

TOOLBOX

Security as Dispositif: Michel Foucault in the Field of Security

Ricky Wichum, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

At the beginning of his lecture, *Security, Territory, Population* (1977/78), Michel Foucault raises the question of whether it can be regarded as true “that the general economy of power in our societies is becoming a domain of security.”¹ This question should not be answered hastily here. Rather, it is to serve as a starting-point for a reflection on Michel Foucault’s thinking in the field of security. This text goes back to an interdisciplinary workshop on *Security Dispositifs. Technology—Space—Event*² held at Freiburg in May 2012 that brought together scholars from the fields of geography, sociology, literature, criminology, anthropology, and Media Studies. Following the presentations and discussions there, this text will demonstrate how contemporary theories of security draw on Foucauldian thinking for developing their theses, terms, and categories. The purpose of the workshop was to explore the potentials of connecting Foucault’s work on security dispositifs to contemporary analyses of strategies and regimes of (in-)security. Thus, this text will address five central issues: security as dispositif (1), population and crowds (2), technologies of security (3), temporalities of security (4), and spaces of security (5), giving a conclusion and an outlook at the end (6).

1. Security as Dispositif

Analyzing security as a dispositif in the sense of Foucault, basically means to understand security not as an essential part of the human condition, or an a priori social value. In this perspective, the demand for security is neither the result of speech acts (“Securitization”³) nor a side effect of high-tech risk societies,⁴ nor can it be reduced to an essential function of the modern state. The study of security within the grid of Governmentality Studies is clearly dis-

¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 10-11).

² The workshop at the University of Freiburg was organized by Serhat Karakayali (University of Halle-Wittenberg), Sven Opitz (University of Hamburg), Ulrich Bröckling (University of Freiburg), and Stefan Kaufmann (University of Freiburg) and funded by Volkswagen-Stiftung. For more detailed conference proceedings cf. Sabine Blum & Ricky Wichum, “Tagungsbericht Security Dispositifs. Technology—Space—Event. 10.05.2012-11.05.2012, Freiburg im Breisgau.” *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 21.06.2012, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=4294>.

³ Cf. Ole Wæver, “Securitization and Desecuritization,” in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security*. New Directions in World Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁴ Cf. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London; California; New Dehli: Sage, 1992).

tinct from such concepts. Governmentality Studies encompass security as strategical effect of specific relations of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. Consequently, both the discourses and the materialities of security become the focus of analysis. From this viewpoint, the key question is: In the present demand for security, how do specific problematizations of risks and threats connect to certain forms of knowledge, practices, technologies, and affects, to create (un-)stable assemblages of (in-)security that even amplify each other? As Luis Lobo Guerrero pointed out during the workshop, a revealing question could be why the anxious pursuit of collective security is so important for modern western societies. Hence, we are to explore the epistemological principles, the conditions of possibility of (moral) orders of security in contemporary societies. A critique of governing (in-)security following Foucault thus resists the political rhetoric of insecure and uncertain times since the end of Cold War respectively 9/11 and emphasizes in contrast the contingencies of propositions and moral values of security.

2. Population and Crowds

The fundamental object of governmental security dispositifs is the population. Foucault understands population not as the entirety of all the state's subjects, but as an entity "with its specific phenomena and processes."⁵ A basic feature of the population is that it cannot be transparent to the sovereign's action, it "escapes the sovereign's voluntarist and direct action in the form of the law."⁶ Despite this, the population in its 'naturalness,' represents a field of governmental intervention (government in the broad understanding of Foucault), since it is "a set of elements in which we can note constants and regularities... and with regard to which we can identify a number of modifiable variables on which it depends."⁷ In her keynote speech, Claudia Aradau depicted the crowd as an actual strategy of governmental intervention to modify a specific social entity that is on the one hand a part of population and on the other hand escapes logics of population. However, Aradau indicated how in contemporary strategies of counter-terrorism and emergency planning the crowd is indirectly reconfigured as "a surface on which authoritarian, but reflected and calculated transformations can get a hold."⁸ By reformulating the contingencies of terrorism as a problem of governing and controlling crowds, as Aradau showed, the crowd itself is put into the scope of contemporary security dispositifs as a continually threatened and threatening social entity. The logic of crowd control increasingly circulates and pervades the spaces of society. Crowds are everywhere—at workplaces, at hotels, at shopping malls, at schools, or hospitals. In the context of counter-terrorism, however, crowds are no longer described as the irrational and pathological anti-nomism of the social order. Based on a transformed social-psychological knowledge, they are regarded as governable, de-democratized social units. The potential for crowds as a political subject, as for example Canetti described it, is systematically denied in these strategies.⁹

⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 66.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁹ Cf. Elias Canetti, *Crowds and power*, 1st edition (New York: Noonday Press, 1984).

3. Technologies of Security

Within the logic of liberal governmentality as analyzed by Foucault, the security of the population is the constitutive counterpart to its freedom—although liberalism defines freedom not as much as an imperative than as “the management and organization of the conditions in which one can be free.”¹⁰ Freedom is something “which is constantly produced.”¹¹ But if freedom is indeed an artificial product, then in the very core of this production there lies a problematic relationship between the production of freedom and the continuous possibility of its restriction. The possibility to restrict freedom is therefore an essential part of freedom. It is at this point security dispositifs come into play. They act as the correlate of freedom within liberal rationality. Foucault puts it like this:

An apparatus of security... cannot operate well except on condition that is given freedom, in the modern sense [the word] acquires in the eighteenth century: ...the possibility of movement, change of place, and processes of circulation of both people and things. I think it is this freedom of circulation... it is in terms of this option of circulation, that we should understand the word freedom, and understand it as one of the... dimensions of the deployment of apparatuses of security.¹²

The relationship of freedom and security is thus subject to a liberal-economic calculation, where circulation is defined as the essential problem of security. The field of interventions for security dispositifs is organized around the following question: “How should things circulate or not circulate?”¹³ The increasing usage of security technologies as for example biometrics, full-body scanners or CCTV could be interpreted as an answer to this question by contemporary liberal security dispositifs. Security technologies, installed at borders or urban places, are in this sense an attempt to govern circulation processes at the population level in an economical and rational way.¹⁴ The contemporary governance of circulation, as Vasilis Tsianos and Sebastian Sierra Barra showed at the workshop, is set in motion through computerization and digitization. Control regimes of security¹⁵ shape the tension between freedom and security in order to maximize ‘good’ circulation by duplicating and combining individuals, their bodies, and their behavior to form digital *data bodies* and storing them in digital databases. Tsianos illustrated this through the example of the EURODAC database, which is used to keep out ‘illegal’ refugees at external EU borders. He showed how risks of this ‘bad’ mobility are materialized into digital *data bodies* of refugees, thus focusing on the processes, which connect real-life individuals to their data.

¹⁰ Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 63-64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 48-49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴ Cf. Thomas Lemke, “‘Eine Kultur der Gefahr’ - Dispositive der Unsicherheit im Neoliberalismus,” *Widerspruch* 24 (46) (2004), 89-98.

¹⁵ Deleuze describes these regimes as ‘societies of control.’ Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” *October* 59 (2009), 3-7.

