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ARTICLE

Alea Capta Est: Foucault's *Dispositif* and Capturing Chance

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ABSTRACT: It is somewhat of a mystery why one of Foucault's most important concepts—that of *'dispositif'*—is still quite vague in social and political theory; and while a small number of analyses have moved understanding forward, it remains stubbornly opaque. This paper argues that a strengthening of Foucault's concept can be achieved by (i) integrating elements of Althusser's formulation of a *dispositif* (with its links to aleatory ('chance') events), and (ii) a detailed examination of the shared conceptual history between *dispositifs* and discursive formations. Regarding (i), the paper contends that *dispositifs restrict* three types of aleatory event: first, a 'continuous present' exerted upon objects and subjects; second, overdetermining repetitious occurrences; and third, negating the effects of unexpected aleatory events. The paper also argues that *dispositifs* are capable of *producing* certain forms of aleatory change. Regarding (ii), four developmental thresholds of *dispositifs* are identified: strategic emergence, political elaboration, overdetermined *a priori*, and aleatory dominance. These two developments are argued to move Foucault's concept from being descriptive and largely passive to becoming a more theoretically *active* resource—what Deleuze terms changing the analytical (i.e. analysis of the past) to the diagnostic (i.e. interrogation of the present).

Keywords: Aleatory, chance, discursive formation, *dispositif*, overdetermination.

Introduction

Giving orders for his armies to cross the Rubicon river and march upon the city of Rome, Julius Caesar knew he was breaking Senate law and would, as a result, be deemed an insurrectionist. The Rubicon marked the northernmost boundary of the city's territory and all standing armies were barred from entering. While a multitude of outcomes were possible for Caesar they would, arguably, now resolve themselves into three broad categories: victory (taking control of Rome), death (on the battlefield, after a trial by a victorious Senate, etc.), or life as a fugitive (from military stalemate, military defeat but escape, etc.). Caesar captured this high-stakes gamble in the following expression: *alea iacta est,* "the die has been

cast."[1] Chance—the 'aleatory'—had now taken on an increased level of uncertainty.[2] His actions in taking and holding Rome, Caesar displayed the traits Machiavelli would later argue were found in a 'Prince': *fortuna* (fortune) and *virtù* (virtue)—to have favourable circumstances *but also* to successfully exploit them.[3] But if *alea iacta est*, why not *alea* capta *est?*[4] If a die can be thrown, can it not also be caught? It is engaging with one possible answer to this question that this paper is focused.

It is somewhat of a mystery why one of Michel Foucault's most important concepts—that of a '*dispositif*'—is still quite vague in social and political theory. *Dispositifs* are important because it is through them that Foucault argues dominant groups are able to continually restructure conflicting meanings, discourses, or forces and to 'capture' chance events. Its vagueness can be partially forgiven due to both the problems of translating the French term into English but also because Foucault himself was ambiguous in his use of it.[5] However, even while recent analyses by Bussolini, Veyne, Agamben, and Datta, as well as some older engagements by Deleuze and Brenner, have moved the understanding of Foucault's *dispositif* forward, it remains stubbornly opaque.[6]

The aim of this paper is to overcome some of this opacity by focusing on three areas. First, by detailing in Foucault's work his varied use of *dispositif*, but by also drawing out some of the latencies Foucault created but which he leaves largely unarticulated and undertheorised. This includes typologising *dispositifs* into three distinct types: dominant *dispositifs*, proto-*dispositifs*, and ancien-*dispositifs*. This elaboration is followed by an overview of the above analyses which are similar to this paper in engaging with Foucaultian *dispositifs*.

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[1] Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars vol. 1* [*De Vita Caesarum*], translated by John Carew Rolfe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1935, English & Latin), 44.

[2] By this I mean not the uncertainty of "will it rain or not during my walk to work today?", where the outcome is merely getting wet. The uncertainty in Caesar's situation is now elevated to "will I and my army still be alive at the end of this conflict and what will be destroyed in the process?"

[3] Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, edited by François Matheron, translated by Gregory Elliott (London & New York: Verso, 1999).

[4] "The die has been caught". The author's thanks go to Dr Bill Kerr in the Classics and Ancient History Department at The University of New Brunswick for advice on this Latin reformulation. Any subsequent misuse, of course, remains the author's responsibility alone.

[5] Jeffrey Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive?", *Foucault studies*, no. 10 (2010); Gregory Elliott, "Introduction: In the Mirror of Machiavelli", in François Matheron (ed.), *Machiavelli and Us* (London & New York: Verso, 1999); Neil Brenner, "Foucault's New Functionalism", *Theory and Society,* vol. 23, no. 5 (1994).

[6] Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive?"; Paul Veyne, *Foucault: His Thought, His Character*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Polity, 2010); Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, California: Stanford university Press, 2009); Ronjon Paul Datta, "Politics and Existence: Totems, Dispositifs and Some Striking Parallels between Durkheim and Foucault", *Journal of Classical Sociology,* vol. 8, no. 2 (2008); Gilles Deleuze, "What is a *Dispositif*?", in Timothy Armstrong (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Philosopher* (Routledge, 1992); Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

Second, this paper attempts to 'deepen' Foucault's concept of *dispositif* by comparing it to elements of Louis Althusser's 'dispositive'.[7] Althusser brings a very different formulation and use of *dispositif*, but in comparing the two it becomes clear that Foucault's concept can be retheorised to include productive elements from Althusser's. These elements are Althusser's focus upon 'potential' aleatory events, rather than Foucault's primary focus on 'existing' aleatory events. (This is a crude distinction between the two but is discussed in detail below.) The analysis argues that *dispositifs* engage with three distinct 'types' of aleatory event. The first is the production of a 'continuous present' that gives form and content to social existence. The second is the 'overdetermination of repetitious events' so that recurrent entities, things, and circumstances are mostly, or even totally, formed within the parameters—and therefore the 'rules'—of a *dispositif*. The third is the 'negation of unexpected events', such as the 'capture' of prison-produced delinquency that threatened the bourgeoisie; this is Foucault's argument that a *dispositif* responds to "an urgent need."[8]

Third and finally, the paper concludes with an argument that *dispositifs* can be retheorised in a manner similar to their conceptual siblings, discursive formations. The similarities in terms of the constitution of the two, the relations between their elements, and the politicisation and strategic nature of their conflicts (partially hidden within discursive formations, but overt in *dispositifs*), means that Foucault's argument for discursive formations passing through 'thresholds' can be retheorised for *dispositifs*.[9] In this way, four *dispositif* thresholds are identified: strategic emergence, political elaboration, overdetermined *a priori*, and aleatory dominance. Conceptualising *dispositifs* in this way means they can be more precisely used in theoretical accounts of social and political processes.

It is worth concluding the introduction with a brief word about what this paper does *not* attempt to do. First, there is no attempt to systematically engage with Foucault and his use of chance/the aleatory across his *oeuvre*. Whilst a hugely interesting subject, that project would be, at the very least, a paper in and of itself (if not a book). This paper's focus is on Foucault's concept of *dispositif* and how it might be productively retheorised. Second, this paper does not attempt a 'pure' comparison between Foucault and Althusser and their separate formulations and uses of *dispositifs*. What is attempted here is a brief outline of Althusser—building upon recent posthumous publications and secondary academic works—and his conceptualisation of a particular form of the aleatory as the 'created possible'. This is sufficient to support the claim that it can be used in a reconceptualisation of Foucault, but the present argument attempts to go no further than this.

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[7] It is important to note that Althusser also uses *'dispositif'* as a term in his work, but it has been translated into 'dispositive' (Elliott, "Introduction: In the Mirror of Machiavelli"). This is different to the many other translations of Foucault's *dispositif* into 'apparatus', 'social apparatus', 'deployment', or 'system'. This discussion is returned to later in the paper.

[8] Michel Foucault, *Discipine and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1995); Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

[9] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by Alan M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

Foucault's *dispositif*

Dominant dispositifs

Foucault's use of *dispositif* as a concept can be found in interviews, his Collège de France lectures, and books. In a particularly detailed explanation, Foucault outlines what he understands a *dispositif* to be.

