

# Foucault's Concept of Dispositif

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This article focus on the concept of Foucault's substantive *dispositif*, often translated into 'apparatus', 'deployment' or 'dispositive' in English. These terms contained different meaning in the trend of philosophy in France at the time of the development of the term dispositive. Dispositif is only meaningful in relation to something. Therefore, one also have to ask: A dispositif of what, for what purpose? Bourdieu states that Foucault analyzes history as *opus operatum*, not as *modus operandi*; the question is if Foucault analyzes practices in terms of their discursive and non-discursive genealogy at all – rather, he is interested in and equipped to analyze the thoughts incarnating a problematization. Human action is habitual, has a habitual basis, it is not a pure creation. This concerns not only the conditions of possibility of an action, but the action itself; you are not admitted to do definite things, if you are not a legitimate member of the social category at stake. Foucault's history of thought means to analyze how and why certain behavior, object of social regulation, gets thought of as a problem as a consequence of the answer certain individuals give to a certain state of things in the world.

**Keywords:** Foucault, dispositif, Bourdieu, Veyne, theory, epistemology, praxeology

## Introduction and practical remarks

I use the French term *dispositif*, even in English, because I feel the usual translations such as 'apparatus' or 'deployment' are misleading when used in connection with Foucault's texts. These terms contained different meaning in the trend of philosophy in France at the time of the development of the term dispositif.<sup>1</sup> The Penguin edition of *The Will to Knowledge* (Foucault 1998), often translates dispositif with 'deployment', perhaps suggested by the use of dispositif in a military context, as in the dispositif of troops before the battle. Others translate the term as mechanism, device etc.

Raffsnøe, writing in English in a working paper from before 2014 "What is a dispositive?" (Raffsnøe et al. 2014), translates the French substantive *dispositif* into 'dispositive' in English, inspired by the adjective in "Qu'est-ce qu'un dispositif?" (Raffsnøe 2008).

In a way it does not make sense to write a paper on the concept of dispositive, in the writings of Foucault, in isolation; dispositif is only meaningful in relation to something. Therefore, one also have to ask: a dispositif of what, for what purpose?

I myself have finally understood the concept of *dispositif* in Foucault's lectures and writing as: a certain physical, non-discursive or intellectual, discursive way of ordering, having ordered things in a certain domain, which makes a certain action/understanding in that domain possible. As such, the *dispositif* is a condition of possibility, not a cause.

Foucault underscores that the points of interest are:

1. The network holding together the elements of the *dispositif*
2. The very nature of that network, in the case under consideration

One could thus also say: a *dispositif* is an intellectual network assembling different thoughts together in a way making a certain understanding/action possible.

That is to say: the significance of the expression '*dispositif*' in scientific writing is highly dependent on the everyday significance of the concept in French: an ordering of things in a certain domain, making a course of action possible in that domain. More specifically in a technical context: the final judgment of a court, the deployment of an army before the battle or the device for repairing the bridge over the river or the summer house in the garden. It may be an instrument making a change in thinking and/or doing possible, like the *dispositif* published by the government making it legal to hold a shop open on Sunday.

Today the expression is common place, easily repeated twenty times within half an hour at a TV5 French Evening News Broadcasting, for example.

### **My personal background**

Before we start our analysis, I want to say something about my own background, to situate my understanding of Foucault, and relation to the Praxeology research group and the Master in Health Sciences – Nursing, Department of Global Public Health and Primary Care, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Bergen, Norway.

From 1950 to 1968 I was a member of the Order of Dominicans in Belgium,<sup>2</sup> studying at first in Louvain. From 1959 to 1962 I was preparing my doctoral dissertation at the Theological Faculty of Le Saulchoir, situated at the village of Etiolles in the remote southern suburbs of Paris, now dominated by the new City of Evry. I also participated in social work with immigrants from the provinces, and from Southern Europe and Nord Africa in the suburbs of Kremlin-Bicêtre and Villejuif, returning to this social work for some months every year until 1990 together with my Swedish companion Inger Sjöberg (Callewaert), whom I met in Villejuif. At that time everything in these suburbs was controlled by the French Communist Party: the communal primary school was called *École Karl Marx*, the public swimming pool was *la Piscine Youri-Gagarin*, etc.

The Philosophy I had become familiar with in Louvain centered on the one hand on Aristoteles and Thomas Aquinas, and on the other hand on Husserl, Heidegger, Ricœur and Merleau-Ponty, and later on the School of Frankfurt and Habermas in

sociology. My view of society was influenced by Emmanuel Mounier and the review *Esprit*, and on the theoretical level by the Neo-Marxism of Althusser. But most important was my direct experience of the red under-proletarian suburb and the North African Arab immigrants.

In 1972 I started as a doctoral student in sociology at the Department of Sociology at the University of Lund in Sweden. In 1980 I defended together with my colleague Bengt A. Nilsson our doctoral thesis, a classroom observation study of a higher primary school in Sweden, with, among others Bourdieu's work as a theoretical and epistemological framework.

I had discovered Bourdieu in 1972 through the book he wrote together with J. C. Passeron: *La Réproduction* (Bourdieu & Passeron 1970). This book became the theoretical framework of my sociology of education project, the first classroom observation study with anthropological methods done in Sweden. Our work was interrupted by long journeys in West Africa, where I was training Master students in education by doing research in the countryside, while Inger lived in the forest with a Prophet Women leader of a revival movement calling Kiang-kiang, on which she would also write her thesis; *The birth of religion among the Balanta of Guinea-Bissau* (Callewaert 2000).

Some years before, Passeron had visited the Department of Sociology at the University of Lund. His seminars with the doctoral students made deep impressions on the important local empirical work in sociology of education under the direction of Professor Bengt Gesser.

I was appointed as professor at the Department of Education of Copenhagen University 1980, at that time the only institute for so-called 'theoretical pedagogy', that is to say a department that was not a Teacher Training College. I started a Bourdieu seminar for Masters and Ph.D students in Sociology of Education. Prof. Karin Anna Petersen became at first my informal assistant and with her came an important number of nurses wanting to perform a Masters or a Ph. D. in nursing science, which at that time did not exist in Denmark. I opened up for that possibility and after a while we had a huge number of dissertations by people from very different disciplines and places inspired either by the work of Bourdieu, Foucault or the Frankfurt-school with Habermas.

