly, I understand by the term 'apparatus' a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function (Foucault 1980, 194-195).

According to this definition, the methodological, or strategic, function of the term *dispositif* in Foucault's analyses is to allow him to bind together very heterogeneous elements and to look at how their interplay results in a specific historical formation producing both power structures and knowledge. This emphasis on the regulatory and somehow anonymous force of the "panoptic" *dispositif* in Foucault's work undoubtedly gives additional reasons for the choice of "apparatus" as an English translation of this concept.

2.1. Deleuze and Guattari

It might be interesting here to link Foucault's concept with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who very often use the term 'machine' as a metaphor, and who seem to use the concept "rhizome" at least in part in order to create links between the heterogeneous:

> Principes de connexion et d'hétérogénéité : n'importe quel point d'un rhizome peut être connecté avec n'importe quel autre, et doit l'être. […] des chaînons sémiotiques de toute nature y sont connectés à des modes d'encodage très divers, chaînons biologiques, politiques, économiques, etc., mettant en jeu non seulement des régimes de signes différents, mais aussi des statuts d'états de choses. *Les agencements collectifs d'énonciation* fonctionnent en effet directement dans *les agencements machiniques*, et l'on ne peut pas établir de coupure radicale entre les régimes de signes et leurs objets (Deleuze/Guattari 1976, 18-19).

The common ground here would be the methodological interest in concepts allowing to bind together various heterogeneous entities, even though, obviously, their strategic functions of the for Foucault on the one hand, and Deleuze and Guattari on the other, are more or less in opposition to each other. Whereas the *dispositif* in Foucault's writings has a totalising effect

and is intimately linked to the production of power and knowledge, the rhizome, quite on the contrary, is concept related to a fluidity and openness escaping attempts of totalising control. [My thanks to Jim Hurley for his comments on an earlier version of this paragraph.]

In his own reading of Foucoult's concept – re-reading in a way Foucault's definition quoted above – Deleuze in fact shifts the focus from the idea that a *dispositif* establishes relations and connections between the heterogeneous elements that constitute it, to the disjoint and in fact rather precarious character of such a formation:

> But what is a *dispositif*? In the first instance it is a tangle, a multilinear ensemble. It is composed of lines, each having a different nature. And the lines in the apparatus do not outline or surround systems which are each homogeneous in their own right, object, subject, language, and so on, but follow directions, trace balances which are always off balance, now drawing together and then distancing themselves from one another. Each line is broken and subject to *changes in direction*, bifurcating and forked, and subject to *drifting*. Visible objects, affirmations which can be formulated, forces exercised and subjects in position are like vectors and tensors. Thus the three major aspects which Foucault successively distinguishes, Knowledge, Power and Subjectivity are by no means contours given once and for all, but series of variables which supplant one another (Deleuze 1992, 159).

2.2. Heidegger

Another interesting link could be made with Heideggers concept of the *Ge-stell*, which he uses to describe modern technology as something that goes beyond the simple mechanical or technical object:

> Aber ein Verkehrsflugzeug, das auf der Startbahn steht, ist doch ein Gegenstand. Gewiß. Wir können die Maschine so vorstellen. Aber dann verbirgt sie sich in dem, was und wie sie ist. Entborgen steht sie auf der Rollbahn nur als Bestand, insofern sie bestellt ist, die Möglichkeit des Transports sicherzustellen. Hierfür muß sie selbst in ihrem ganzen Bau, in jedem ihrer Bestandteile bestellfähig, d. h. startbereit sein (Heidegger 1962, 16).

And a little further:

> Ge-stell heißt die Weise des Entbergens, die im Wesen der modernen Technik waltet und selber nichts Technisches ist. Zum Technischen gehört dagegen alles, was wir als Gestänge und Geschiebe kennen und was Bestandstück dessen ist, was man Montage nennt. Diese fällt jedoch samt den genannten Bestandstücken in den Bezirk der technischen Arbeit, die stets nur der Herausforderung des Ge-stells entspricht, aber niemals dieses selbst ausmacht oder gar bewirkt (ibid., 20).