> [It is first], 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… In short, 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… 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.[10]

The three points Foucault outlines show the complex constitution of a *dispositif*: it has particular elements, those elements are held in a particular set of relationship *vis-à-vis* one another, and the external effect(s) that the *dispositif* produces. At first glance, Foucault's account of elements may appear nothing more than an eclectic list, but in fact they correspond closely to his existing analyses of power at the "capillary" level, the constitution of veridical ('truth') discourses, and the extra-discursive.[11, 12] Presumably each individual element in a *dispositif* has varying inherent powers or capabilities, yet Foucault argues for an additional important point: it is also the *arrangement* of elements that creates particular effects.[13] Therefore, and second, it is this arrangement—i.e. "the system of relations that can be established

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[10] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 194-195, emphasis in original.

[11] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, edited by Mauro Bertani, et al. (New York: Picador, 2003, 1st ed), 27. An alternative citation is Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures", in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 96. Cf. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 80; Nick Hardy, "Foucault, Genealogy, Emergence: Re-Examining the Extra-Discursive", *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2011); Paul Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionises History", in Arnold Ira Davidson (ed.) *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago, Illinois: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1997); Dominique Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem and Foucault* (London: NLB, 1975).

[12] Veyne outlines this as the "material universe, made up of prediscursive referents that remain faceless potentialities" (Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionises History", 170-171). The extra-discursive/prediscursive is an essential aspect of Foucault's theory but is often overlooked. As part of a *dispositif*, it can constitute a range of elements ranging from institutions to the physical bodies of the subjects contained within it.

[13] The similarity between this conception of a *dispositif* as a means of relating elements to one another and Foucault's archaeological argument that a discursive formation "regulates the dispersal of elements" will be examined later.

between these elements"—that actually 'constitutes' the *dispositif*. The arrangement creates certain restrictions in how elements can relate to one another. To borrow a term from engineering, the elements have a certain "tolerance" within which they can vary.[14] This is important because, while variation can and does occur, problems will appear within a *dispositif* if elements shift beyond their tolerable parameters of relationship.

Third and finally, Foucault identifies that a *dispositif* operates to meet "an urgent need," playing a "strategic function." A *dispositif* increases the chances that a dominant group will be able to react to unexpected events in such a way that they maintain their dominant position.[15] This "strategic function" shows quite clearly that Foucault understands a *dispositif* to be dynamic: it is not monolithic in form or structure as it must continuously reform both itself and the social and discursive relations connected to it or face destruction. As he states,

> On the one hand, there is a process of *functional overdetermination*, because each effect—positive or negative, intentional or unintentional—enters into resonance or contradiction with the others and therefore calls for a readjustment or a reworking of the heterogeneous elements that surface at various points. On the other hand, there is a perpetual process of *strategic elaboration*.[16]

> [T]he apparatus is essentially of a *strategic* nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of relations of forces, either developing them in particular direction, blocking them, stabilising them, utilising them, etc. The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge. …[T]he apparatus in its general form is both discursive and non-discursive, its elements being much more heterogeneous.[17]

Foucault gives an example of this "strategic nature" in his analysis of the response to the new delinquent-class of criminals that emerged from the new disciplinary prison system developed in the early nineteenth century; their co-optation into social relations was made possible because of the bourgeois *dispositif*.[18] There had always been "illegalities" Foucault argues, acts that are (as is implied in the name) illegal against whatever law or code is in

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[14] A similar point is made by Datta, "Politics and Existence", 228; Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction", in Graham Burchell, et al. (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20.

[15] Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*; Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh".

[16] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 195, emphasis in original.

[17] Ibid., 196-197, emphasis in original.

[18] Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*; Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh". See Ronjon Paul Datta, "From Foucault's Genealogy to Aleatory Materialism: Realism, Nominalism and Politics", in Frank Pearce and Jon Frauley (eds.), *Critical Realism and the Social Sciences: Heterodox Elaborations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 289.

operation, but the move from sovereign power to disciplinary power altered the relation between power and illegalities. Disciplinary power individualised and standardised the previously generalised illegalities, bifurcating them into illegalities *but now also* delinquency:

> No doubt delinquency is a form of illegality; certainly it has its roots in illegality; but it is an illegality that the 'carceral [prison] system', with all its ramifications, has invested, segmented, isolated, penetrated, organised, enclosed in a definite milieu, and to which it has given an instrumental role in relation to other illegalities. […]
>
> For the observation that prison fails to eliminate crime, one should perhaps substitute the hypothesis that prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous—and, on occasion, usable—form of illegality; in producing delinquents, in an apparently marginal, but in fact centrally supervised milieu; in producing the delinquent as a pathologised subject.[19]

Foucault catalogues multiple effects of the disciplinary prison system: first, it created, isolated, and enabled supervision over a particular type of criminality (delinquency); second, it aided the subversion of (some) delinquency into less harmful forms—and ones that may even be useful, even if still illegal; third, delinquents represent a 'harder core' of illegalities and serve to reduce the activities of other lesser illegalist offenders' through intimidation, violence, and from the police supervision that continuously follows them; finally, delinquency had direct uses: from the deportation of European criminals to various colonial territories, to the illicit trade in sex (i.e. prostitution), drugs, alcohol, and arms trafficking, and also political delinquents as *agents provocateurs*, informants, and a reserve source of violent labour (e.g. as strike breakers).[20]

Why is this of interest to a discussion of *dispositifs?* The interest lies in the utilisation of the bourgeois *dispositif* to "recapture" the accidentally created delinquent class. As Datta reminds us, the bourgeois *dispositif* was not about discipline *per se* but was focused upon the "valorisation of a calculus… combining discipline, normalization and confinement as the solution to the problem of developing the most economical and efficient means of punishment."[21] As Foucault states:

> From about the 1830s onwards, one finds an immediate re-utilisation of this unintended, negative effect within a new strategy which came in some sense to occupy this empty space, or transform the negative into a positive. The delinquent milieu came to be re-utilised for diverse political and economic ends, such as the extraction of pleasure through the organisation of prostitution. This is what I call the strategic completion [*remplissement*] of the *dispositif*.[22]

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[19] Foucault, *Discipine and Punish,* 277.

[20] Ibid., 278-280.

[21] Datta, "Politics and Existence", 295.

[22] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 196.

The bourgeois *dispositif* enabled that dominant group to incorporate an unexpected development *into* an existing set of social relations. While the delinquent class could not be 'unmade'—for the disciplining and pathologising genie was out of the bottle—they *might* be incorporable in some way into existing relations. Foucault's account shows that dominant groups continually 'ride the tiger' of social relations: they never have absolute control over circumstance, relations, or effects but maintain their dominance by successfully responding to events in a way that allows them to either nullify the events or to benefit from them.

To sum up the discussion so far of Foucault's use of the concept of *dispositifs*, they initially constitute three things: a diverse number of elements, a particular set of relations between these elements, and the effects produced by these relations. Furthermore, *dispositifs* operated in two distinct ways: the first is to shape, as far as possible, the outcomes of activities and events ("functional overdetermination"); the second is to respond and to attempt to control and/or redirect unexpected events ("strategic elaboration"). This makes a *dispositif* a dynamic entity and the nexus from within which the day-to-day activity of social reproduction is formed, maintained, and channelled. It can be characterised as a 'management system' through which particular sets of values (in the Nietzschean sense) and normalisations (in the Foucaultian sense) are implemented. (It can also be understood as a form of politicised discursive formation, a point that will be returned to below).

It is also clear that Foucault sees a *dispositif* as a crucial means through which relations of forces—the various "capillaries," "vectors," and "blocks" of power that exist—produce a reciprocally supportive relationship to knowledge.[23] A *dispositif* is in part a metaformation of Foucault's argument for the symbiotic existence of power/knowledge: to be in a position of power allows a group to access and to generate supporting knowledges; to have knowledge is to be able to able to enunciate from an authoritative position and to define the world around you, as well as (at least partially) to alter or create power relations. Foucault also conceptualises *dispositifs* as *immanent* structures, i.e. existing in the present and producing immediate effects when they reorganise and realign their constituent components.[24]

However, the discussion so far has only focused on *dispositifs* as 'structures in dominance' and has neglected accounting for how they form and decline.[25] The process of generation is important because it shows—for Foucault at least—how a particular set of power relations 'comes to be'. But the 'rise to dominance' is a two sided coin: if one side is a *dispositif* rising, flip to the other and there is one falling. Both aspects are important because they show the complexity through which Foucault understood social and political change.