In 2009 Karin Anna Petersen was appointed professor of nursing science at the University of Bergen, successor of Prof. Kari Martinsen. Because of her sharp competence in Bourdieu studies, Bergen got a new research seminar on Bourdieu for master and doctoral students in nursing science; Callewaert participated sporadically (Petersen & Callewaert 2013).

In this environment, the assistant of Karin Anna Petersen, assoc. prof. Jeanne Boge became associated, bringing along the doctoral and masters students she was directing to Foucault and his concept of *dispositif* in their theoretical and empirical work. These research projects addressed problems such as why did Norwegian nurses get imposed specific rules for patients' hygienic comfort, for parents' presence/absence at the Clinic where their small children were treated, and why nurses

writing about patients' progress in the patient medical journal were suddenly no longer allowed to write in their own words, but only by filling in pre-ordered schemes on their computer.

Prof. Karin Anna Petersen felt that the use of Foucault concepts alone, instead of the concepts of Bourdieu, was not without problems for the praxeology paradigm, and that was also my first impression. We thought also that the concept of *dispositif* was vague, and less apt to express the understanding and explanation of nursing practices we were looking for. Later on, the reference to the *dispositif* concept was discarded, but Foucault was kept by some students as the main or exclusive focus for their work in nursery science.

Therefore, some of us started studying Foucault again, specifically the texts related to the concept of *dispositif*. We also studied the Scandinavian researchers who used the concept, such as the philosopher prof. Raffsnøe at Copenhagen Business School. As a guest lecturer I started a comprehensive study of Foucault's use of the concept. As a result, articles for scientific review are published (Boge et al. 2016).

I had published a book with some chapters on Foucault's *Les Mots et les Choses* (Foucault 1966) and an article on "Bourdieu's Critic of Foucault" (Callewaert 2006); I had held lectures on *The Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault 1963) as a possible inspiration for the understanding of the birth of a Nursing Science at Uppsala, see Callewaert 2003.

To work with Foucault was not new to us, and it had also been part of Kari Martinsen's research and lecturing e.g. *Modernitet, avfortrylling og skam. En måte å lese vestens medisin på i det moderne* (Martinsen 2008: 423-439).

### **Bourdieu and Passeron, Passeron and Foucault, Bourdieu against Foucault?**

Because of my personal research-curriculum, I always have Bourdieu as a reference when reading Foucault; I cannot avoid it. Therefore, I am interested in contributions which help to clarify or objectify the impact of that situation. Reading the book *Lectures de Bourdieu* (Lebaron & Mauger 2012), with a contribution of José Luis Moreno Pestaña: "Pierre Bourdieu & Jean-Claude Passeron" (ibid.: 353-372). I noticed the following:

...the scientific collaboration (between Passeron and Bourdieu) ended 1972 and their institutional context becomes different. From 1968 and 1977 Passeron did work with Foucault, within the framework of the experimental university of Vincennes.<sup>3</sup>

It is not obvious what is meant. Foucault left Vincennes in 1970, after two years. After an affiliation with the Conseil National de la Recherche Scientifique CNRS between 1977 and 1981, Passeron went to the Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, EHESS, and moved to the Marseille department of the EHESS. In 1986 he published his master work "Le raisonnement sociologique" (1991) discussing his own very personal epistemology and methodology. After Bourdieu had passed

away 2002, Passeron again participated with the other researchers from the “movement Bourdieu” in commemorative and follow-up activities.

Passeron went to work with Foucault at Vincennes; Foucault at the Department of Philosophy, Passeron at the Department of Sociology. Passeron left Bourdieu because of differences stemming from *The craft of sociology* (1991), finally made explicit in his “Le raisonnement sociologique”, but without engaging in any long discussion with Bourdieu as such. My focus was on Foucault’s *dispositif* concept, so I did not follow up the implicit Bourdieu-Passeron discussion, being only interested in possible Foucault-Passeron links in relation to the concept of “*dispositif*”. Alas, the concept appears only on in the trivial sense of the “*dispositif multidimensional de recherches...*” (Passeron 1991:76).

When I published my article “Bourdieu Critic of Foucault: The Case of Empirical Social Science against Double-Game-Philosophy” (Callewaert 2006: 73-98) in the English Review *Theory, Culture and Society*. I had become more aware of the fact that Bourdieu criticized Foucault in many instances, mainly because of what Bourdieu considered to be an attempt to destroy the very possibility to do sociology, while conserving classic philosophy intact and borrowing themes and problems from sociology, without submitting to its scientific methods. Foucault, however never developed a critique of Bourdieu.

Paul Veyne explains how Foucault and Passeron already at the Ecole Normale Supérieure were associated to the same group, to which Bourdieu were not affiliated (2008). Veyne was, just like Bourdieu and Foucault, at that same period a student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure.

Paul Veyne, who became a historian, specializing in Greek and Roman Antiquity and also a close friend of Foucault, tells in his autobiography that Foucault never said a word on sociology while extensively discussing other social sciences like psychology or education. Veyne states in an ironic way that there were two bodies Foucault never consulted: the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* and the works of Bourdieu! But Veyne still feels that many of the main theses of Foucault have a kinship to Bourdieu’s work (Veyne 2008:155). Both Veyne and Foucault are said to prefer to follow Passeron when it comes to the philosophy and methodology of sociology. I myself have always considered Foucault to be typically a philosopher pretending to be a historian of systems of thought, which was also the name of the chair he got at the Collège de France. Today, I would not follow Habermas in his critique of Foucault as a radical relativist, as I did in my first publication *Om Foucault og Postmodernisme-diskussionen* (Callewaert 1987). I accept the complex explanations offered by Veyne in his intellectual biography of Foucault (2008) concerning Foucault’s epistemology and method. Veyne is naturally aware of a basic difference between Bourdieu and Foucault, related to their social origin poor peasant/petty civil servant on one side, high bourgeois medicine professor at the Clinic of Poitiers on the other side. The rather aristocratic origin of Foucault and his colleagues, expressed itself during the sixties in the fact that Foucault, Passeron, Veyne and other well-to-do students at the École Normale Supérieure were all members of

the local Cell of the French Communist Party! They constituted at the same time a sort of club of well-to-do friends who lived apart at the École. As for Bourdieu, Veyne writes: “Quant au célèbre Pierre Bourdieu, qui n’était pas membre du parti, il mangeait à une autre table, plus sérieuse que la nôtre” (Veyne 2008: 66), translation: “As far as the famous Bourdieu was concerned, who was not member of the communist party, he took his meal at another table, more serious than ours”. Bourdieu did not have to break with the Party, but instead was to leave his social class.