Again, as far as I know there is no explicit reference by Foucault to Heidegger's concept of *Ge-stell* in the definition of the *dispositif*, but here we have not only a similarity of point of view in that their analysis of objects aims at going beyond the sheer materiality, but also one at the level of terminology: both *Ge-stell* and *dispositif* are terms implying on the one hand a certain 'arrangement' of (heterogeneous) elements, and a certain 'tendency' that this arrangement brings forth. Another obvious common point in Heidegger's and Foucault's analyses is the scepticism vis-à-vis modern technology.

2.3. Lyotard
Another author having used the term *dispositif* already early in the 1970s is Jean-François
Lyotard in his *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*. This remains to be explored in more depths.
Lyotard's text "La peinture comme dispositif libidinal" could be of interest here. (Lyotard's
concept of *dispositif* is briefly discussed in Paech 1997, 412).

2.4. Re-conceptualisations
Building upon Michel de Certeau's (1980) critique of Foucault's "panoptic" conception of the
dispositif in a body of recent work [see *Hermès*, no. 25, 1999] the concept of *dispositif* is
explored as a type of formation which not only produces control and constraints, but also
opens up possibilities of contact, participation, play, as well as bodily and sensual
experiences. This re-conceptualisation allows to approach a number of relationships such as
technological – symbolical; subject – object; human – non-human; etc. not as dualistic
oppositions but as interdependent structures. The *dispositif*, in such studies, is seen as a
concept of the "in-between" (Peeters and Charlier 1999).

3. Baudry
Baudry published his two seminal essays that often are seen as the founding texts of the so-
called "apparatus theory" in the early 1970s: "Effets idéologiques produits par l'appareil de
base", in *Cinéthique* no. 7/8, 1970, and "Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de
l'impression de réalité", in *Communications* no.23, 1975. Together with another article and
several interviews with filmmakers, these two articles were subsequently turned into a book
with the title *L'Effet cinema* (Baudry 1978). The first of these two articles in fact does not yet
use *dispositif* as a central concept, the term appears rather *en passant* when Baudry describes
the effects produced by the "*disposition*" of the screening situation:

> La disposition des différents éléments – projecteur, « salle obscure », écran – outre
> qu'ils reproduisent d'une façon assez frappante la mise en scène de la caverne, décor
> exemplaire de toute transcendance et modèle topologique de l'idéalisme, reconstruit le
> dispositif nécessaire au déclenchement de la phase du miroir découverte par Lacan
> (Baudry 1978, 23).

It is but in the second article that Baudry actually theorizes the screening situation in terms of
a specific *dispositif*. Right from the start, however, we have the reference to Plato's allegory
of the cave. The implication of a *positioning* of the spectator, first of all topologically, but also
ideologically, does connect Baudry's concept with Foucault's, even though neither of them
refers to the other.

3.1. Definition: *dispositif / appareil de base*
In a footnote to his second article, Baudry gives definitions for both *appareil de base* and
dispositif:

> D'une façon générale, nous distinguons *l'appareil de base*, qui concerne l'ensemble
> de l'appareillage et des opérations nécessaires à la production d'un film et à sa
> projection, du *dispositif*, qui concerne uniquement la projection et dans lequel le sujet
> à qui s'adresse la projection est inclus. Ainsi l'*appareil de base* comporte aussi bien la
> pellicule, la caméra, le développement, le montage envisagé dans son aspect
> technique, etc. que le dispositif de la projection. Il y a loin de l'appareil de base à la
> seule caméra à laquelle on a voulu (on se demande pourquoi, pour servir quel mauvais
> procès) que je le limite (Baudry 1978, 31).

Thus the *dispositif* is but one aspect of the *appareil de base*, the latter term covering all of the machinery necessary to produce and to screen a film. *Dispositif* refers exclusively to the viewing situation, i. e. the situation which, according to Baudry, seems somehow prefigured in Plato's allegory of the cave. Hence the problems posed by the translation of *dispositif* by "apparatus", since it makes it difficult to clearly distinguish between the "basic apparatus" and the "apparatus" as the *dispositif* for viewing/screening a film.