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[23] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 27; Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*, 30; Foucault, "Subject and Power", in Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose (eds.), *The Essential Foucault* (New York: New Press, 2003), 136, respectively.

[24] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 37; Deleuze, "What is a Dispositif?"; Brenner, "Foucault's New Functionalism"; Datta, "Politics and Existence".

[25] Hardy, "Foucault, Genealogy, Emergence", 75; Datta, "Politics and Existence", 296.

Proto-dispositifs and ancien-dispositifs

While Foucault does not devote much time to expanding the concept of *dispositifs*, he does give an intriguing account of a changing *dispositif* in the *History of Sexuality, Vol.1*.[26] Published (in French) in 1976, a year after *Discipline and Punish* and a year before the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures (1977-78).[27] *HS1* stands as the mid-point in his use of *dispositif* as a concept. In *HS1* Foucault makes a core component of his argument an explanation of how the *dispositif* relating to sexual conduct changed.[28] The original *dispositif* was, as Foucault terms it, one of 'alliance' but this later changed to a *dispositif* of 'sexuality'.[29] The *dispositif* of alliance was explicitly concerned with tracking familial relations in order to discern lineages of descent (especially in terms of inheritance and title) but it also gave considerable powers of social control. However, with the social, political, and economic rise of the bourgeoisie, they were able to exert an increasing focus upon their own assumed sexual exclusivity. The *dispositif* of sexuality, Foucault argues, was first developed and enacted by the bourgeoisie *upon themselves:*[30]

> …the bourgeoisie made this element [i.e. the *dispositif* of sexuality] identical with its body…. This class must be seen rather as being occupied, from the mid-eighteenth century on, with creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a "class" body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race: the autosexualisation of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body, the endogamy of sex and the body.[31]

What Foucault details in *HS1* is the exclusion, subsumption, and, finally, alteration of different parts of one *dispositif* (alliance) into another (sexuality). Importantly is it *not* a sudden change. What we gain from Foucault's account is that in this instance the *dispositif* of sexuality grew out of the narcissism of one particular social group (the bourgeoisie) and achieved a dominant position only later as part of the wider rise of that social group. At no point does Foucault claim that the sexuality *dispositif* was 'destined' to become dominant; it was presumably merely one of many (what this paper terms) 'proto-'*dispositifs* concerning sexual conduct, but one that happened to become dominant because of the wider rise of the bourgeoisie.

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[26] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). In text, hereafter *HS1*.

[27] Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-1978*, edited by Michel Senellart and Arnold Ira Davidson (Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[28] Importantly, Bussolini notes that Robert Hurley, in his translation of *History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, opts for an unusual choice of "deployment" as the translation for *dispositif* (Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive?", 86).

[29] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, 106.

[30] It was only later that control of the labouring classes in the form of their reproductive capacities became an issue—i.e. while sexuality came to be a means of repression it *did not start out* as a class repression mechanism.

[31] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, 124.

This focus upon the rise to dominance of a proto-*dispositif* can also be found in Foucault's *Security, Territory, Population* lectures, which Foucault gave only a year after publishing *HS1*.[32] In discussing the changing dominant forms of power relations—from sovereign/subject, to disciplinary/individual, to governmental/population—Foucault highlights the important role that a proto-*dispositif* played in one of the earliest concrete formulations of 'security'. Rising to prominence in French political economy/economics was the "physiocratic doctrine;" this focused upon the "freedom of commerce and the circulation of grain [which] began to be laid down as the fundamental principle of economic government."[33] The physiocrat argument is an important development in the generation of the concept of "security." It is also important because the physiocrats achieved this by constructing a proto-*dispositif*.

> […] [T]he physiocrats […] tried to arrive at an apparatus (*dispositif*) for arranging things so that, by connecting up with the very reality of the fluctuations, and by establishing a series of connections with other elements of reality, the phenomenon [i.e. scarcity] is gradually compensated for, checked, finally limited, and, in the final degree, cancelled out, *without it being prevented or losing any of its reality*. In other words, by working within the reality of fluctuations between abundance/scarcity, dearness/cheapness, and not by trying to prevent it in advance, an apparatus is installed, which is, I think, precisely an apparatus of security and no longer a juridical-disciplinary system.[34]

There are two aspects that Foucault raises here, both of which need to be identified and unpicked: first, what *is* the form of the physiocrat (proto-)*dispositif*; second, what does it concretely *do?* The first question is specific to the topic of this paper, while the second is situated within Foucault's wider work. Slightly counter-intuitively, it is easier to answer the first by initially focusing upon the second. The physiocrat *dispositif* differed from the previous juridical-disciplinary form of regulation because it aims to nullify scarcity *when* it occurs rather than attempting to prevent scarcity *before* it occurs. The nullification within the physiocrat *dispositif* is achieved through price mechanisms: areas with grain scarcity are allowed to increase grain prices which draws in grain sellers keen to make profit. The *dispositif* reconfigures scarcity as a part of the "naturalness" of the world, so it is not something to be prevented (any more than humans can 'prevent' the changing of the seasons) but, instead, it must be offset (like storing food for consumption during winter when none can be grown).[35] Scarcity continues to occur, but its effects are now offset by price mechanisms that attract grain sellers toward the area(s) most in need. Scarcity is therefore nullified, not because it ceases to exist, but because it is met with an equal response that is a direct result of post-physiocrat 'rewired'/'realigned' social relations.

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[32] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*.

[33] Ibid., 33.

[34] Ibid., 37.

[35] Ibid., 70.

Foucault's analysis highlights important internal reformations to social relations.[36] Initially, three types of elements can be theorised as being realigned by the *dispositif:* (i) the extra-discursive, (ii) the discursive, and (iii) the strategic/political. To give these context, the extra-discursive consists of the volume of grain produced, the variability of abundance and scarcity, etc.; the discursive consists of the connections maintained between different concepts, definitions, statements, etc.; while the strategic/political elements are the manoeuvrings necessary to exclude, refute, defeat, and impose, etc. the physiocrat *dispositif* over and above the existing juridical-disciplinary system. What this shows is the "thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble" of which Foucault spoke, where elements are subject to "shifts of position and modifications of function" and which are, importantly, responses to an "urgent need".[37] The *form* of a *dispositif* changes period to period, circumstance to circumstance; but the *role* of the *dispositif* is always the same: to attempt to manage and to successfully incorporate, subsume, or at least nullify disparate and problematic events, elements, and forces. The *dispositif* is able to do this because it brings an event, element, or force *into* its prior set of relations, its 'framework', that ascribes both knowledge and a location to the elements within it.

However, the rise of a proto-*dispositif* necessarily denotes the 'eclipse' of another. As has already been examined, Foucault himself engaged with two instances of *dispositif* change: sexual conduct and grain scarcity. In Foucault's analysis, a proto-*dispositif* is formed through the actions and strategies of particular social groups—e.g. the bourgeoisie, the physiocrats, etc. Assuming it is able to dislodge the existing *dispositif*, a proto-*dispositif* becomes the new 'actual' *dispositif* and the former 'actual' *dispositif* becomes, what may be termed, a 'prior-' or an 'ancien-'*dispositif*. Importantly, the new *dispositif* is not (usually) free to simply impose new circumstances upon the old; there is no social *tabula rasa*. To employ a metaphor, the new *dispositif* has to operate amidst the ruins of the old *dispositif*. Some of the outmoded, unwanted, or simply contradictory elements of the ancien-*dispositif* will be removed or reformed over time, but some elements may be retained. The utility of juridical and disciplinary techniques, for instance, were not rejected wholesale from the security *dispositif;* indeed, this is far from the case. What is retained is a new *use* for a number of old techniques. The *dispositif* of sexuality retained elements of the ancien-*dispositif* of alliance, with its focus on lineage and social control. Change takes time to stabilise and, while it is always rendered so as to appear a normal and natural progression, it is difficult to think of an example when a previous *dispositif* was *completely* excluded in one single moment.[38] The echoes of previous practice(s) endure in social relations and one of Foucault's many theoretical strengths is in realising and incorporating this into his theory.

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[36] See Datta ("From Foucault's Genealogy to Aleatory Materialism", 289) on Foucault's sometime slippages between *accounts* of the material world and the material world *itself*.

[37] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 194-195.

[38] Foucault, "Questions of Method", 249-250.