Passeron understands the sharp difference between himself and Bourdieu as related to, among other things, the fact that Bourdieu should have been a Durkheimian to the bitter end, Passeron himself being inspired rather by Weber: The contrast being between “to consider human actions like things“ and “sociology is about meaningful action“.

Passeron worked together with Foucault at Vincennes, according to Pestana or Veyne, describes a small group of friends, all members of the FCP cell, at the ENS, among them Foucault, Veyne and Passeron, while Althusser was their intellectual mentor and model. He states that one cannot understand the epistemology of Passeron without relating it to that of Veyne and Foucault, who both were extremely critical of sociology. Foucault was at that time already an assistant in psychology at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Like Foucault, Passeron chose psychology as empirical science special, in addition to philosophy. Like Bourdieu, he participated with the French Army in the Algerian war of independence and like Bourdieu he became attached to the sociological institute directed by Raymond Aron. May 1968 saw the departure of Aron and the nomination of Bourdieu as director. Bourdieu and Passeron wrote *The Craft of sociology* (1968) and *La Réproduction* (1970) together. Passeron’s book (1991) has discussions with Bourdieu, and only one single line to typify Foucault.

All these hints are interesting, but certainly too simple, if we really shall understand, for example, the background of “le jeu de Michel Foucault” (The game of Michel Foucault), referring to the explanation Foucault gives to the Lacan researchers from the review “Ornicar” concerning the origin/genealogy of the “Dispositif of Sexuality” concept (Gordon 1980). He explains how, one day, it came to his mind that he could, as a sort of a game, turn the relation between sex and sexuality upside-down, to see what happens if we suppose that it is not sex that produces sexuality, but sexuality that produces sex. It is the deployment of sexuality, the infinite thinking, talking and intervening about sex, that is the condition of the possibility to have sex, to think of sex, to experience sex, as we have it today, and not the other way around. Foucault pretends that he was convinced in his idea to inverse the relation between sexuality and sex as a game, from the inspiration Freud got from a remark of Charcot at the end of a session exposing hysterical women at the amphitheater of the Salpêtrière Clinic, where Charcot provoked the rise and decline of violent “symptoms” by putting his hand or a wooden baton on the ovaries of the so called hysteric women. Freud heard Charcot murmur: “it’s all sexual”. This lead Foucault to the conclusion: Freud is not responsible for the final breakthrough in

the modern history of sexuality, he had it from Charcot, which is to say from psychiatry. Freud's radical new contribution was, contrarily, the discovery of the "unconscious" as the explanation, rather than sexuality as such.

### **Paul Veyne on the concept of *dispositif***

Before looking at Foucault's different texts which offer a sort of definition of the *dispositif* concept, let us have a look at what Veyne has to say on *dispositif* in his biographical monography on Foucault and his work. Paul Veyne has contributed to the clarification of what Foucault meant by the concept of *dispositif* in three chapters of his book concerning the person and the thinking of Foucault (Veyne 2008):<sup>4</sup>

To the contrary, for Foucault nothing is the reflection of an ideal; all politics are only the product of a concatenation of causes; it has no totality outside its disposition, it does not express anything more elevated than itself, even if we drown its singularity under noble generalities.

[Foucault] makes it impossible to be like Sartre or Bourdieu, a generalist intellectual, who takes a stand on the basis of an idealistic view for the society, or of the sense of history. Foucault wants to be a specialist intellectual. (Veyne 2008: 115).

A very strange, erroneous comment, since Bourdieu has constructed his work as a social science specialist in opposition to Sartre's model. Bourdieu has demonstrated how social sciences shall not be based on an idealistic view of society or of the sense of history. Veyne again:

... science is maintaining itself and persists, without the help of a heaven of ideas, which doesn't exist, because science is elaborated under the constraint of an institution, the university based research, and under the rule of conformity with a program of rigor; science is based upon a *dispositif* which is composed of rules, traditions, teaching, special buildings, institutions, powers etc. ... This *dispositif* forms at the same time the object "science" and the individuals ..., forms the role of scientist; they interiorize this role. The genealogy of a science is nothing else than this mutual genesis of the subject and the object of science; the *dispositif* consists of the interface of subject and object. The scientist makes science and science returns it well. ... the social role of being a scientist is produced by the *dispositif* ....

Why is Foucault adding this subjectivation to the objectivation ...in order to make an end to the illusion that the subject exists prior to its roles ...the scientist and the *dispositif* exert power on each other, and science exerts power on society ...what is taken for granted in a *dispositif* has the power to be obeyed ...it is true that you are obliged to obey your prince ... these truths are true ... because they are immanent within institutional, traditional, didactic, legal *dispositifs*. These

truths are in a circular way bounded to systems of power which are producing and maintaining them (Veyne 2008:133-136).

I wonder where an old fox like Veyne has this incredible naive view of universities and science from, but let that be.

Politics and economics are neither things that exist, nor are they errors, or illusions or ideologies. They are something which does not exist and nevertheless is inscribed in the real, depending of a truth regime which distinguish truth from error (Veyne 2008:139).

The mutual implication of power and knowledge is the simple basis of social life: “Il est de fait que, sans qu’aucune violence soit exercée sur eux, les gens se conforment à des règles, suivent des coutumes qui leur semblent évidentes”. Translation: “It is a plain fact that people conform their behavior to rules, follow the customs which are evident for them, without being exposed to violence” (Veyne 2008: 141).

The unavoidable question for a historian is: “What is the truth concerning this or that object of study?” The question has become sharp because of the Foucault concept of “discourses”, and even more because of his “dispositifs”; through these dispositifs, what we call society prescribes in a given place and at a given time, what is true and what is false speech. The work of Foucault aims to prove how every idea which one believes in is an eternal idea, is in fact an idea which has a history” (Veyne 2008: 164).