3.2. Psycho-analytical interpretation of the "impression of reality"
It is not unimportant that Baudry uses the concept of *dispositif* in order to explain the specific "impression of reality" (*impression de réalité*) of the fiction film. This is in fact a theoretical issue that emerged in the late 1940s with an important article by Albert Michotte van den Berck (1948) and taken up periodically by theorists (Rinéri 1953, Metz 1965 and 1977, Baudry 1978; for an overview see Kessler 1997). The earlier texts try to explain the specific visual impact of filmic images first of all on the basis of perceptual phenomena (Michotte), then as a specific belief in the diegesis (Riniéri) caused by the moving image, thus based on the semiotic characteristics of film (Metz in 1965), which then appear to be overdetermined by the meta-psychological functioning of the *dispositif* (Baudry) and the specific viewing position of the spectator (Metz again, in 1977).

For Baudry, there is an analogy between the film spectator and the prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave:

> Le prisonnier de Platon est la victime d'une illusion de réalité, c'est-à-dire précisément ce qu'on appelle une hallucination à l'état de veille et un rêve dans le sommeil; il est la proie de *l'impression*, *d'une impression de réalité*.
> […] Platon […] imagine ou recourt à un dispositif qui fait plus qu'évoquer, qui décrit de manière fort précise dans son principe le dispositif du cinéma et la situation du spectateur. (Baudry 1978, 30-31).

From this analogy Baurdy draws the following question:

> Quel désir serait en jeu, à quel désir répondrait, plus de deux millénaires avant l'invention réalisée du cinéma, *un montage dont la rationalisation dans la perspective idéaliste a pour but de montrer qu'il repose d'abord sur l'impression de réalité.* Celle-ci est centrale dans la démonstration de Platon. Que tout le développement de son discours ait pour visée de prouver que cette impression est trompeuse, démontre à souhait qu'elle existe (ibid., 35).

Using both Freud theory about the functions and the functioning of dreams, and in particular Bertram D. Lewin's concept of the *Dream Screen* from the late 1940s, Baudry describes the characteristics of the cinematographic *dispositif* as follows:

> Le dispositif cinématographique aurait la particularité *de proposer au sujet des perceptions « d'une réalité » dont le statut approcherait de celui des représentations se donnant comme perceptions* (ibid., 45).

And this precisely is the deeply rooted desire that the *dispositif* caters to:

> Effet de retour, réitération d'une phase de développement du sujet, durant laquelle représentation et perception ne s'étaient pas encore différenciées, et le désir de

retrouver cet état avec le mode de satisfaction qui lui était lié, archétype, sans doute de tout ce qui cherche à s'ouvrir des passages dans les multiples désirs du sujet. Ce serait bien le désir en tant que tel, disons le désir du désir, la nostalgie d'un état d'accomplissement de désir á travers le transfert d'une perception en une formation se rapprochant de l'hallucination, qui serait en jeu et mis en activité par le dispositif cinématographique (ibid., 46).

Thus the cinema appears not only as the realisation of the desire which is present already in Plato's allegory of the cave, but also as the final accomplishment of an age-old history of inventions: "fabriquer une machine à simulation capable de proposer au sujet des perceptions ayant le caractère de représentations prises pour des perceptions (ibid., 47)". Cinema, in this respect, functions in a similar way as dreams (for a critique of the "dream metaphor" see Metz 1977, 121-175).

3.3. Modes of address, film style, enunciation (*histoire/discours*)
On the textual side, classical narrative cinema provides the counterpart to this positioning of the spectator. In order to guarantee that representations can appear as perceptions, classical cinema has developed specific stylistic operations, the so-called continuity system. Continuity of time, continuity of space, continuity of causal chain – narration (cf. Bordwell 1985, 156-204; Bordwell of course does not analyse the functioning of classical narration along the same lines as the so-called 'apparatus theory'). Stephen Heath (1981, 52) describes this process in the following terms:

> The construction of space as a term of that binding in classical cinema is its implication for the spectator in the taking place of film as narrative; implication-process of a constant refining – space regulated, orientated, continued, reconstituted. The use of look and point-of-view structures […] is fundamental to this process that has been described in terms of *suture*, a stitching or tying as in the surgical joining of the lips of a wound. In its movement, its framing, its cuts, its intermittences, the film ceaselessly poses an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly recaptured for […] the film, that process binding the spectator as subject in the realization of the film's space.