Developing the Foucaultian concept of dispositif

A small number of theorists have explicitly engaged with the concept of *dispositif* and it is to their work that the analysis now turns. One of the most detailed single developments of Foucault's argument is by Deleuze.[39] *Dispositifs*, Deleuze argues, consist of "lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, [and] lines of splitting, breakage, [and] fracture."[40] As with Foucault's account, this understands a *dispositif* to operate in multiple ways. The *dispositif* creates the circumstances of what can be seen, i.e. what is 'identifiable' to the observer; what are the things that can be said, as well as who is able to say them; the (re)organisation and (re)linkage of 'relations of force';[41] the creation of *types* of subjectivity that correspond to relations within the *dispositif*; and—of huge importance—unavoidable (but continually shifting) lines of inconsistency, contradiction, and fragmentation that create circumstances for change. The Deleuzeian concept of *dispositif* is also an immanent structure, distinguishing itself from other *dispositifs* and, importantly, from its prior form(s):

> We belong to *dispositifs* and act within them. The newness of a *dispositif* in relation to those which have gone before is what we call its actuality, our actuality. The new is the current. The current is not what we are but rather what we are in the process of becoming—that is the Other, our becoming-other. In each *dispositif* it is necessary to distinguish what we are (what we are already no longer), and what we are in the process of becoming: *the historical part and the current part*.[42]

Deleuze identifies a *dispositif* as effecting two things: "lines of stratification or sedimentation and lines leading to the present day or creativity."[43] The previously identified elements of seeing, saying, force, and subjectification operate to create a circumscribed—and, importantly, external—past that is continually re-thought within the confines of the present *dispositif* (this is arguably a good example to highlight Foucault's comment regarding the "history of the present"[44]).

A *dispositif* also operates to constantly shape the present by providing, as Foucault termed it, "functional overdetermination".[45] This quite abstract (and very Althusserian!) term means that the *dispositif* operates to 'shape' both repetitive events and social relations, making them 'fit' within the *dispositif's* overall relations. This is what Deleuze argues are the "lines leading to the present day:"[46] the continuous creation of the present. What is found in Deleuze's account of *dispositifs*, therefore, is an increased level of abstraction from Foucault's

[39] Deleuze, "What is a *Dispositif*?"
[40] Ibid., 162.
[41] Arguably the most consistent element in Foucault's conceptualisation of 'power'.
[42] Deleuze, "What is a *Dispositif*?", 164.
[43] Ibid., 165.
[44] Foucault, *Discipine and Punish,* 31.
[45] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 195.
[46] Deleuze, "What is a *Dispositif?*", 165.

own analyses, but also a formulation of *dispositifs* that brings the concept firmly into Deleuze's own, and arguably more 'fluid', conception of social relations.

Deleuze's analysis offers a strong foundation for development and the analyses by Brenner, Bussolini, and Datta build upon it. While there is not space here to go fully into Brenner's argument, he outlines an intriguing position where he posits that Foucault's theory often incorporates a level of "new functionalism."[47] Brenner disassociates the concept from those established by Parsons, Luhmann, etc. and instead argues that Foucault's functions "do not cause their own fulfilment because they are *always already embedded in* the same historically specific social processes whose rationale and logic they describe."[48] They are not (teleologically) 'present in order to be filled', but instead are 'products of' the very maelstrom of social conflict(s) that Foucault argues are continually present and from which relations of domination are produced.[49] *Dispositifs* are important for Brenner, because they amalgamate effective functions—i.e. techniques and tactics of successful subordination—and enable their transition and reutilisation across a range of otherwise diverse social practices (e.g. army discipline moving into schools).[50] For Brenner, then, it appears that a *dispositif* is (mostly) focused upon maintaining concretely effective tactics and techniques (i.e. 'what works') in maintaining subordination. Importantly, Brenner is also explicit that "no single power *dispositif* could ever completely fix all social relations within the spatio-temporal grid… and thereby attain definitive closure"—there is always the chance for change and difference.[51]

In another formulation of Deleuze's position, Bussolini argues that Foucault's *dispositif* should be understood as being "onto-creative."[52] This explicitly emphasises the constructive aspects of Foucault's account. But Bussolini argues that Deleuze goes further than this, with Deleuze arguing Foucault was responding "to a crisis in [his] thought."[53] As Rajchman has noted (see Shumway for an even stronger articulation[54]), Foucault's move to genealogy can be understood as a means to bring in politics and conflict into his analysis where previously they had focused on the close analysis of texts.[55] As such, Bussolini argues, Deleuze understands Foucault's *dispositif* as crucial for "discerning possibilities for

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[47] Brenner, "Foucault's New Functionalism", 685.

[48] Ibid., 688 and 689, emphasis added.

[49] For instance, a dominant group, in order to maintain their dominance, has a 'functional need' for techniques to keep subordinate groups in a position of subordination; but *before* the dominant group was dominant there were no 'functional needs' for subordinating others precisely because there were no others *to* subordinate.

[50] Brenner, "Foucault's New Functionalism", 692 and 699.

[51] Ibid., 701.

[52] Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive?", 100.

[53] Ibid., 101.

[54] David R. Shumway, *Michel Foucault* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

[55] John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 115-117.

resistance and for the elaboration of new subjectivities."[56] In this way, Bussolini (via Deleuze) understands a *dispositif* to be a particular system of order being stamped upon social relations and entities that are in a state of flux and uncertainty. This could possibly be characterised as the 'continuous relations of encoding' that perpetually recreate the present; but it is at those moments of encoding there are (à la Brenner above) possibilities for difference and change.

Datta, developing his argument across several works, also draws on Deleuze's analysis.[57] He integrates a number of Foucault's texts and provides an overview of (what this paper has termed) a *dispositif* in dominance.[58] In an intriguing elaboration of the *dispositif* concept, Datta argues that it "produce[s] the effect of hegemonisation in society."[59] The multiple elements contained within the 'multi-linear ensemble' of the *dispositif* produce a (largely) stable and (largely) consistent set of *limited* discursive forms. These discursive forms are continually reaffirmed to subjects—e.g. the primacy of an unfettered free-market—and constitute the dominant framework from which a subject draws when making choices regarding possible courses of action.[60] By constricting the content of the discursive framework, it restricts possible thought while within that framework—and so the circumstances of "hegemonisation" are produced.[61]

Datta also emphasises that *dispositifs* are "Foucault's unique contribution to the theorizing of rule."[62] Datta argues that no other theorist develops such an articulate account of the 'cut and thrust' mechanisms through which dominant groups, day-to-day, maintain their social position. Alongside hegemony (which is necessarily discursive/ideological), *dispositifs* are also the means by which one particular 'blueprint' of social relations is continually (re)asserted. This brings in Foucault's linkage to "overdetermination:" *dispositifs* vastly increase the possibility that an event's outcome (so long as it is within the boundaries of the *dispositif*) will manifest in a particular manner and form.

Combining all of these developmental accounts, several insights are made. The first is Deleuze's development of the immanent effects of a *dispositif* and its continual effects to 'shape the future.' A *dispositif* purposefully gives shape to routine occurrences as well as attempting to regulate chance occurrences. Bussolini's magnification of the Deleuzeian position sites a *dispositif* as taking an even stronger role in shaping present and future circumstance. Datta's engagement brings in a welcome development to Foucault's political ac-

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[56] Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive?", 102.

[57] Ronjon Paul Datta, "Security and the Void: Aleatory Materialism Contra Governmentality", in Mark Neocleous and George Rigakos (eds.), *Anti-Security* (Red Quill Books, 2011); Datta, "Politics and Existence"; Datta, "From Foucault's Genealogy to Aleatory Materialism".

[58] Michel Foucault, "Clarifications on the Question of Power", in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996); Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*; Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh".

[59] Datta, "Politics and Existence", 296.

[60] Ibid., 297.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 296.

counts of power. Expanding Deleuze's argument, *dispositifs* are understood to create the very mental landscape in which subjects operate. To adapt Bussolini's term, Datta sees *dispositifs* as 'episto-creative'. Furthermore, Datta's argument advances Foucault's position that *dispositifs* create fields of overdetermination. This means that a *dispositif reduces* possible outcomes, making sure that from those reduced possibilities the vast majority of concrete outcomes fit the 'blueprint' of social relations most amenable to the dominant social group.[63] This is also the link to explaining the stability of social forms and social relations: such stability exists, in large part, because a *dispositif* is active to *restrict* difference and variation. What occurs is always simply 'more of the same'.