Considering the increasing technologization and computerization of life in general and of control in particular, Sierra Barra asked to which extent the Foucauldian concepts of discipline, surveillance and control are still sufficient under conditions of omnipresent data bodies in everyday life. This question is of special importance since Foucault developed these concepts under the assumption of the centrality of biological life. We can agree to Sierra Barra's observation that the relationship between security and technology needs further theoretical assessment and that in this respect the notion of *dispositif* should be supplemented by taking a look at *Science and Technology Studies* (STS) or *Actor-Network Theory* (ANT). Taking the fundamental changes in non-discursive requirements into account, Sierra Barra proposed to use Bruno Latour's concept of 'powers of associations' for that purpose.¹⁶ Tsianos, by contrast, emphasizing the connections between technologies, social practices, and forms of knowledge, pointed to the term 'surveillant assemblage,' as elaborated by Haggerty and Ericson.¹⁷

In a theoretical view, security technologies cannot be conceptualized as neutral and powerless inscription devices of social interests. By contrast, their specific economies of power and distinct processes of subjectivization should be the focus of analysis. For instance, biometric systems seeking to identify individuals at borders are, on the one hand, biopolitical technologies that govern circulation by identifying and excluding potentially dangerous elements. On the other hand, the criteria and juridical mechanisms used for this process rest upon the sovereign power of (nation) states or their alliances. Moreover, the architectural design of such arrangements of control shows significant signs of disciplinary logic, where the individuals are arrested, normalized through technological processes, and finally arranged within a tableau (database) for the purpose of control. So, as a first step, the focus of research should rest on the specific logic of the peculiar (technological) setting, characteristic features that quite often produce disruptions or frictions within overlapping rationalities of power.

4. Temporalities of Security

Security *dispositifs* aim at what not yet has happened. As a result, security strategies operate as a management of "open series [that] can only be controlled by an estimate of probabilities."¹⁸ Following Foucault, threats to freedom in the economy of security assume the shape of uncertain, unpredictable events that might never happen but are always possible.¹⁹ This contingency of threat is rationalized by security *dispositifs*—paradigmatically, in the 'war on terror'—through logics of preemption, precaution, and preparedness.²⁰ Each of them enacts dif-

¹⁶ Cf. Bruno Latour, "The Powers of Association," in John Law (ed.), *Power, Action, and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* Sociological Review Monograph 32 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

¹⁷ Cf. Kevin D. Haggerty & Richard V. Ericson, "The surveillant assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology* 51 (4) (2000), 605–22.

¹⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 20.

¹⁹ Cf. Christopher Daase & Oliver Kessler, "Knowns and Unknowns in 'The War on Terror': Uncertainty and the Political Construction of Danger," *Security Dialogue* 38 (4) (2007), 411–34; Oliver Kessler & Christopher Daase, "From Insecurity to Uncertainty: Risk and the Paradox of Security Politics," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* (33) (2008), 211–32.

²⁰ Concerning these anticipatory logics cf. Ben Anderson, "Preemption, Precaution, Preparedness: Anticipatory Action and Future Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 34 (6) (2010), 777–98.

ferent forms of knowledge and practices to govern the radically unknown. In this framework, threats are regarded not so much as material issues, but mainly from a temporal point of view, as Susanne Krasmann demonstrated at the workshop, using the example of targeted killings. Basically, this practice is deduced from logics of preemption, aiming to counteract a threat *before* it has materialized. Under conditions of radical uncertainty, the sanctioning intervention *precedes* the anticipated action. In the logic of preemption, targeted killings by state authorities are reconfigured as an adequate answer to the threat of terrorist networks—as quasi state-like enemies—at the same time inscribing these practices into the law. But how can proactive killings become legally verified and defined as lawful? As Krasmann illustrated, they become a legal practice by applying temporal criteria, i.e., the imminence and gravity of possible threats. The practice of targeted killing at the same time constitutes and verifies the deadly threat it tries to preempt by acts of legitimate self-defense. In this way, targeted killing is performative. Also, it is not a practice of a sovereign *state of emergency*, since it does not suspend the norms of law, but always preemptively adjusts them to the reality of targeted killing.²¹