We may recall here Canguilhem’s idea that “the history of truth” is sort of a *contradictio in terminis*. Either the assertion is true, and then it has no history, or it has a history, and then what you believed yesterday was in fact false. That something like the history of science has a history of breaks, is not self-evident. Hence the innovative aspect of the so called “French Historical Epistemology”:

And what about power? Power is the capacity to conduct the conduct of people without physical violence ...power is transported by a hair fine web so well stricken together, so one may wonder if there is power at all involved ...liberty is based upon more or less resistance ...liberty can oppose the dispositif of the moment, but what liberty is opposing then is the mental and social dispositif. One cannot demand that Antiquity’s Christendom was thinking of abolishing slavery. The dispositif is less a determinism than the obstacle against which thought and liberty react or do not react; they are activated because the dispositive is itself active (Veyne 2008: 144).

Veynes explanation is de-mystifying the concept, in comparison of many of Foucault’s own texts on the subject, or many of others’ writings about it. It is about what at a given moment in a given place is already realized as the external material shape of social reality and the personal incorporation of it, realized by a power as



pacific as possible, against which its subjects are resisting. Veyne, unfortunately, compares this dispositive idea with the Anglo-Saxon theories of roles or of socialization, a comparison which kills the originality of Foucault. But both Veyne and Foucault are here hopelessly naive; Bourdieu will express some doubts about the efficiency of such a “hair fine web stricken so well together ...”.

Where shall we then find the analogy between Bourdieu’s habitus/field theory and Foucault’s dispositif theory? That is: Between an unconscious or rather preconscious, implicit orientation of thoughts, words and deeds on the side of Bourdieu’s habitus, that is to say disposition that is the product of taking part in a position, and Foucault’s truth which turns around a dispositif and the resistance against it.

Sociologies profess the same doctrine in their own way; no individual exist, unless he is socialized. Subjectivation in the sense of Foucault occupies the same place in society as with Bourdieu the notion of habitus, this couple of conversion between the social and the individual (Veyne, 2008: 144)

In fact, that is not true. Bourdieu does not teach the same doctrine as Foucault. Veyne cannot imagine Foucault as sociologist; he is, has decided to be himself, a philosopher, not only a professor of philosophy, a philosophical specialist of systems of thought, but also a philosopher and historian. Bourdieu did not want to be a philosopher, he went through a break with philosophy as his ‘special’ and started again to do sociology and anthropology. I also think that Foucault’s obsession with causal explanations ends up in a sort of mist where sometimes all cats are grey. But for me the problem with Foucault is that he at the end has so many reservations and restrictions in what he can accept as interpretation of people’s thoughts, because what they are doing seems to be less important, at least it is not comprehended by what is left of the theory concerning systems of thought.

### **The concept of dispositif in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975)**

The final pages of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* containing the model of socialization invented by and for the prison, which he calls the carcel and which he considers has pervaded the whole society, is different from his lectures on conduct of conduct as the exercise of power by governmentality etc., which appear later on.

Foucault takes the agricultural and penal colony of Mettray, near the city of Tours, for children and adolescent transgressors of the Law, opened in 1840 and closed in 1937, as a typical example of the ‘new penal policy of the body’ using coercive technologies of conduct (Foucault 1975: 300). This colony is interesting to Foucault’s purpose, because it unites the characteristics of family life, service in the army, school education, and work place rules, each time with a specific form of power, direction, rules, and punishments of deviant conduct. The principal punishment consists of the isolation in a cell, being the most efficient way to influence the moral of the children: “God sees you”. The staff incarnates all these specific, special

competences, but in an applied form: Engineer of conduct, orthopedist of individuality, presidents at the bath, for example e.g. (Boge 2008; Boge 2011; Boge e.a. 2013; Boge e.a. 2016). They have to produce bodies which are at the same time submissive and capable (Foucault 1975: 301). The application of these techniques result in knowledge of the soul and maintenance of subjection. The taming combines with other forms of control based upon medicine, education, religion, and administration, apparently totally different from the discipline. The staff were submitted to the same discipline as they had to impose on the children. Foucault calls Mettray the first “*école normale*”.<sup>5</sup> Foucault pretends that the normalization practice of undisciplined people by force can itself become normalized by technical elaboration and rational reflexivity. The disciplinary technique can become a ‘discipline’ (=science?) of its own school *école normale*! Ironic use of the label.

Foucault considers these efforts parts of the origin of scientific psychology, assisted by elements of physiology, medicine, and psychiatry, leading to a “reflexive technique of control of the norms” for these practices.

Foucault (1975: 305) uses the term *dispositif* in order to say: this model of the carcel will by a number of *dispositifs* be transferred to the whole society and its relations and mechanisms. Not the carcel in the compact form it has within the prison, but some of its mechanisms for example in the way the system of social houses for workers’ families is organized, which is still marked by the fact that the model comes from the carcel; *dispositifs disciplinaires* for the poor are disseminated all over the society. They will gradually become *dispositifs* for the ‘population’.

Foucault suggests that the delinquent population is created by the disciplinary *dispositifs*, aside from the Law. Because it becomes natural to punish not only by the Law and the juridical order, but by all the ‘disciplines’ (ibid.: 308).

After the revolution and the dissolution of the feudal order, a new right to punish was installed. The interesting question is not “on which juridical basis”, but rather how did one get people to accept the power to punish or to be punished that way. The answer is that the creation of a complete network of discipline *dispositifs* made it ‘normal’ to be punished for all ‘abnormal’ conduct. It is no longer the Law that creates the right to punish and the acceptance of punishment by the punished, but a whole new world of pedagogic, medical, and psychiatric expertise and institutions removed from the Law, for the betterment of the abnormal, but soon of everybody. We have the teacher-judge, the medical doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker-judge etc.: All of them exercising the power to normalize (ibid.: 311). With them comes an enormous activity of scrutinizing behavior, which opens up for the development of the so called ‘sciences of man’. One does not say that the sciences of man are born in the carcel, but that the episteme underlying them is borrowed from a new modality of exercising power: by politics of the body, making bodies docile and utile.

The carcelar network is one of the frames of this power-knowledge which made the human sciences historically possible. What can be known about man (soul,

individuality, conscience, behavior, you name it) is the result-object of this analytic investment, of this domination-observation (Foucault 1975: 312).