But is this as far as Foucault's concept of *dispositif* can be taken? By integrating Foucault's various accounts the argument was made that a *dispositif* forms first as a discursive formation (a point that will be returned to below) that becomes increasingly politicised, this morphs into a proto-*dispositif*, then finally a *dispositif* in dominance. Its constitution is from of a variety of elements, held together by certain internal relations (which 'is' the *dispositif* itself) and which create multiple external effects. Finally, a *dispositif* operates as a mechanism through which the strategic aims of a dominant social group is able to 'shape' social relations, but also to respond to emergencies and crises. From the developmental accounts of Deleuze, Brenner, Bussolini, Agamben, and Datta, *dispositifs* become an increasingly powerful means through which social and discursive reality is constantly held in a kind of stasis, with discourses and events continually being shaped to fit the parameters established by the *dispositif*.

While bringing together Foucault's diverse arguments into one place certainly adds clarity to his concept of *dispositif*, this paper makes an additional argument: that, specifically, Foucault's account of *dispositifs* and *chance events* is, at the same time, undertheorised yet essential for his account of what a *dispositif* is meant to 'do'. Chance occurrences are always present as factors in three different levels of Foucault's argument: major disruptions (e.g. delinquents), anticipated problems (e.g. scarcity), and establishing new political influence (e.g. the physiocrat doctrines). All three are important, yet Foucault does not offer a suitable theorisation of either what 'chance' is or how is it contained within the boundaries of a *dispositif*. 'Theorising chance' is not as outlandish as it first may sound, as the following discussion of Louis Althusser will hopefully establish.[64]

Deepening the concept of *dispositif*

Althusser's dispositive

Foucault is not the only theorist to utilise a theoretical device such as a *dispositif*. Althusser also uses the concept, but in his work it takes on quite a different role: that of promoting and supporting revolutionary politics and struggle and he places much heavier emphasis

[63] Datta, "Security and the Void", 221-222.

[64] Cf. Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jacques Monod, *Necessity and Chance*, translated by Austryn Wainhouse (Vintage Books, 1972).

on its theoretical abstractness.[65] In an intriguing development that will be discussed below, Gregory Elliott, the translator of *Machiavelli and Us*, chose to translate *'dispositif'* as "dispositive."[66, 67] An Althusserian *dispositif* (to avoid any confusion, from hereon only the term 'dispositive' will be used in relation to Althusser) is significant because it is the means through which a theorist is able to, first, abstractly identify the force relations that constitute a "crystallised historical conjuncture" and then, second, theorise the relations between those social forces.[68] A dispositive is also the means to theorise the circumstances necessary for creating what Althusser termed a "void:" this is a theoretical elaboration of the possibilities (both internal and external) associated with a particular conjuncture.[69] These points are not as trite as they may first appear; for what a dispositive does is to articulate (in the form of theoretical discourse) the circumstance(s) in which social change may occur. While this initially may seem to place Althusser at odds with Foucault, on closer inspection Althusser's argument is not that far from Foucault's. In Foucault's articulation of the physiocrat proto-*dispositif,* for example, the physiocrats laboured hard to reconceptualise social relations in order to produce different outcomes.

Althusser first detailed his idea of a dispositive in his analysis of the work of Niccolò Machiavelli.[70, 71] In *Machiavelli and Us* , Althusser offers a sustained analysis of Machiavelli's study of the failure of long-lasting or effective government to form in Renaissance Italy. Althusser's interest lies in Machiavelli's ability to "think under the conjuncture"—i.e. to think partially 'outside' of his present circumstances.[72] Machiavelli's breakthrough, Althusser argues, is being able to see that history is *not* infused with a *telos* (an inherent logic), a Beginning, nor an End, but is instead constituted by particular "relations of forces" that Althusser

[65] Nick Hardy, "Theory from the Conjuncture: Althusser's Aleatory Materialism and Machiavelli's Dispositif", *Décalages: an Althusser studies journal,* vol. 1, no. 3 (2012).

[66] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*; Elliott, "Introduction: In the Mirror of Machiavelli", xviii.

[67] Interestingly, Elliott states this decision was taken after extensive discussion with David Macey, the long-time translator of many of Foucault's works. For a similar, but different analysis, see Bussolini, "What is a Dispositive?", 86.

[68] Louis Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter", in François Matheron and Oliver Corpet (eds.), *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87* (London & New York: Verso, 2006), 170; Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 19.

[69] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 42.

[70] See Fillippo Del Lucchese, "On the Emptiness of the Encounter: Althusser's Reading of Machiavelli", *Décalages,* vol. 1, no. 1 (2012), for a broad overview of Althusser and Machiavelli.

[71] While there is no space here for a discussion of Althusser and Foucault on Machiavelli, it is discussed in Adam Holden and Stuart Elden, ""It Cannot Be a Real Person, a Concrete Individual": Althusser and Foucault on Machiavelli's Political Technique", *Borderlands,* vol. 4, no. 2 (2005); Paul-Erik Korvela, "Sources of Governmentality: Two Notes on Foucault's Lecture", *History of the Human Sciences,* vol. 25, no. 4; and Robyn Marasco, "Machiavelli Contra Governmentality", *Contemporary Political Theory,* vol. 11, no. 4 (2012). It is sufficient to say here that Machiavelli constitutes a theoretical *divergence* rather than a convergence between Althusser and Foucault.

[72] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 18.

terms "conjunctures."[73] A conjuncture is constituted by a myriad of "relations of forces" that varyingly intersect, interlink, overlay, support, and contest one another, giving a particular historical moment/period its form and shape (e.g. feudalism, capitalism, etc.).

Machiavelli composed his dispositive of three otherwise contradictory statements brought together in a particular alignment. They were: (1) that social relations are enduring, (2) that social relations are subject to constant change, and (3) that social relations are cyclical.[74] However, instead of creating analytical failure—i.e. constituting gibberish, opinion, or mere wishes—the dispositive allowed Machiavelli to theorise the three elements beyond their existing relationship. Althusser argues that the way in which Machiavelli set the three statements in relation to one another opened up a "void" of possibility.[75]

This seemingly strange concept of 'the void' forms an important part of Althusser's later work on *aleatory materialism*.[76,77] Aleatory materialism means 'chance' materialism and for the present discussion it is sufficient to understand it as arguing that social structures: (a) originally form through the chance encounters of their elements; (b) have managed to endure in their form(s); and (c) overdetermine other structures, meaning the others develop in a similar form.[78] Althusser's interest in the void is because it signifies the possibility of aleatory change—i.e. change *not* expected to be produced from the forces as presently configured in the conjuncture.[79] In aleatory materialist terms, the void is the non-space in which *chance* is played out and contains the possibility of both formation and of effect: that is, chances of encounter and chances of outcome. The implication/result of the void is the creation of *possibilities*, which is why Althusser places so much emphasis upon it.

Althusser's fascination with Machiavelli's dispositive was that, as a theoretical assemblage, it enabled the conceptualisation of a means to nullify and to transcend—i.e. move beyond—present circumstance. Being locked in the cycle of ineffective government in the historical conjuncture of sixteenth century Italian politics meant that Machiavelli's theory had to reorder that conjuncture and treat it as one *possible* relation of forces—albeit one that

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[73] Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter", 189; ibid., 170; Althusser, "On Genesis", *Décalages* 1, no. 2 (2012); Katja Kolšek, "The Parallax Object of Althusser's Materialist Philosophy", in Katja Diefenbach, et al. (eds.), *Encountering Althusser: Politics and Materialism in Contemporary Radical Thought* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 82; Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 19.

[74] *Machiavelli and Us*, 34-36.

[75] Ibid., 41-42. See also Kolšek, "The Parallax Object of Althusser's Materialist Philosophy"; Hardy, "Theory from the Conjuncture"; Datta, "From Foucault's Genealogy to Aleatory Materialism"; François Matheron, "The Recurrence of the Void in Louis Althusser", *Rethinking Marxism,* vol. 10, no. 3 (1998).

[76] Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*; Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter".

[77] For further analyses of Althusser and aleatory materialism see Datta, "From Foucault's Genealogy to Aleatory Materialism"; Datta, "Security and the Void" and Diefenbach, et al. (eds.), *Encountering Althusser: Politics and Materialism in Contemporary Radical Thought*.

