

Foreword

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The purpose of the present volume is to (re-)examine the question of viewing and listening dispositives, from the emergence of the notion in the field of film studies in the late 1960s to the more limited – technical and descriptive – use that followed, as well as the parallel elaboration on the term by Michel Foucault, on a completely different scale, in *Discipline and Punish*, up to more recent developments in literature and art. The book also aims to confront approaches and perspectives in the very different context that is ours today: the generalization of new technologies, the digital era and the appearance of new theoretical developments around these phenomena, new models of knowledge generally situated in the field of media (we are thinking of Jonathan Crary, Friedrich Kittler and Lev Manovich, among others). The emergence of the notion of “dispositif” in film studies was tied to a model of cinema and film corresponding to the “classical” period of the medium, previously examined with different tools by Christian Metz and the various semiological trends. Theoreticians of the “dispositif” intended to move beyond these approaches by focusing on spectators and their place in the cinematic event. Starting in 1978, however, the historiographic turn in film studies towards early cinema brought a starkly different model of cinema and film to the fore, challenging an important part of the historical and theoretical legacy that had dominated the study of cinema for decades. The context of new technologies has shifted the boundaries and spaces of “cinema” yet again. The (ongoing) research on “early cinema” has probably done much to prepare researchers for the current situation, which, as has often been stated, shares a number of characteristics with that of the beginnings of cinema (heterogeneity, intermediality, attraction, incompleteness, variability in reception, and so forth).

Traits of this “past” cinema resurfaced and could then be reconstructed in light of the present (experimental cinema, then new media), in a sort of “backward movement of the true.” At the same time, processes of remediation, technological transfers or the translation of models from one media to another (that of sound with respect to the image, for instance, or, more recently, of the computer with regard to the editing table and new modes of sharing) are remapping the field of study.

Within these diverse frameworks and environments, is an approach in terms of “dispositifs” still relevant and effective? Does the obsolescence of the original apparatus theory point to the need to move beyond any

apprehension of the cinema in these terms? In other words, is the notion still elastic enough to remain pertinent in relation to its object(s), or should we consider that it is linked to an epistemic situation, a historical state of viewing and listening machines?

These questions provided some of the rationale for the international conference organized at the Université de Lausanne, “Dispositifs de vision et d’audition: épistémologie et bilan.” Locally, the event took place within the logic of a general line of research and teaching in the university’s department of Film History and Aesthetics, with a possible prospective program sketched out as early as 2002 with “L’Épistémè 1900,” delivered at the seventh Domitor conference (“Cinéma des premiers temps: technologies et dispositifs”).¹ It is within this area, gradually developed and enriched, that a number of projects were undertaken in the department, materializing in three collective publications.²

At an international level, two conferences had preceded the one on viewing and listening dispositives: the first in Louvain-la-Neuve in April 1998 (“Dispositifs et médiations des savoirs,” co-organized by the Université Paris 8 - St-Denis - Vincennes, the FNRS in Belgium, the CNRS in France and the European Commission), and the second in Marne-la-Vallée in October 2006 (“Les Dispositifs,” with the ENS Louis Lumière, the Université de Marne-la-Vallée and the LISAA).³ Both showed the success enjoyed by

1 The contribution appears in *Le Cinéma, nouvelle technologie du XXe siècle/The Cinema, A New Technology for the 20th Century*, André Gaudreault, Catherine Russell and Pierre Veronneau, eds. (Lausanne: Payot, 2004). Other interventions at the conference, which epitomized a “return” to a functional, descriptive sense of “dispositifs” and to some degree a refusal to problematize the notion, were published in *Cinema & Cie* 3 (2003), “Les technologies de représentation et le discours sur le dispositif cinématographique des premiers temps,” and in *CiNéMAS* 14.1 (2003), “Dispositif(s) du cinéma (des premiers temps).”

2 In order of publication: *Cinema Beyond Film. Media Epistemology in the Modern Era*, François Albera and Maria Tortajada, eds. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), with contributions from the editors as well as Alain Boillat, Laurent Guido and Olivier Lugon; *La Télévision, du téléphoscope à YouTube. Pour une archéologie de l’audiovision*, Mireille Berton and Ann-Katrin Weber, eds. (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2009), with contributions from the editors, François Albera, Stefan Andriopoulos, Christina Bartz, Alain Boillat, Gilles Delavaud, Laurent Guido, Kurd Lasswitz, Lynn Spiegel, Maria Tortajada, William Uricchio, Siegfried Zielinski and others; *Between Still and Moving Images*, Laurent Guido and Olivier Lugon, eds. (Herts, U.K.: John Libbey, 2012), with contributions from the editors as well as François Albera, Alain Boillat, Mireille Berton, Christa Blümlinger, Wolfgang Brückle, Myriam Chermette, Clément Chéroux, Michel Frizot, Tom Gunning, Maria Tortajada, Valérie Vignaux and others.

3 The Louvain conference resulted in a publication in the periodical *Hermès*. See *Hermès* 25, “Le dispositif entre usage et concept” (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1999). Contributions from the Marne-la-Vallée conference appeared in issue 4 of *Cahier Louis-Lumière* (2007), titled “Les dispositifs.”

the notion, which for some had become a “meta-concept,” while for others the “dispositif” had supplanted “structure” or was close to the Deleuzian rhizome.⁴ A philosopher also asked the radical question of what a “dispositif” was.⁵

The confrontation between the researchers attending the conference, who came from different disciplines and “schools of thought,” gave rise to exchanges that proved fruitful and convinced us of the renewed vitality and fertility of a theory of “dispositifs.” Most of the papers presented at the conference have been rewritten to form the substance of this book. A few later contributions have been added; they were part of a cycle of lectures around the issue of “dispositifs,” which started in 2011. Open to international scholars, the cycle was also connected to the doctoral school and to ProDoc programs financed by the FNS.

The studies included here have been divided into three parts: Programs, Issues and Histories. The first part presents two types of programmatic projects related to two institutions of higher education that collaborate with each other while maintaining their distinctive characteristics: the department of Film History and Aesthetics at the Université de Lausanne (François Albera and Maria Tortajada, “The Dispositive Does Not Exist!”) and the department of Visual Studies at the University of Amsterdam (Thomas Elsaesser, “Between Knowing and Believing: The Cinematic Dispositive after Cinema”).

The second part questions the notion of the dispositive by confronting it with one or several objects: spectacles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Patrick Désile), the stereopticon (Charles Musser), the praxinoscope-theater (André Gaudreault); the theoretical corpus of a thinker such as Bergson (Elie During) and a scientist like Marey (Maria Tortajada); or its own theoretical elaboration (Omar Hachemi) and the relation it establishes between two fields, for instance with the “dispositive effect” in film narrative (Philippe Ortel).

The third part brings together studies that start from a concrete technical object or set of objects, such as the crank in different viewing or listening machines (Benoît Turquety) or the dispositives of early serpentine dance films (Laurent Guido); from imaginary objects, telephony as imagined by Robida (Alain Boillat) and Raymond Roussel’s machines as seen through

4 Bernard Vouilloux, “Critique des dispositifs,” *Critique* 718 (March 2007).

5 Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?* (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 2009). More recently, the word has been used in the context of a restrictive definition of cinema: Raymond Bellour, *La Querelle des dispositifs. Cinéma - installations, expositions* (Paris: POL, 2012).

the prism of Foucault's analyses (Christophe Wall-Romana); and from an institutional ensemble ranging from amateur cinema in the 1920s (François Albera) to television (Gilles Delavaud) and reality television in French-speaking Switzerland (Charlotte Bouchez), to installations in the space of the museum (Viva Paci).