According to Ben Anderson, even for cases of emergency, the theory of the sovereign state of emergency is not the only viable perspective. Emergencies can also be understood by looking at governmental logics of security, since in cases of emergency, different temporal regimes culminate as well: the eschatological time of the future catastrophe, the cyclical time of routines, and the linear time of specific sequences of actions to be initiated as soon as a case of emergency commences. Each one of these temporalities implies certain practices and technologies: technologies of preparedness or emergency drills play a crucial role in anticipating cases of emergency, thus installing the case of emergency as a future potentiality, which is nevertheless ever-present in everyday actions, even if it remains absent in its actuality. For this reason, as Serhat Karakayali stressed, even criticizing mechanisms of security for dissolving the normative structure of action misses the point. According to this criticism common today, the future unjustly gains primacy over both the present and the past, reducing capabilities of self-conscious action to a merely conditioned behavior in the form of stimulus and response. To oppose these critics, again, we can consider that security dispositifs anticipate the radical uncertainty of threatening events by activating specific practices and forms of knowledge as well as discursive and non-discursive elements to rationalize this uncertainty. It remains to be seen if there are specific fields of society, which imply hegemonic forms of managing the future. What, for instance, is the difference between logics of preemption in the military and in the insurance industry? What is the role of the law in stabilizing anticipative strategies in contemporary societies?

5. Spaces of Security

Up to date, spaces of security remain a widely unreflected area in the field of critical security research. Given the fact that space, in the sense of 'territory,' even occurs in the title of Fou-

²¹ For a contemporary theory of exception, cf. Giorgio Agamben's 'Homo-Sacer' trilogy. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000); Giorgio Agamben, *State of exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

cault's first lecture on the history of governmentality, this is especially astonishing. Foucault ties the notion of 'territory' to the economy of sovereign power. Sovereign power "involved something that we could call precisely the safety of the territory, or the safety of the sovereign who rules over the territory."²² This tight connection between sovereignty and territory is essential. Thus, Foucault conceptualizes the mechanisms of a power referring to territory in contrast to strategies of security that aim at the 'population.' Security dispositifs process space by working with "a number of material givens."²³ Security operates by "maximizing the positive elements, for which one provides the best possible circulation, and of minimizing what is risky and inconvenient."²⁴ Spatial elements are regulated according to their respective probabilities: "The specific space of security refers... to the temporal and the uncertain, which have to be inserted within a given space."²⁵ Besides distinguishing between spaces of sovereignty and spaces of security, Foucault also highlights spaces of discipline. Discipline takes possession of spaces by designing them, starting off with the "constitution of an empty, closed space."²⁶ Its way of processing space is guided by the principle of partitioning: "One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation... Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals."²⁷ In other words, discipline organizes an analytical space.

Starting from these theoretical differentiation of spatiality in Foucault's work—heterotopias, as spaces of "counter-sites,"²⁸ would make another one—, the workshop tested the potential of these concepts for an analysis of contemporary spaces of security in three ways. *Firstly*, the intersection of territories of sovereignty and spaces of security was discussed. Sven Opitz and Ute Tellmann pointed out that processes of globalization do not so much dissolve sovereign state territories as they make them correlate with liberal-governmental mechanisms of space arrangement in many ways. Using the example of two offshore zones—a refugee camp on Christmas Islands near Australia and offshore banks on the Cayman Islands—they demonstrated how global flows of people and money are governed in different ways, by constructing two contradictory juridico-political zones. Offshore zones establish a partition on sovereign territories between inside and outside, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility. For example, the refugee camp on Christmas Islands belongs to the sovereign territory of Australia. But at the same time, the camp is legally split off from the mainland, because the Australian government declared it as "excised offshore places". Moreover, with regard to offshore entry persons, the government created a distinct legal persona with limited rights ("unlawful non-citizens.") Offshore-territories, according to Opitz

²² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 65.

²³ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 143.

²⁸ Cf. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1) (1986), 24.

and Tellmann, could in this sense be described as the heterotopias of today's liberal-democratic circulation regimes.