[78] Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter".

[79] n.b. this would appear to be contra Kolšek's position (Kolšek, "The Parallax Object of Althusser's Materialist Philosophy").

was presently 'actual'. Using the concept of the void, Althusser identifies precisely that element which Machiavelli hoped would be accessed by a successful Prince: chance. *Fortuna* would grant the Prince chance opportunities by destabilising conjunctural relations, and the *virtù* possessed by the Prince would enable them to grasp (as well as possibly even create) the chance of change *and then also* make that change occur. The huge importance that Althusser placed upon the dispositive was that it (at least in theory) constructed the circumstances in which the void may be encountered. For Machiavelli, it was the Prince-figure who would open up this possibility. For Althusser, it was the combination of political struggle *and* structural change.[80]

Althusser sadly did little to expand his argument regarding dispositives, but what is immediately useful about Althusser's work—especially for Foucaultian theory—is that the concept of a dispositive contains two things: first, an account of 'thinking outside of the present'; and second, an emphasis upon the value of fluctuation, disruption, and difference. Althusser's attempt to find a *theoretical* means by which to analyse aleatory events appears to be in marked contrast to much of Foucault's work which only articulates 'responses to' aleatory events (the exception being, as has already been noted, aspects of the proto-*dispositif*). However, by both adopting a more rigorous approach to both defining and theorising aleatory events (taken from a partial integration of Althusser's approach to Foucault), Foucault's concept of *dispositif* could be greatly strengthened. It is to this task that the discussion now turns.

Developing aleatory accounts

As argued above, *aleatory events* constitute a key, albeit very small, area of Foucault's *dispositif* and consequently require theoretical development. There are several ways of interpreting "aleatory"—which simply means 'chance'—so to talk of aleatory events means nothing more than 'occurrences not purposefully created'. Foucault's account of the creation of delinquency by the disciplinary prison system serves as a good example of the most extreme kind: events which are utterly unexpected and pose a serious threat to the *status quo* of social relations. A second form are those known to likely occur (e.g. grain scarcity) but not when or where they might occur. The effect of these events can be estimated with some certainty (such as how people many people may starve) but not how frequently they might occur. A third form is the creation of *possibilities:* this entails the likelihood of *variation* in the (repeated) form of a current object, of an *alternate* form of an object, or even the *rejection* of an object altogether; all are 'possibilities'. Both Althusser and Foucault incorporate the 'aleatory' into their work, both in terms of dispositives/*dispositifs* playing a key role in theorising and articulating aleatory events, but also in attempting to exert some form of control over an aleatory event.[81] (Indeed, this is Foucault's entire point in detailing the establishment of

[80] Nick Hardy, "Wolff, Althusser, and Hegel: Outlining an Aleatory Materialist Epistemology", *Rethinking Marxism*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2014); Hardy, "Theory from the Conjuncture".

[81] Althusser, "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter"; Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*; Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 11.

the *dispositif* of security.) The differences between these three types of aleatory event—the unexpected, the securitised, and the possible—is what separates Althusser's and Foucault's accounts of the aleatory. Yet if an attempt to account for them is made, then three conceptual frameworks are generated: aleatory capture (for the unexpected), aleatory nullification (for security), and aleatory production (for possibilities).

The argument being made in this paper is that by gaining insight from Althusser's concept of a dispositive, a strengthening of Foucault's concept of a *dispositif* can be achieved. This would alter the concept of *dispositifs* so they become a more theoretically *active* resource, rather than being descriptive and largely passive. This is a reading that moves Foucault's *dispositif* from the part of his work that is, as Deleuze has termed it, the analytical (i.e. analysis of the past) to the diagnostic (i.e. interrogation of the present).[82] Integrating insights from Althusser into Foucault's concept of *dispositif* creates an expanded concept capable of examining immediate social relations *as well as* historical circumstances. All of the elements of a *dispositif* already identified above are retained: (i) that its form comes from the arrangement of the discursive and extra-discursive elements within it; (ii) that it operates to maintain the dominance of a particular social group; and (iii) that it creates a field of overdetermination within its boundaries. What will be added to it is a more articulate account of how a *dispositif* captures, controls, and creates aleatory events.

Foucault and Althusser: aleatory capture and aleatory nullification

Both Foucault and Althusser have an understanding of *dispositifs* that incorporates a form of 'aleatory capture'. In Foucault's analysis there was a heavier emphasis upon aleatory capture, where he focused upon the ability to respond to unexpected events.[83] In responding to unexpected events, a *dispositif* either subsumes (and so reforms) an aleatory event into the *dispositif's* existing structure, or the *dispositif* reforms itself in order to incorporate the unalterable traits of the aleatory event. Either way, it entails strategic manoeuvring in order to ensure the continued dominance of that *dispositif* (and its associated social group).

Part "functional overdetermination", part 'nullification by design', a *dispositif* has a capacity to both restrict possibilities and to offset known eventualities. In restricting possibilities, a *dispositif* acts though its *immanent* structure and form to produce a field of overdetermination so reducing aleatory possibilities. This is how, within Foucaultian theory, *dispositifs* are key for producing spheres of social stability. Abilities to *nullify* aleatory events were part of the very design of (some) *dispositifs*. This is different to 'simple' overdetermination, because the social and natural forces requiring nullification necessitate a *specific* shape and form to a *dispositif*.[84] *Dispositifs* reduce the possibility of disruptions to social relations

[82] Deleuze, "What is a *Dispositif?*" 164.

[83] e.g. the emergence of a delinquent criminality in Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*, 276-277; Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 195-196.

[84] For example, the overdetermined shape and structure of the family will take its form largely from the dominant *dispositif*, but the family does not *need* a specific *dispositif* in which to form in the first place (i.e.

(by overdetermining the type and form of subjects and entities produced within them), but also offer the possibility to offset those events that do still arise unexpectedly.

For Althusser, meanwhile, aleatory capture is a much smaller feature for a dispositive. A dispositive operates much less to capture empirical aleatory events rather then to attempt to *create* aleatory events (this is discussed further below). Where a dispositive does attempt to capture aleatory circumstances (and this may be stretching the concept of 'capture' too far) is through the form of theory, examining why more aleatory moments have *not* occurred—e.g. why a particular set of social relations continually repeat themselves in the form(s) that they do. This is an attempt to 'capture' circumstances in the form of theoretical representation and discourse.

In terms of the nullification of aleatory events, Althusser does not conceive of a dispositive operating in this way. The closest an Althusserian perspective may produce in this manner is the theoretical form of the dispositive creates conclusions that nullify (theoretically at least) the powers inherent in particular social forces. From this nullification comes the possibility for political action and struggle.[85]

Foucault and Althusser: aleatory production

Where both Foucault and Althusser share a focus is on the production of aleatory circumstances. While for Althusser this is not at all contentious, for Foucault this may seem to go beyond the discussion of *dispositifs* made so far. However, by viewing proto-*dispositifs* as concerted attempts at altering the status quo/dominant *dispositif*, then Foucault's account does indeed include attention to the production of aleatory events.

For Althusser the entire purpose of a dispositive is to theorise how to destabilise social relations and to *increase* the likelihood of aleatory circumstance entering into social relations. To utilise Datta's appealing formulation of Althusser's concept of *underdetermination*, a dispositive attempts (in the form of a theoretical construct) to release, expand, or create new possibilities from the potentialities present within existing social relations.[86] This is not a theoretical version of alchemy—i.e. transmogrifying one substance, in this case a 'concept', into another—but it *is* an express attempt to unlock 'possible futures' contained within particular social relations. Consequently, Althusser's dispositive can be understood as a theoretical *interruption*. It enables the theorist to engage with an issue and to attempt to negate one or more of the operating elements.

For Foucault, meanwhile, the effort and effect of *creating* aleatory circumstances is somewhat different. While he does not focus in the same way as Althusser on such an explicitly political project, he does articulate a strong account of how proto-*dispositifs* are stra-

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there are always children being born). However, for nullification to operate a specific form of the *dispositif is* required: scarcity is *not* nullified by the juridical-disciplinary *dispositif*, but it is by the security *dispositif*.

[85] Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, edited by François Matheron and Oliver Corpet, translated by G. M. Goshgarian (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), 189; see also *Machiavelli and Us*, 81-103.