With the result that there arises a graduated parallelism between the transgression and the punishment. We have to do not with a misdeed, or a prejudice of the common good, but we have to do with a difference, an anomaly. We have long series of punishments parallel to series of abnormal behavior (Foucault 1975: 311).

Because the carcelar system is hidden in the midst of dispositifs and strategies of power, it can resist against whoever would want to change it, a big capacity of inertia (Foucault 1975: 312).

The prison is not alone to occupy a central position, it is bounded to other ‘carcelar’ dispositifs, which appear to be of well distinguished nature, since they are intended to relieve, to recure, to help, but which tend in the same way as the prison to exercise a normalization power. These dispositifs are not applied on transgressions of the Law, but around the production apparatus (trade and industry) on a multiplicity of transgressions with their diversity of nature and origin. ...So that the notion of repressive institution ...is not adequate to describe at the Centre of the carcelar Town, things like ...techniques, and at the end ‘sciences’, (always within brackets! they are not really sciences for Foucault), which allow for the fabrication of the disciplined individual ...bodies and forces subjugated under many forms of dispositifs of ‘incarceration’, objects for discourses which are themselves elements of this strategy (Foucault 1975: 315; the last sentence of the book).

I think it is very important to recognize the immense contribution of Foucault regarding this definition of a historical, qualitative difference in the societal order: we pass from ethics or morals to techniques. But I would say that at the same time Foucault and his followers have for a long time obscured and hidden what was happening, because this understanding/explanation of the technical/qualitative change has not been related to the underlying economic, social and cultural structural changes. Macro changes in social history are presented as ‘technical’ changes existing by themselves. The fear of appearing as another variation of the Marxism of that period, tainted by the ideology of the mass communist parties, combined with the “the craft of philosophy”, led Foucault to the creation of a new type of discourse, more ethic than ethic.<sup>6</sup>

Foucault will at the end talk of an ‘éthétisation’ (not esthétisation) of one’s way of life (Foucault 1984). The concept is a transposition of the Greek word/concept of ethos, which means in French usage, coutume, moeurs.

***The history of Sexuality 1: The will to know (1976; 1981)***

It is not possible to find a new short definition of the concept of dispositive in this book, since it is omnipresent, and structuring the book. This small book is sort of a presentation of a lifelong research project for Foucault and for others who want to contribute.

Part one describes our common understanding of ourselves as formed by Queen Victoria's prudery.

Part two develops two aspects of the counter-hypothesis, countering the hypothesis that we have all lived in a culture which was repressive of sex:

1. The constant incitement to develop discourses about sex.
2. The implantation of sexual perversities by constantly talking about them.

Part three explains how instead of developing an "ars erotica" we developed a "scientia sexualis", the procedures of the coming "sciences of man", that is to say the sciences based upon the interrogation and confession of people, and the interpretation (hermeneutics) of what is said and what is done. The model is concerned, among other things, with the Christian ritual of individualized confession in relation to the interrogation, questioning, examination, inquiry, and interview by the priest, and soon by parents, police, the medical.

Part four develops the different aspects of the 'Dispositif of sexuality'. The basic idea is to offer a guideline for and an invitation to collaborate in a common enterprise of researching the following aspects for all periods and countries:

1. What is at stake?
2. What is the method?
3. What is the domain?
4. The periods of its development

Foucault characterizes this call to move to start inquiring, with the formula used by Virgil in the Book VI of the Aeneid, attributed to the goddess Juno saying "flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo" ("If I cannot deflect the will of Heaven, I shall move Hell"), a formula also used by Freud as motto of his "The interpretation of Dreams" figuring Acheron (river) as the psychological underworld beneath the conscious mind: "There is the truth: go and find it there by surprise" is the transposition by Foucault to our time's question, "why sex is so secret" (Foucault 1976: 103).

Part five explains the relation between sexuality and the right of paternal powers to dispose of 'life or death', today transformed into the care of 'the population' as a central part of government, and hence the care of the interconnection of alliance/family and sexuality in a broad sense. This makes for 75 pages on the "dispositive of sexuality", i.g. how does sexuality create/manage sex and how can we manage the dispositif(s) of sexuality.

Philippe Ariès has a wonderful article in the *Review L'Arc* no 70 (1977: 27-32), "A Propos de 'La volonté de savoir'", where he responds to the proposition of Foucault and gives his own 'dream' of the history of the dispositif of sexuality and its relation to sex.

### **The Confession of the Flesh or The game of Foucault**

Next text is taken from a meeting with the disciples of Lacan. It goes under the original heading "le jeu de Foucault/the game of Foucault", or, in the English translation: "The confession of the flesh" (Foucault 1975).

We can find the definition of the concept of dispositif a bit more formalized in this review article of the Lacan-inspired psychoanalytic research in Paris (*Ornicar* nr 10: 1977: 62-93). The article is the transcription of a meeting between Foucault and the members of the Direction of the Review, which Foucault himself had asked for after *Discipline and Punish* had been published in 1975 and a new research program had been announced in "The History of Sexuality 1. The Will to Knowledge" in 1976/1978/1998, wherein the concept of dispositif is used extensively. Foucault's objective is to get comments from friendly-minded researchers on these two books, and to get help on how to proceed in the further implementation of this research project, also concerning other domains to be clarified with the help of the concept of dispositif. The psychoanalytic sparring partners are somewhat confused by Foucault's series of central concepts over the years: dispositif of sexuality is neither taken from biology, from the history of the sciences, from the history of ideas or morals, or from the history of sexual practices. It deals with the 'dispositif de sexualité'. What then is the methodological function of the concept of 'dispositif'? Foucault answers with one definition and a multitude of explanations.

The English translation is published in Colin Gordon (1980: 194-228). Some lines of the introduction to the text by Foucault are mysteriously omitted in the English translation published in Colin Gordon (1980), and the heading is changed, without explanation.

The concept of 'the flesh' is what Foucault at first believed the first generations of Christian thinkers/writers used to name the human body as it, after the Fall of Adam and Eve, had become the cause of immorality. Later it was called "the original sin" affecting body and soul. This idea was, in fact, invented by Tertullianus among others, in order to be able to defend the application of baptism, communicating the remission of all sins and salvation by the life and death of Jesus Christ. The application of baptism gives priority to children, who cannot have sinned personally, but are not innocent either and need to be baptized soon, to find a new innocence, since through their origin in their own parents they inherited from the first parents the original sin of Adam and Eve.