Thus the combination of the cinematographic *dispositif* and the specific textual form of classical narrative cinema produces a viewing position, in which the spectator is like a voyeur, seeing without being seen, looking at a chain of events unfolding before her/his eyes.

In a theory of filmic enunciation based on an influential article by the French linguist Emile Benveniste, this regime has been described as *histoire*:

> A vrai dire, il n'y a même plus de narrateur. Les événements sont poses comme ils se sont produits à mesure qu'ils apparaissent à l'horizon de l'histoire. Personne ne parle ici; les événements semblent se raconter eux-mêmes (Benveniste 1966, 241).

The counterpart to *histoire* is the regime of *discours*:

> Il faut entendre discours dans sa plus large extension: toute énonciation supposant un locuteur et un auditeur, et chez le premier l'intention d'influencer l'autre en quelque manière (ibid., 241-242).

Christian Metz transposes Benveniste's definition of the enunciative regime of *histoire* onto cinema as follows:

> Dans les termes d'Emile Benveniste, le film traditionnel se donne comme histoire, non comme discours. Il est pourtant discours, si on le réfère aux intentions du cinéaste, aux influences qu'il exerce sur le public, etc.; mais le propre de ce discours-là, et le principe même de son efficace comme discours, est justement d'effacer les marques d'énonciation et de se déguiser en histoire (Metz 1977, 113).

An alternative to this *discours*-posing-as-*histoire* based classical narrative cinema was seen in a filmic mode of representation clearly stating its discursiveness, a somehow 'Brechtian' cinema, subverting the codes of classical narration, addressing the spectator clearly showing "the intention to influence" in one way or the other. Films by Godard, Straub/Huillet, and others were seen as examples for such alternative strategies.

3.4. The *dispositif* in a historical perspective.
Given Baudry's assumption that the cinematographic *appareil de base* is in fact the realisation of an age-old desire, but also given the dominating teleological view on film history (at least at the time when Baudry's essays were first published), considering narrative sound-and-colour film as the (final) accomplishment of technological progress (moving towards the so-called 'total cinema'; see Barjavel 1944 and Bazin 1958, 21-26), the *dispositif* as described by Baudry has often been seen as a trans-historical norm.

However, Tom Gunning's characterisation of the 'cinema of attractions' in fact describes another *dipositif*, one that contrasts almost point by point with the *dispositif* of the classical narrative cinema:

> What precisely is the cinema of attractions? […] Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analysed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionist cinema. An aspect of early cinema […] is emblematic of this different relationship the cinema of attractions constructs with its spectator: the recurring look at the camera by actors. This action, which is later perceived as spoiling the realistic illusion of the cinema, is here undertaken with brio, establishing contact with the audience. From comedians smirking at the camera to the constant bowing and gesturing of the conjurors in magic films, this is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator (Gunning 1990, 57).

Thus the cinema of attractions produces in fact a different viewing positions, the viewer is not bound into the space of the film, as Heath states with regard to classical narrative cinema, but rather placed vis-à-vis a space where spectacular attractions are being displayed. In other words, there is not but one *dispositif* – when looking at cinema history from a non-teleological perspective we may be able to distinguish, diachronically or even synchronically, different *dispositifs* in what we are normally used to perceive as one and the same medium (see Kessler 2003).

4. Broadening the concept of *dispositif*
In media theory, the concept of *dispositif* has been used in different ways and not always in reference to Baudry's definition of it.

4.1. Television
In the field of television, the term "*dispositif*" is widely used in France, especially since the 1980s, by theorists and practitioners alike. According to Lochard (1999, 144) it appears already in the 1960s in writings by Pierre *Schaeffer* with regard to experimental set-ups of

television programs. Lochard distinguishes three elementary units of signification (*sèmes*) in the way the word "*dispositif*" is used with regard to television: *spatiality* (constellation, configuration, display, arrangement); *systematicity* (referring to the coherence linking different constituents); *intentionality* (referring to a strategic function) (149). Within television studies (but also in the terminology used by television makers) the term "*dispositif*" can refer to a variety of different phenomena: the format, the type of enunciation, the set-up in a studio, the structure of the program etc. (Flageul 1999, 125). Noël Nel (1998, 1999), in turn, declares that there are multiple televisual *dispositifs*: "méta-dispositif technique (production, diffusion, reception); dispositifs économiques (lignes éditoriales, stratégies de programmation et d'industrialisation culturelle); dispositifs sémiotiques et esthétiques (liage séquentiel, construction de mondes, polyphonie énonciative, configuration pragmatique, aspectualisation stylistique, déclinaison sérielle) (1999, 138)". Interestingly, it seems that the term "*dispositif*" is used here mainly with regard to either production or the product, but does not, contrary to Baudry's theory of the *dispositif*, address the specific viewing situation of television.