[86] Datta, "Security and the Void", 221-222.

tegic attempts to influence existing social relations and, if achieved, to then create new relations from them.

What can be found in Foucault's work is a continued emphasis upon the struggles for dominance found within any social relations.[87] While events can, at times, overtake the strategies of particular groups (dominant or not) and radically alter the landscape of social relations, more often than not chance occurs through a *combination* of strategy and circumstance. Some of this may be through the efforts of a particular group to advance (what they deem to be) their interests, but change comes about by destabilising existing relations—by creating *aleatory opportunities*. While this may not contain the same analytics as Althusser (i.e. explicitly theorising one's immediate social relations), it does contain a strong emphasis towards breaking the repetitive pattern of events that continually form in a set number of ways (i.e. they are overdetermined).

Dispositifs, discursive formations, and thresholds

Bringing together Foucault's and Althusser's differing conceptions of *dispositifs*/dispositives has enabled an increased level of theoretical complexity. While Foucault retains the more developed position *vis-à-vis* Althusser—especially after incorporating the developmental analyses discussed above—his work still benefits from integrating elements of Althusser's account, such as conceptualising aleatory events and nullification. Thus, with the Althusserian argument incorporated, a *dispositif* can be understood to operate as a means of imposing three types of restriction upon aleatory events: first, a 'continuous present' exerted upon objects and subjects; second, overdetermining repetitious occurrences; and, third, negating many of the effects of unexpected aleatory events. Furthermore, the proto-*dispositifs* identified in Foucault's accounts of "sexuality" and "security" demonstrate attempts to create aleatory possibilities in order to bring about changes in existing social relations. Combining these different facets of the proto- and dominant-*dispositif* together, a more detailed understanding of their operation is possible. Therefore, the argument will now turn to an attempt to give *dispositifs* a firmer structure and process, established by identifying a series of *thresholds* that a *dispositif* passes through, similar to the thresholds associated with a discursive formation.

Outlined in Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* a discursive formation is a 'system of dispersion' within which objects, statements, concepts, and themes are ordered into particular relations with one another, so producing (or excluding) particular discourses.[88]

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[87] e.g. Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1973-74*, edited by Jacques Lagrange, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"; Foucault, "Subject and Power"; Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms", in James D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: New Press, 2000); Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*.

[88] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 38-68; Danica Dupont and Frank Pearce, "Foucault Contra Foucault: Rereading the 'Governmentality' Papers", *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2001), 146-147; Hardy, "Foucault, Genealogy, Emergence"; Lecourt, *Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem and*

While discursive formations are outlined in detail elsewhere, both the 'form' and the 'operation' of a discursive formation are of interest to the discussion here because discursive formations are strikingly similar to a *dispositifs*.[89]

Foucault argues that the *form* of a discursive formation contains four types of regulated element: objects (the material 'things' that the discursive formation engages with—e.g. the mad); statements (the 'enunciations' deemed acceptable, as well the subjects' deemed acceptable to enunciate them—e.g. a psychiatrist passing clinical judgement); concepts (the linkages established between different statements—e.g. the diagnosis that 'hearing voices' signifies schizophrenia); and themes (the differences *within* a discursive formation between competing positions—e.g. electroshock treatment versus psychoanalytic therapy).[90] The continuously shifting sands of complementarity and contestation between the elements within a discursive formation mean that it should be understood as constantly changing. (Although, it should be noted that this is not as 'quick' as changes within a *dispositif*, discursive formations are altogether 'slower' assemblages.)

The *operation* of a discursive formation produces a 'discursive environment' within which discourses form, taking their content from the various 'statements'—the "elementary units of discourse"—present within the discursive formation.[91] To use some of the arguments developed above, discursive formations overdetermine the discursive possibilities of what can and cannot be said within them. For example, within the configuration of the medical discursive formation in the 1700s 'the soul' was a distinct object of medical treatment, yet the medical discursive formation in the 2000s does not.[92] Alongside the dispersion of elements, a discursive formation also contains what Foucault terms "rules of formation."[93] These rules govern how the elements are placed into relation to one another. This dispersion and regulation create the discursive preconditions from which particular discourses are formed and maintained.

This brief outline of discursive formations should give at least a surface indication of the similarity they have with *dispositifs*.[94] One means of developing the comparison is to

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Foucault. n.b. see also Jon Frauley, "Towards an Archaeological-Realist Foucauldian Analytics of Government", *British Journal of Criminology,* vol. 47, no. 4 (2007).

[89] Nick Hardy, "A History of the Method: Examining Foucault's Research Methodology", in Benôit Dillet, Iain Mackenzie, and Robert Porter (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Poststructuralism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Hardy, "Foucault, Genealogy, Emergence".

[90] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 41-42, 50-52, 56-59, 65-68.

[91] Ibid., 80.

[92] Hardy, "A History of the Method"; Hardy "Foucault, Genealogy, Emergence".

[93] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 38.

[94] The similarity discursive formations and *dispositifs* also extends to Foucault's concept of *épistémè*. Outlined in Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xxii, and Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* 191-192: *épistémè* is an elusive term that Foucault used to encompass the particular dominant 'form' of scientific inquiry and knowledge present at a particular time (e.g. taxonomical in the 1600s, empirical in the 1800s). However, having dropped the concept, Foucault resurrects it in "Confession of the Flesh" to answer a question, stating: "…I would de-

adopt Rajchman's distinction between Foucault's archaeologies being 'textual' and his genealogies being 'political'.[95] With this distinction, the argument can be made that Foucault develops an *existing concept* (a discursive formation) but changes the *environment* in which he theorises it to operate. For example:

> [W]e could consider Abeille's [physiocrat] text within an analysis of a theoretical field by trying to discover its guiding principles, the rules of formation of its concepts, its theoretical elements, and so on… But I do not want to look at it *in this way*, and instead of considering it in terms of an archaeology of knowledge, I would like to consider it from the perspective of a genealogy of technologies of power. I think we could reconstruct the function of the text, not according to the rules of formation of its concepts, but according to its objectives, the strategies that govern it, and the program of political action it presupposes.[96]

The physiocrat text by Abeille can be understood either as part of a discursive formation *or* as part of a technology of power. The same theoretical *object* (the physiocrat argument for conceptualising, organising, and engaging with the issue of 'scarcity') can be understood using *both* archaeological and genealogical perspectives. Relating this explicitly to the argument here, this possibility of a dual explanation means that proto-*dispositifs* (like Abeille's) have an internal consistency that is also comprehensible in terms of a discursive formation. This is significant because it shows that Foucault understands a *dispositif* to constitute, at least for a time, a discursive formation which later becomes 'elevated' into a proto-*dispositif* and then a new form of dominant power/knowledge relations (which then becomes a dominant *dispositif*).

One of the most intriguing elements in Foucault's account of the generation of discursive formations are the 'thresholds' that Foucault argues they pass through.[97] These transformations impact upon how discursive formations operate internally and how they create effects externally. The four thresholds that Foucault identifies are: (1) positivity,

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fine the *épistémè* retrospectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of [sic.] separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The *épistémè* is the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may or may not be characterised as scientific" (Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh", 197). An *épistémè* is, here, defined in the same way as a *dispositif*, a "strategic apparatus", but relates solely to scientific inquiry. There is not space in this paper to explore Foucault's analysis of science (cf. Hardy, "A History of the Method"; Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical*, translated by Edward Pile, Atopia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Gary Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989)), but elements of this will be taken up in the following discussion of discursive formations. (I would like to thank the reviewers for bringing this later use of *épistémè* to my attention.)

[95] Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*.

[96] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 35-36, emphasis added.

[97] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 186-189

where a discourse becomes a discursive formation;[98] (2) epistemologisation, where the discursive formation establishes internal coherence and becomes a reference point between competing knowledge claims; (3) scientificity, where the discursive formation creates and then maintains formal rules and criteria for generating knowledge within it; and (4) formalisation, the discursive formation contains axiomatic truths and becomes a starting-point in and of itself.[99]

Conceptualising the thresholds of a *dispositif*

The similarity between discursive formations and *dispositifs* allows a parallel series of thresholds to be theorised that chart the development of a *dispositif* from genesis to dominance. The argument here is that, by taking Foucault's own work, the insights from Althusser's dispositive, and recent scholarly work, four thresholds can be identified as relating to the development of a *dispositif* (examples are given below). They are:

(1) Strategic emergence: a proto-*dispositif* stage, this is when a discursive formation is able to contest social relations comparable to it (i.e. relations similar to the content of the discursive formation) but which are 'within' another discursive formation.