This has to do with how Tertullianus conceived man. When a child was conceived/born, it was supposed to be constituted half by its father's and half by its mother's body and soul. As a result, both the child's soul and body were affected

by the sin of their parents, and should be baptized in order to participate in the salvation constituted by the life and death of Jesus. Tertullianus was a North African Berber living 160-225, son of an officer of the Roman army stationed at Carthago, and a Christian mother with a classical education. At first he became a jurisconsult, later working as a theologian writer, developing the doctrine of the official Christian Church, principally by his writings. Later he passed to the Montanist group, but his writings were an inspiration to all later Latin theologians like Augustinus, Cyprianus etc., principally in their polemics with Gnosticism. The principal competitor of the Christian churches to replace the Roman official state organization around a sort of ancestor cult with deities borrowed from the Greeks.

Foucault would, according to his original plan, publish a second volume of the History of Sexuality with the title: *Les aveux de la chair* (The confessions of the flesh). He did not, however, succeed in publishing any additional volumes before he passed away from HIV/AIDS. He did, meanwhile, finish the two volumes *The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault 1984a) and *The Care of the Self* (Foucault 1984b) according to the Greek and Roman Classic and Christian Antiquity *l'Usage des plaisirs* (Foucault 1984) and *Le souci de soi* (Foucault 1984), stating once that the Classic and Christian view of sexuality and marriage were basically the same, not antagonistic as he at first believed.

Most importantly still for Foucault was to identify the 'confession of sin' as the first form of 'confession', necessitating a corresponding scrutinizing of the mind, which slowly was transformed from being a collective ritual of the community before participating in the memorial of the Last Supper in the Holy Mass, into a preparation for the individual confession in relation to the interrogation by the priest. Foucault would follow the development of 'the will to know' into the complex of 'sexuality' concerning sex. The confession with its basis in the scrutinizing of one's mind would become a theme Foucault developed in all his courses at the Collège de France, from Tertullianus to Freud sitting behind his patient laying on the couch.

After the publication of *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality 1. The will to Knowledge*, Foucault was thus invited to a conversation with the members of the Lacan-inspired psychoanalysis review *Ornicar* for a discussion. Together with them, he was on a common ground, so to speak, concerning the question of sex and sexuality.

The conversation started with the attempt by Foucault to present a clear definition of the central concept of both books, the concept of *dispositif*, in this case the *dispositif* of sexuality. Later the board published the transcription of the conversation under the heading "The game of Foucault", because Foucault attributed the use of the concept and the whole plan to write the history of sexuality, which from the start was meant as a game in the hope to learn from a change of perspective that turns things upside down. Instead of expecting that sexuality is born from sex, Foucault (Foucault 1980) tries out the idea that, to the contrary, sex is born from the never ending problematization of sex in sexuality:

Then I turned the whole thing upside down. That was only a game, because I wasn't sure ... . Couldn't it be that sex... be something which to the contrary is produced by the apparatus (=dispositif) of sexuality? What the discourse of sexuality was initially applied to wasn't sex but the body, the sexual organs, pleasures, kinship relations, interpersonal relations, and so forth ... (ibid. 210)

I am saying let's try to shift the scenery and take as our starting point something else which is just as manifest as the 'break', provided one changes the points of reference. One then finds this formidable mechanism emerging – the machinery of the confession, within which in fact psychoanalysis and Freud figure as episodes (211) ... Not a delusive appearance, but a fabrication (ibid. 212).

...I would say in the same way that from the day it was said to man 'You shall not merely make yourself pleasure with your sex, you will make yourself truth, and that truth will be your truth, from the day Tertullian began saying to the Christians, 'Where your chastity is concerned ...'

I was only joking there... (ibid. 213)

Foucault tells his colleagues that some readers of his first draft were not satisfied with it, leading him to the idea to inverse as a game the terms of the relation changing the points of reference: changing the idea that it was sex that was at the origin of sexuality, into the idea that it was sexuality that was at the origin of sex. That appeared to be the right way.

When Colin Gordon (1980) published the English translation of the *Ornicar* text, he gave the text the heading of "the confession of the flesh" understanding the text in terms of the Christian confession of one's sins to the priest in the individual confession taking place at least once a year, on the basis of one's own examination of oneself and responding to the scrutinizing of the priest. Foucault feels confirmed in his idea that it is the complexity of thoughts and regulations developed around sexual behavior in what we call sexuality, more precisely the *dispositif* of sexuality, that constitutes sex as an entity, and not the other way around. Foucault invites his readers to think the inversed relation to experience that it is the true way of thinking.

But the *Ornicar* people is more interested of what is meant by *dispositif*, which is new in these two books. It is a new historical object 'sexuality' and 'dispositive of sexuality'. It is not a sort of botanist or biologist discourse, not traditional history of ideas or customs; it does not speak of sexual practices; we speak of a *dispositif* of sexuality:

1. The elements of the *dispositif* is a heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions, the said and the unsaid.

2. The dispositive itself is the relation between the elements. The question is to know the nature of this connection, what it is meant to justify, to mask, to reinterpret that which is creating a new form of rationality.
3. The dispositif responds to an urgent need at a given moment in the community.
4. It was the dispositif that took slowly the control of madness, mental illness and neuroses.

The genesis of the dispositif by

- The prevalent influence of the strategic objective.
- The impact of a strategic re-elaboration of the getting and holding together of the elements.

Nevertheless, installing the carceral system in prisons, for example, totally failed, without any ruse of any transhistoric subject; the result was the constitution of a criminal/delinquent milieu very different from the 18<sup>th</sup> century's illegalist practices. From 1830 and on, the delinquent milieu was re-utilized so to say, example the extraction of profit of pleasure through the organization of prostitution.

Somebody asks the delicate question: are you now working in your research and practical application with the contemporary struggles that are to be fought, the world that has to be changed rather than interpreted?

Foucault answers by suggesting that he may be at cross purposes; being unsure how to make sure that the dispositif can maintain its strategic orientation, maintaining the articulation of forces and knowledge. Episteme is a discursive dispositif, the dispositif must be both discursive and non-discursive; the idea is to get further to a non-discursive effect. It is not a question of ideas, but of forces supporting ideas.