4.2. The Image
In his study on the relationship between cinema and painting Jacques Aumont (1989) already extends the concept of "*dispositif*" beyond the realm of cinema to, among others, painting and panoramas. In a more systematic analysis, he arrives at a definition which also includes the inescapable historic dimension of every *dispositif*:

> [...] le dispositif est ce qui règle le rapport du spectateur à ses images *dans un certain contexte symbolique*. [...] ce contexte symbolique est aussi, nécessairement, un contexte social, puisque ni les symboles ni, plus largement, la sphère du symbolique en général, n'existent dans l'abstrait, mais sont déterminés par les caractère matériels des formations sociales qui les engendrent.
> Aussi, l'étude du dispositif est-elle obligatoirement une étude historique: il n'y a pas de dispositif hors de l'histoire (1990, 147).

5. The concept of *dispositif* in approaches to media history
Even though the concept of *dispositif* has often been regarded as describing a trans-historical phenomenon (it should however be noted that Metz [1977, 132-133] does in fact highlight the cultural and historical specificity of the particular regime of spectatorship attributed to the classical narrative cinema; see also Aumont [1989, 52-53]), some media historians have in fact tried to use this concept as a historiographic tool.

5.1. Zielinski
Siegfried Zielinski analyses the historically changing modes of the audiovisual apparatus, referring explicitly to Baudry's concept. On the one hand he clearly states that "the historical relationship between subject and apparatus cannot be described in terms of a continuity", but that there is, on the other hand, a "continuity [...] on a meta-psychological level, situated above the various arrangements of film-viewing and film-experiences: at the level of the need, the desire for visual illusions of movement and audiovisual illusionization as a whole, which goes back lang before the 100 years of cinema history and extends beyond it (Zielinski 1994, 7). In this text Zielinski thus clearly shares Baudry's premises about the trans-historicity of the desire which lies at the basis of the creation of moving images and visual illusions ("des représentations se donnant comme perceptions"). And so he affirms:

> [...] although in many cases in discredit, I continue to try to work with the concept of the dispositif, as it was introduced into the cinema debate by Jean-Louis Baudry, not

identical with Foucault's superstructural concept. This is because I can see no alternative yet that is in apposition to grasp more adequately the interdiscursive event and experience time-space of film reception, which also includes the individual wish-machine (ibid., 8)

In this perspective, the history of (audio-)visual media is seen rather as a series of varying historical modes of spectatorship that are connected at precisely the meta-psychological level. In this article Zielinski aims at presenting a number of

> […] exemplary modes of such positioning and temporal fixing. I regard these as the load-bearing bausteine for the whole edifice of film subject identities in the past, the present, or that can be anticipated for the nearest future (ibid., 9).

In the last instance, however, this knits together cinema, television, and the computer – as for instance in the characterisation: "the present prehistoric age of computer-centred film reality (ibid., 19).

In a more recent text, Zielinski (2001) in fact criticises his earlier work as an approach still working with a model of progress ("dem gedanklichen Modell der Leiter, des abgestuften Progresses, prinzipiell verpflichtet", 2001, 152), and pleads rather for an "anarcheological" approach. The question is, whether this also means that he will abandon the concept of *dispositif*. It actually looks like it: in his latest book (Zielinski 2002), neither "*dispositif*" nor "apparatus" appear in the index, and Baudry is mentioned only in passing.