Secondly, the analytical focus on spaces of security was expanded to include other shapes of territoriality. Burkhardt Wolf unfurled a history of risk and insurance, locating their common starting point at the separation between land and sea. On the one hand, the sea was imagined as a realm of endless and unpredictable dangers, while on the other, it thus served as the very reason for the emergence of insurance companies, which can be seen as institutions for predicting the unpredictable. This doubling of imagination and calculation, as Wolf demonstrated, is exemplary for western societies' attempts in 'making security.' He depicted the inner contradictions and paradoxes of these attempts by referring to Joseph Conrad's narrative *The Partner*. Insurances, through their very existence, create new, unpredictable risks, especially the risk of insurance fraud. By hindsight, events could always have happened in one way *or* another. The only possible way to reconstruct the course of events is to draw on second-order observations. The disconnection of land and sea is suspended under these conditions.

Thirdly, the workshop emphasized the relationship between space and affects. In this respect, Andrew Neal, and Chris Zebrowski explored the practice of kettling by the police as a spatial strategy of crowd control within urban milieus. As a temporarily established territory, a kettle serves to contain uncontrolled movements, to localize and confine. In this sense, it may be interpreted as an answer to new, highly flexible, and dynamical forms of social protest using, first of all, new communication technologies. In essence, kettling is about proactive control of affective intensities: immobilizing movements, cooling down emotions, demoralizing kettled individuals—thus dissolving the collective political subject constituted by the protesters. Peter Adey clarified which kinds of affects, emotions, and intensities are produced through the design of spaces of security. Perceptions of (in-)security or the desire for security cannot just be traced back to stimulated responses to specific (real) threats. Rather, they are permanently evoked by architectural designs of spaces of security. Warning labels, loud-speaker announcements, or pictographs, working as simple but highly effective artifacts, permanently elicit feelings of insecurity, thereby creating specifically intensive forms of space perception. Analyzing spaces of security in accordance with Foucault means to understand space in its modes of re-territorialization and de-territorialization and to explore its relationality within different dispositifs of power.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

Based on the workshop *Security Dispositifs. Technology—Space—Event*, this text aimed at retracing the potentials of interdisciplinary, critical, security research influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. The core project here is to understand security as a dispositif and to make use of the concept as an analytical grid in order to both follow Foucault's achievements and to go beyond them, connecting theoretical reflection with empirical (micro-)analysis. This provides us with a way to analyze security distinct from viewing it as an essential part of the human condition or as an essential social value. The demand for security is neither a result of speech acts nor a side effect of high-tech risk societies. By emphasizing discourses and materialities instead—technologies, artifacts, bodies, and affects—it becomes possible to trace back the

emergence of such concepts to specific rationalities of power. However, as the workshop's final discussion made clear, seeing security as a *dispositif* still leaves open some important questions. To what extent, for example, is the notion of *dispositif* still a viable option for analyzing contemporary phenomena of security? In this respect, a number of contributions explored connections to other theoretical concepts. Peter Adey suggested Sloterdijk's term '*atmospheres*' to emphasize the crucial role of affects in constructing perceptions of (in-)security, and Luis Lobo Guerrero proposed the theoretical framework of '*moral economies*' (Lorraine Daston) to underline systems of emotional forces running through every security *dispositif*. With the Deleuzian term, '*diagram*,' Ben Anderson tried to uncover the force field preceding the security *dispositifs*. Vasilis Tsianos, facing the current state of technological developments, referred to the term '*assemblage*' coined by Deleuze and Guattari. In addition, questions of coexistence, overlaps, and fusions of (different) security *dispositifs* were being raised. While life plays a central role in biopolitics, security *dispositifs* govern life on many different levels simultaneously: data-bodies, collective bodies, biological bodies, etc. At which positions, through which strategies, technologies, and mechanisms do different (security) *dispositifs* interact? Considering this, additional empirical studies as well as further theoretical reflections are needed.

Ricky Wichum
Institut für Soziologie
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg
Rempartstrasse 15
79085 Freiburg
Germany