### **Three texts from the round table**

[1] A text that is a part of Foucault's answers to the questions of the historians at the conference, organized to discuss his book on the new penal regime symbolized by the new carcels. This text is reproduced in JD Faubion (ed): *Michel Foucault. Power* (Faubion 1994; French original 1980: 223-238).

This presentation of the text in the most important early volume of texts in English under the label of 'method' is very misleading, because the idea of 'method' as a standardized official working method of a given 'science' is not to be found in the works of Foucault. But it will nevertheless be attributed to Foucault.

I will concentrate on the part quoted by Boge/Storum and Sandal in their first outline (Boge et al 2016). In that text the concept of dispositif does not occur, well in the next quote. In this first text Foucault answers the question: "why did you write a book precisely on the prison".



[2] Why select the Prison as theme (Foucault 1980: 230-232). The concept of *dispositif* appears first in the next answer, where Foucault explains that his approach is not just the same as Weber's 'ideal type', the reforms being 'programs' (Foucault 1980: 232 = The French *dispositif* is translated by 'apparatus', which is very misleading).

[3] The third text is also from the discussions with the historians. It insists upon the idea that the whole complex of ideas, practices, etc. must be understood as 'events'. Cfr Power: Questions of method. Eventualisation. (Foucault 1980: 230).

The volume *Sécurité, Territoire, Population Course 1977-1978*. Sueil Gallimard (2004). "Redacteurs: Francois Ewald & Alessandro Fontana".

In this volume of the transcription of the course, we will find (according to the index: 417): *Dispositif(s)*

- diplomatico-militaire
- military
- of politics enter states
- of polity policy
- of European equilibrium
- of discipline
- of power
- of security
- of sovereignty

Remark how the use of the concept follows the different meanings of the word in everyday or technical French language: *dispositif* means an assemblage/deployment of different elements operative in a juridical, military or technical context. The important point is the net which holds its different parts together.

The next important point is that this net of assembled elements lies open for an intervention which inserts one more element, transforming the capacity of the whole *dispositif*. In everyday language: the final decision of the court, the way the army is deployed before the final attack, the instrument to repair the motor of the car. The world as it lies open for an intervention which will change the order of things. The world as it is just before an intervention changes everything. The aptitude of the world to receive and let the intervention work. The world as it is well-disposed, well-arranged and of good will to let something work, the world which offers the conditions of possibility of the capacity to direct and order the field at stake concerning domains that can be very different.

*Is Foucault's 'dispositif' the same as Bourdieu's 'habitus' (disposition)?*

The answer is NO, unlike what Veyne (2008, 2010) is suggesting. The error starts already with the association of 'dispositif' and 'disposition', which is exactly the concept Bourdieu tries to avoid, by introducing *habitus* instead of *disposition*, but

he has himself re-introduced it because of his love of games with words. His theory of 'habitus/field' is about the connection of 'position/dispositions/positionings'. Dispositif is not the same as disposition; these two concepts are basically not aiming at the same complex.

Where, then, would the analogy with Bourdieu's habitus to operate in a field lie? The analogy of Foucault's dispositif with Bourdieu's unconscious, implicit disposition which orients thoughts, words and actions in a field, the practical sense, the sense of the game in a definite field with its stakes? For Foucault, the idea of a dispositif of thinking and handling the social world guided by the way it is disposed, implies that the so disposed world has already become problematic and problematized, it can and will move either the one or the other way. For instance, the way one has sex, thinks of sex, talks about sex, internalizes orientations about sex, all that sort of practices are what the dispositif turns around. Disposition with Bourdieu aims at an explanation, in principal a causal explanation, something Foucault wants to avoid at all costs.

### **Fearless Speech at Berkeley 1983**

Foucault says in his Berkeley lecture 1983 on the "frankness of speaking the truth":

The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience becomes a problem, raises discussions and debate, incite new reactions and induces crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices and institutions. It is the history of the way people become anxious, for example about madness, about crime, about themselves or about truth (Foucault 2001).

...what I intended to analyze in most of my work was neither past people's behavior (...) nor ideas in their representative values, (but) how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) became a problem (Ibid:171) ...some real existent in the world which was the target of social regulation... How and why were very different things in the world gathered together... and treated as, for example, mental illness.

I have tried to show that the new problematization of illness of physical disease at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was very directly linked to certain practices ..., to a new social reaction to diseases ... .

The problematization is an 'answer' to a concrete situation which is real ...a given problematization is not an effect or consequence of a historical context or situation, but is an answer given by definite individuals (...at a certain point an answer may become so general that it also becomes anonymous). (ibid:172).

Compare his answer at the meeting with the historians.

These answers are not collective ones from any sort of collective unconscious, ...nor an effect of a situation ... (it is) always a kind of creation ... in the sense that, given a certain situation, you cannot infer that this kind of problematization will follow ...you can only understand why this kind of answer appears as a reply to some concrete and specific aspect of the world ...the original, specific and singular answer of thought – to a certain situation ...it is this kind of specific relation between truth and reality which I have tried to analyze in the various problematizations of parrhesia (Foucault 2001: 173).

In a way it is very simple if we compare with Bourdieu's chapter "Understanding" in *The Weight of the World* (Bourdieu 1999), talking about the social scientist's understanding of the behavior and the thoughts of specific people by listening to their answers to definite questions in an interview combined with observation of behavior.

Foucault is not interviewing people, he is interpreting the texts people have left behind who were governing/conducting people to govern/conduct themselves. Because he is not interested in the factual implementation of peoples' thoughts in practices, does not want to know if they are acting upon their thoughts, doing what they taught one should do; because he is primarily interested in the thoughts inspiring plans of action that have been implemented in the case of the prison and the carcelar society for instance, with the opposite effect: the establishment of a criminal environment.

Bourdieu states that Foucault analyzes history as *opus operatum*, not as *modus operandi*; the question is if Foucault at all analyzes practices in terms of their discursive and non-discursive genealogy, rather he is interested in and equipped to analyze the thoughts incarnating a problematization.

That is to say: the old Greek unproblematic answer to sex, where gender is not an issue per se, but only per modalities, feminization of young man is not allowed, man must conserve the dominant role.