(2) Political elaboration: at the end of the proto-*dispositif* stage but still within it, this is when a discursive formation extends its previously localised discursive emphasis and connects into existing discourses and power relations external to itself and begins to alter them.

(3) Overdetermined *a priori*:[100] now transformed beyond a discursive formation, this is when a *dispositif* has established power/knowledge networks, structured the relations of its internal components, and produces and maintains hegemonic influence; altogether, these form the circumstances within which repetitious events gain their form and content.

(4) Aleatory dominance: when the *dispositif* has proven able to counteract, subsume, or alter unexpected and contradictory events, so maintaining its dominant effects.

It is worth noting that this is not simply a case of transferring Foucault's argument for the thresholds affecting discursive formations directly onto *dispositifs*. Originally he argued that a discursive formation did not necessarily have to pass through all four of the thresholds he outlined, and even that they did not have to be achieved in order.[101] Howev-

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[98] Agamben (Agamben, "'What is an Apparatus?,'" 3-6; also Bussolini "'What is a Dispositive?,'" 102-103) makes an interesting observation that Foucault's early use of the term "positivity" was likely inspired from his education by and reading of Jean Hyppolite, a scholar of Hegel. Rather than being the 'creative' form of positivity found in Foucault's later work, Agamben argues that positivity in Foucault's early work means (à la Hegel) "a certain historical moment externally imposed on individuals" (Agamben, "'What Is a Apparatus?,'" 4). So, when a discourse passes through a threshold of positivity and becomes a discursive formation, it becomes something that, in and of itself, is 'imposable' upon the things within it.

[99] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 186; Dupont and Pearce, "Foucault Contra Foucault", 146.

[100] See Datta, "Politics and Existence", 296; Datta, "From Foucault's Genealogy to Aleatory Materialism", 277-280. See also Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical* for a more general account of Foucault and the *a priori*.

[101] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 187-188.

er, the overtly political form of a *dispositif* makes it difficult to conceptualise the thresholds being moved through in a different order to the one outlined above. This is not because of any developmental need by a *dispositif* (an analogy of developmental need being that a child cannot mature directly into an adult without first having been through adolescence), but that the *dispositif* must necessarily form within contested social spaces. Therefore, if it cannot operate to at least withstand attack from other discursive formations and *dispositifs* then it will simply cease to exist; consumed, incorporated, or outright destroyed by its opponents.

It may also be that the fourth threshold may not occur for long periods of time. The example that Foucault gives of delinquency is an example of 'aleatory dominance': the bourgeois *dispositif* was able to react to the emergence of a new criminal class successfully, negating most of delinquency's harmful effects (at least the effects upon the bourgeoisie and their *dispositif*).[102] Yet a *dispositif* operating at the third threshold may never have to react to something so severe as that. Thus it is feasible that a *dispositif* may operate for an indefinite period of time without facing the emergency of a major contradiction. There would, of course, be many conflicts, alterations, and discordances that had to be rectified (for, as stated earlier, a *dispositif* is a dynamic construct in its everyday operation), yet when a major crisis occurs it may be beyond a particular *dispositif's* abilities to successfully accommodate it.

Using this framework for *dispositif* thresholds, it is now possible to revisit part of Foucault's arguments about *dispositifs* to see how they are historically composed. Taking the example of the physiocrat concern with grain scarcity—and the corresponding conception of 'security'—the following process can be identified.[103] Within the discursive formation of political economy/economics (hereafter "economics"), the physiocrats were a distinct group (the mercantilists, for example, were another) and they agitated and strategised successfully to have their discursive position adopted as one of, if not 'the', leading perspective within the economics discursive formation (threshold 1).

The physiocrats begin to rise to prominence *outside of* the economics discursive formation based upon their alternative means of tackling scarcity. The effect of this was that associated social relations become increasingly influenced by the physiocrat concept of the naturalness of scarcity and its remedy through nullification (rather than the juridical-disciplinary attempt at 'prevention') (threshold 2).

Over time the concept of 'naturally occurring scarcity' becomes superseded by the concept of 'security' (both 'nullify' events, but the latter has a much different discursive basis than the former). Later developments within economics show the move towards 'marginalism' (where goods are understood to have decreasing utility for purchasers) and, while not a direct relation to the physiocrat doctrine, marginalism assiduously maintains the as-

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[102] Foucault, *Discipine and Punish*.

[103] Care must be taken here to keep distinct the discursive/nominal form of the *proposed* solution of 'security' and the material/real/existing effects of *actual* implementation of 'security'. (My thanks to the reviewers for drawing my attention to this potential theoretical slippage.)

sumed need for an unfettered free-flow of goods and services only regulated by the market. Security, meanwhile, increasingly serves the interests of the dominant social group (the bourgeoisie) because it creates an increased level of 'certainty' and reliability to social relations. Consequently, forms of 'securitisation' are increasingly inserted into other unrelated social relations which coalesce and begin a repetitious cycle by securing a particular form of social relations (threshold 3).

How does this insertion work? Take 'delinquency' again as an example: when delinquency emerged from the disciplinary prison system occurring at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the security *dispositif* had already been active for several decades. It is unclear how far Foucault understands the security *dispositif* to overlap with what he (very vaguely) terms the wider "bourgeois *dispositif*," but the bourgeois *dispositif* was certainly the key component in altering the police service from simple 'city watch' style foot patrols into a data gathering and surveillance organisation.[104] Through syphoning off certain strains of criminality (prostitution, drugs, arms dealing, etc.), periodically utilising others (strike breakers, social intimidation, etc.), or outright repression (police surveillance, etc.) the bourgeois *dispositif* was able to absorb, recast, or nullify different elements of the delinquent population (threshold 4).[105]

By viewing the development of *dispositifs* as passing through four thresholds, it is possible to achieve greater conceptual precision. This means that the various abilities held by *dispositifs* can be attributed to a particular stage of development *as well as* being broken down into their 'type' of aleatory operation.

There is a danger that, if misconstrued, *dispositifs* can appear to be an 'easy way out' of explaining complex social change. If misunderstood, *dispositifs* can appear totalising, almost omnipotent, and dangerously close to approximating a conspiratorial entity similar to—to paraphrase Marx's famous quote about the state—nothing more than a means of securing the common interests of the bourgeoisie.[106] But Foucault's *dispositif* is *not* this. It is a development from a discursive formation and contains all of the conflicts inherent in a discursive formation but also the multitude of others that come with a Foucaultian conception of political rule. The complexity of what a *dispositif* is, and the wide range of effects that it produces, means that *dispositifs* are worthy of deeper conceptualisation, articulation, and understanding than Foucault initially gave them. It is towards this goal that this paper hopes it has made some contribution.

Conclusion

The argument presented here focused on two core points: the first was to elaborate Foucault's own arguments (backed up by a small number of associated studies) of what exactly a *dispositif* 'is'. The second was to develop the concept of *dispositif* to include both a greater

[104] Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh".

[105] Ibid.

[106] Karl Marx, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party", in Eugene Kamenka (ed.), *The Portable Karl Marx* (Viking: Penguin Books, 1983), 206.

awareness of the unique qualities of what a *dispositif* 'does', but also to give a much firmer hold on how a *dispositif* is generated, developed, and then installed. To achieve this, a number of Foucault's texts were examined that engaged with a fully developed *dispositif* and two instances where a proto-*dispositif* (as this paper termed it) was developed. After advancing Foucault's position with insightful additional studies, the later work of Louis Althusser was incorporated for their focus on nullifying conflicting relations and for their focus on aleatory ('chance') circumstances. Foucault's *dispositif* was then reassessed, bringing in not only a stronger understanding of how it engages with different forms of 'aleatory' events, but also to detail its specific developmental stages which, it was argued, Foucault had not previously done. By demonstrating the strong similarities between *dispositifs* and discursive formations, a series of thresholds were argued to exist that a *dispositif* passes through as it increases in size, effect, and influence. The argument's conclusion was that by giving more rigour to the understanding of what a *dispositif* is and what it does, it means that *dispositifs* can now more easily and successfully form part of contemporary Foucaultian analyses.

Alea capta est.

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