5.2. Hickethier
In his work on television, Knut Hickethier has suggested that the history of the medium should be approached as the history of (a?) *dispositif* (Hickethier 1995, 1997). His argument puts forward one of the undeniable strong points of this concepts, namely its capability to tie together various aspects of media, such as their technological, economical and institutional dimensions:

> Um diesen Zusammenhang zu entfalten, hat sich das Modell des Dispositivs als brauchbar erwiesen, weil es die institutionellen, technischen, programmlichen Aspekte der Medien im Zusammenhang der Wahrnehmungsstrukturen beschreibbar macht, dabei nicht allein auf die Inhalte der Medienvermittlung schauend, sondern auch auf die Vermittlungsweisen, die Ästhetik der Medien und darauf, wie sich der "mediale Apparat" zur "mentalen" Basis des Medienwahrnehmens in Bezug setzt. Von Michel Foucaults Arbeiten zu den Dispositiven der Macht ausgehend, die diese als Anordnungssysteme von Institutionen, Normen, Gesetze und gesellschaftlichen Auffassungen beschrieben haben, hat sich der Begriff in innerhalb der kino- und fernsehtheoretischen Diskussion [...] durchgesetzt (Hickethier 1997, 67-68).

Hickethier thus sees a continuity between Foucault's and Baudry's concept of *dispositif* (while Zielinski explicitly distinguishes them). On the other hand Hickethier – and in this respect his analysis develops along more or less the same lines as Zielinski's (both, however, also underscore the differences, especially with regard to the bodily position of the spectator [Hickethier 1995, 65 and Zielinski 1994, 17-19]) – seems to state there is a fundamental similarity between the cinematographic and the televisual *dispositif*:

> Eine vergleichbare Blick-Konstellation kennzeichnet die Mensch-Apparat-Anordnung des Fernsehens: Der Zuschauer ist in einer zentralen Achse auf das bewegte Bild hin

> ausgerichtet, in diesem ist wie im Kinobild, bei vergleichbarer Flächigkeit des Bildes und Randbegrenzung des Bildkaders, die Perspektivität des fotografischen Bildes mit den Fluchtpunktperspektiven eingeschrieben. Dadurch wird ähnlich dem Kinobild ein Realitätseindruck vermittelt bzw. suggeriert (Hickethier 1995, 64).

This similarity leads him to the conclusion that there are "gleiche gesellschaftliche Bedingungen für die Genese der Erzeugung technischer Bilder und ihrer Funktion in modernen Massengesellschaften (ibid.)." Hickethier thus sees *dispositif* as a descriptive category allowing to stress the similarities between media (without neglecting fundamental differences), and on the other hand this approach presupposes in principle some sort of media identity or media specificity (as do Baudry's or Zielinski's).

5.3. Paech
Joachim Paech, author of a very helpful essay discussing the concept of *dispositif* (Paech 1997), uses it in his own work in a somewhat broader sense and speaks of "*dispositifs* of perception" (Paech 1990), with cinema as an "exemplary *dispositif*'. This approach takes the concept into the field of the specific visual culture of modernity. For Paech the perceptual positions brought forth by modern means of transportations such as the train, the aeroplane and the automobile, by optical media such as the panorama or the cinematographe, by new forms of public space such as the department store can be considered as different *dispositifs*, with the modern metropolis as a "hyper-*dispositif*'. Paech's analysis is thus part of the theoretical and media-historical position that David Bordwell (1997, 141-149) calls the "history-of-vision-thesis", and which Paech links to the tradition of theories of *dispositf*.

6. Pragmatic re-interpretation of *dispositif*
If the concept of *dispositif*, in spite of its basic definition as a trans-historical concept, has been used by several authors with regard to media history, the general premise has been one of genealogy, underlying continuity, structural equivalence etc. The question now is, whether a re-interpretation of *dispositf* in a more pragmatic perspective allows to historicize it in a more radical way, allowing as to stress *difference*s among media *dispositifs* rather than similarities, or to distinguish different *dispositifs* underlying the apparent "identity" of a given medium.

6.1. Meta-psychology to pragmatics
In a somewhat simplified form one could summarise the configuration that Baudry describes with the aid of the concept *dispositif* as follows:

1) a material technology producing conditions that help to shape
2) a certain viewing position that is based upon unconscious desires to which corresponds
3) an institutionalised film form implying a form of address trying to guarantee that this viewing position (often characterised as "voyeuristic") functions in an optimal way.