Working per *opus operatum* exposes you to the scholastic error, projecting into the mind of the agent as the origin/explanation of the action the explicit concept of the action, not taking into account the unconscious/preconscious impetus and orientation of the habitus. Human action is habitual, has a habitual basis, it is not a pure creation. This concerns not only the conditions of possibility of an action, but the action itself; you are not admitted to do definite things, if you are not a legitimate member of the social category at stake (Bourdieu 1996a). You are not capable to perpetrate the action at stake, because you lack the adequate ability, lacking the unconscious disposition inclining to act, and to act the right way.

The question is if the dispositive of Foucault is the same as the disposition of Bourdieu. Some writings on Foucault, using the language of 'disposition', speaking of the 'dispositional' create this confusion. My impression is that Foucault himself avoids this ambiguity.

But if we take it from the start, we can state that a Foucault's history of thought means to analyze how and why certain behavior, object of social regulation, gets thought of as a problem as a consequence of the answer certain individuals give to a certain state of things in the world. It is not, however, possible to infer this answer from the state of things in the world, to infer, that is to say, by reasoning, because the same sort, the similar gathering together of certain elements is not experienced as a problem, does not create a new phenomenon like madness, illness, sexuality, a carcelare society; it has always something of a creation.

Sexuality = the use of sex = only between a man and a women who are married in order to procreate offspring with moderate experience of pleasure, inspired by stoic philosophy; is different from the old Greek 'sexuality' which did not included a stipulation against same sex.

In the *Ornicar* dialogue, Foucault insists very much on the non-discursive character of the *dispositif*. That is: people are married in this way, live in this way, without it being problematized, and this facilitates the regulating task of the ruling power, because the majority live in the countryside in circumstances that form the conditions of possibility of the model. But the fit between the conditions of possibility and the model gets progressively worse as one moves from the cities in the provinces to Rome.

### **Foucault and Bourdieu according to the *Bourdieu Handbuch***

The excellent German *Bourdieu Handbuch* edited by Gerhard Frölich & Boike Rehbein (Frölich & Rehbein 2009) has a first part on the intellectual biography of Bourdieu and the main currents which influenced him. There is a chapter on Foucault, who was an Assistant-Lecturer at the *École Normale Supérieure* when Bourdieu arrived. Foucault was four years older than Bourdieu, which means a lot at that age. Foucault was also a member of a very influential group of well-to-do students, all members of the local cell of the French Communist Party, among them also the historian Veyne, specialist of Greek and Roman History, who later became a personal friend of Foucault, and wrote a book on his personality and work (Veyne 2008; 2010); he was also Foucault's consultant on Antiquity's Greek and Roman text interpretations.

Hilmar Schäfer, the author of the five columns, explains how Foucault recommended Bourdieu at different occasions, how they were both involved in political manifestations, how they both were exposed to the same initiation to the same intellectual objects and methods in philosophy and the humanities, but never during their lifetime publicly confronted their very different personal ideas. Their education at the ENS was strongly influenced by the existentialist phenomenology and by structuralism, but both would define themselves against these currents, on different grounds. Both were positively influenced by the so called French Historical Epistemology, conducted by Bachelard and Canguilhem. Bourdieu mentions in his auto-socio-analysis Foucault's bourgeois origin, homosexuality, and will to posit

himself as a ‘philosopher’ as factors leading to their very different intellectual works.

Their common ground is their interest in the understanding of the regularity of social practices, which are related to fundamental social orders of knowledge. As ‘discourse’, ‘episteme’ or as ‘habitus’, these orders are structured and structuring. Historically differentiated specific social structures produce a ‘space of what is possible’ in thinking and acting, a concept Bourdieu borrows from Foucault (the reference is to a text of Bourdieu I cannot verify at the moment). Both Foucault’s social history and Bourdieu’s analysis of the structures of a field and the dispositions of and habitus, insist upon the historical discontinuity, upon thinking in relations instead of in terms of substances.

My article, “Bourdieu Critic of Foucault” (Callewaert 2006) explains how Bourdieu’s main criticism concerns the fact that Foucault, and many other philosophers at that time, rejected the new sciences like sociology and anthropology, but at the same time ‘borrowed’ the already elaborated ‘objects’ of these sciences, but working with them in a philosophical way, bypassing the necessary competences in empirical methods. Foucault’s interest in power and politics for example was first aroused at the events of May 1968 which he experienced at the University of Tunis.

Bourdieu develops his discussion with Foucault also in his work: *The rules of art* (Bourdieu 1992; 1996b). Borrowing the notion of ‘field of strategic possibilities’ (ibid. 197) from Foucault. Bourdieu refuses to accept Foucault’s ‘internalist’ interpretation of the concept, considering arising differences in the history of thought only as internal differences from within the cultural field under consideration, rejecting all efforts to relate the differences to factors like personal or social origin, living conditions, or external developments of the society and culture. Foucault conceives of this strategic field of possibilities as absolutely autonomous, like Saussure thinking of ‘language’ as absolutely autonomous vis-à-vis speech, using language. ‘Chat’ in French is ‘katt’ in Swedish, but inversed phonologically as ‘tak’ it means roof in Swedish, but ‘toit’ in French, in this case the difference of meaning follows the difference in sound. The phonological construction is totally independent from the meaning in speech, what is needed is sufficient ‘speaking’ differences of sound, between ‘Tak and Kat’, ‘Toit and Chat’, which are the same in this case, because both derived from the same Germanic origin. It is the same with the relation of discourse and social conditions, discourse should express differences, but as understanding it is not caused by the phenomena it names.

Schäfer states that when Bourdieu discusses this theme again in *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu 1997; 2000) he moves more towards the position of Foucault in this question, underscoring that power is not only forcing people by corporeal and other violence, or by manipulating living conditions, to submit to the rules imposed etc., but to the contrary he underscores how socialization results in people’s submission, becoming themselves the actors of their own submission. But Bourdieu thinks Foucault still situates ‘discipline’ on the institutional level (school, army, prison).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See for example 'appareils' in Althusser's texts.
- <sup>2</sup> Dominican brothers are called Black Friars in Great Britain.
- <sup>3</sup> Translated from French into English by the author.
- <sup>4</sup> Veyne's text are quoted from the original French edition 2008 and translated by the author.
- <sup>5</sup> Institute of education of the teachers of the primary school.
- <sup>6</sup> Ethetic: immediate object of attention, different from esthetic, beauty or ethic, morals.

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