As we have seen with Gunning's description of what one could call the *dispositif* of the cinema of attraction, this interrelationship between a technology, a specific film form with its mode of address, and a specific positioning of the spectator can and should be historicized. At different moments in history, a medium can produce a specific and (temporarily) dominating configuration of technology, text, and spectatorship. An analysis of these configurations could thus serve as a heuristic tool for the study of how the function and the functioning of media undergo historical changes. Presupposing, for instance, different intenionalities ("to display spectacular views" or "to absorb into a narrative") one can analyse film form and filmic

devices with regard to their mode of address in a given historical context (a close-up fulfils a different function in an "attractional" film than in a "narrational" film). Similarly, technological choices can be analysed in terms of different intentionalities with regard to spectator address and exhibition contexts (see Kessler 2003, 26-31).

6.2. Implications

Pushing this idea a little further, a historical analysis based on the concept of *dispositif* re-interpreted in a pragmatic perspective can take into account different uses of one and the same text within different exhibition contexts, or different institutional framings (see Odin 1983, 1995, Kessler 2002a). As Roger Odin has argued in his semio-pragmatic approach, a fiction film will not be viewed (or read) in the same way when it is presented in a cinema (where it will dominantly be read within a fictionalizing regime) and in a class-room situation in a film studies program (where it may be read within a documentarizing regime, i. e. as a document of a specific historical or national style or movement, as documenting a specific filmmakers personal style, or as an example for the use of a specific filmic device etc.). Similarly, in the 1910s a travelogue about Africa could function as an exotic attraction in a moving picture theatre, and as colonial propaganda when screened by the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft (see Fuhrmann 2002). A historical investigation of historical and present *dispositifs* would thus have to take into account the different viewing situations, institutional framings, the modes of address they imply, as well as the technological basis on which they rest. In a recent article, Tom Gunning alos argues for a such a view:

> Particularly realizing the protean, even elastic, nature of early cinema, film scholars had to admit that there was no single essential film text that underlay film history. Rather films must be approached as texts whose meaning derived through a complex process of making meaning in the *interaction of films with viewers and institutions* (Gunning 2003, 24; my emphasis).

Another implication of such an approach is that the notion of both textual and medial identity becomes problematic. On the one hand, any given text may trigger a number of different readings, depending on the context in which it is embedded, and at the other hand one can argue that in spite of a continuity in *naming* a given medium (cinema, television, telephone etc.) its functions and its functioning can vary so much over time that it would be more accurate to describe the different *dispositifs* in which it takes shape, rather than to look for the "identity" or "specificity" of that medium (see Kessler 2002b).

7. A non-teleological history of media as a history of *dispositifs*.

In his recent writings, André Gaudreault (2003, 2004) argues that a term such as "early cinema" is problematic, since it implies that one talks about the "early" form of something which later becomes an institutionalised "cinema". And that, accordingly, different types of moving picture machines are considered to be "pre-cinema", that is: not-yet-cinema, but something leading towards it. Gaudreault reminds us, quoting Jonathan Crary (1990, 7), that "there are no such things as continuities and discontinuities in history, only in historical explanation". This leads him to suggest that, instead of adopting a retrospective and thus teleological perspective on the "history of cinema", we should choose a "panoramic" or "panoptic" point of view (2003, 35), trying to understand what a particular medial form means in a given historical context. To not see an invention exclusively as the starting point of a new "cultural series", but to also consider it as part of a variety of other "cultural series". To not just look for unity in a phenomenon, but to explore its multiplicity.

The project that has been sketched here, bears similarities with Gaudreault's approach. Suggesting to consider the history of media as a history of changing *dispositifs* does indeed mean to adopt neither a trans-historical nor a teleological perspective. To not look for the similarity in what is different, but rather for the difference in what appears to be similar – as Wittgenstein puts it when explaining the difference between his way of thinking and Hegel's:

> Mir scheint, Hegel will immer sagen, dass Dinge die verschieden aussehen, in Wirklichkeit gleich sind, während es mir um den Nachweis geht, dass Dinge, die gleich aussehen, in Wirklichkeit verschieden sind (Rhees 1987, 217).

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