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On the Political Ontology of the *Dispositif*

Davide Panagia

At an otherwise unnoteworthy moment during his 18 January 1978 lecture at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault stumbles just when he is about to resume his discussion of the "apparatuses of security" (*dispositifs de sécurité*).[1] In both the English and French edition of the lecture, the interruption is footnoted in the text. Apparently, Foucault had bumped into the microphone of the device recording his lecture. As he recovers and before resuming his discussion he says this: "I am not against any apparatuses [*les appareils*], but I don't know—forgive me for saying so—I'm just a bit allergic."[2] The English doesn't render what's notable in the comment because English is unable to mark the lexical shift, given that the

1. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977—1978*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York, 2009), p. 30.

2. Ibid., p. 30 n. It is worth citing the French edition. Prior to bumping into the mic, Foucault says: "Je voudrais maintenant reprendre cette même analyse des dispositifs de sécurité à partir d'un autre exemple et pour essayer de cerner un peu autre chose: non plus le rapport à l'espace et au milieu, mais le rapport du gournement à l'événement." And then the interruption brought upon by Foucault's clumsiness: "Je ne suis pas contre les appareils quelqonques, mais je ne sais pas—excusez-moi de vous dire ça—, j'ai un petite allergie comme ça" (Foucault, *Sécurité, territoire, population: Cours au Collège de France, 1977—1978*, ed. François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Michel Senellart [Paris, 2009], pp. 32, 32 n.). The apparatus got in his way, and he's allergic to it but not to the *dispositif*.

translation of *dispositif* is, conventionally, "apparatus."[3] There are two (or more) different terms in French, but we tend to only use *apparatus* in English. But by 1978 Foucault had fully adopted and adapted the language of the *dispositif* to discuss the technical media of discipline, security, and governmentality, and he had done so—I will argue—by making an explicit political and aesthetic decision to replace the conceptual architecture and term *apparatus* (*appareil*) with *dispositif*.[4] In the following, I reconstruct this shift and its political and aesthetic stakes.

This essay offers a genealogy of the media concept in the work of Foucault that focuses on his adoption and development of the language of the *dispositif* in his studies on modern systems of government. My attention is to Foucault's development of this language, but my interest extends beyond a scholia on Foucaultian terminology. My larger concerns regard how we might develop an account of media that looks to their dispositional powers. Dispositional powers are those potential powers of distributive arrangement of peoples, spaces, and times that may be available in the operational logics of technical objects but that do not determine how and why they function as they do at any given point in time. This sense of dispositional powers is what I refer to when I speak of the political ontology of the *dispositif*. The reason why Foucault's develop-

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3. I will, from this point onwards, replace the mistranslations of *dispositif* as *apparatus* in the Foucault texts with the word *dispositif* in parentheses.

4. I am not the first to note this; see Giorgio Agamben, *"What Is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, Calif., 2009); Louis Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, trans. Gregory Elliott, ed. François Matheron (New York, 2001); Alain Brossat, "La Notion de dispositif chez Michel Foucault," in *Miroir, appareils et autres dispositifs*, ed. Soko Phay-Vakalis (Paris, 2009), pp. 199–208; Jeffrey Bussolini, "What Is a Dispositive?" *Foucault Studies* 10 (Nov. 2010): 85–107; Gilles Deleuze, "What Is a *Dispositif*?" in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher: Essays*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York, 1992), pp. 159–66; Gregg Lambert, "What Is a Dispositif? —Part 1" *Religious Theory* 11 (July 2016): jcrt.org/religioustheory/2016/07/11/what-is-a-dispositif-part-1/; Matteo Pasquinelli, "What an Apparatus Is Not: On The Archeology Of The Norm In Foucault, Canguilhem, and Goldstein," *Parrhesia* 22 (May 2015): 79–89; Knox Peden, "Truth and Consequences: Political Judgment and Historical Knowledge in Foucault and Althusser," *ZINBUN* 47 (2016): 33–47; and Michael J. Shapiro, "Foucault and Method," in *Foucault and the Modern International: Silences and Legacies for the Study of World Politics*, ed. Philippe Bonditti, Didier Bigo, and Frédéric Gros (New York, 2017), pp. 115–34. Moreover, there is a Wikipedia page entry dedicated to "dispositif."; see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dispositif

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ment of the *dispositif* is especially rich for such an investigation is because his terminology marks a shift in the political, aesthetic, and methodological parameters for thinking about the relationship between media, aesthetics, and politics. This shift moves us away from the idea of media objects as tools of domination and towards a consideration of them as sentimental instruments that arrange dispositions, attentions, and perceptibilities. The shift from *apparatus* to *dispositif* thus offers a rethinking and reformulation of the forces of causality of modern media from the linear causality of a Tauskian influence machine (as presumed in the reflex function of the Althusserian apparatus) to an account of the dispositional powers of media, of their capacities to arrange bodily comportment and movement in space and time.[5]

The matter of the *dispositif* is, indeed, an issue of causality and specifically of the relationship between influence and media objects. For Foucault, the direct causality implied in Althusser's apparatus is insufficient (both historically and ontologically) to account for the work of mediation that technical objects like the Panopticon produce. And direct causality is equally insufficient in accounting for the work of collectivization that accompanies the *dispositif*'s capacity to distribute relations between spaces and sights, persons and things. In essence, Foucault's turn to the language of *dispositif* insists on forms of political mediation as relational dynamics between entities rather than as forces of coercion or domination upon subjects. The *dispositif* doesn't dominate or coerce, like the apparatus does; the *dispositif* disposes, arranges, and assembles in exactly the way that Foucault appreciates Guillaume de La Perrière's definition of government as "the right disposition of things."[6] It is thus an intermedial modality of governance that disposes or distributes things including peoples, places, and times. This means that the *dispositif* aligns itself with a capacity for arranging, for doing, for crafting; it implies a techne of collective participation not available in the apparatus.[7] Foucault's *dispositif*, in other

5. See Victor Tausk, "On the Origin of the 'Influencing Machine' in Schizophrenia," trans. Dorian Feigenbaum, *Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research* 1 (Spring 1992): 185–206.

6. Quoted in Foucault, "Governmentality," trans. Rosi Braidotti and Colin Gordon, in Foucault et al., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Burchell, Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago, 1991), p. 93.

7. To refer to such techne of collectivization we can adopt the French *agencement*, a term conventionally translated as "assemblage" but that also means connecting or adjoining or, again, disposing or ordering; see John Phillips, "*Agencement*/Assemblage," *Theory, Culture and Society* 23 (May 2006): 108–9. The *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* defines *agencement* as "Action d'agencer" (the activity of connecting); as well as "Ajuster, mettre en arrange-

words, is not an object or force of reification. It is, rather, an aesthetic power of radical mediation.[8]

Unlike previous treatments of this intermedial nexus that focus on Foucault's work from the mid-1970s onwards (and especially his often-cited 1977 interview "Le jeu de Michel Foucault"), I will show that Foucault's reflections on the dispositif begin with and never abandon the formal aesthetic insights he develops in his lectures on Édouard Manet's paintings.[9] I will thus advocate a reading of Foucault's Manet lectures (emphasizing his treatment of the *tableau objet*) that argues that the distributions of visibilities Foucault enlists in his (and our) viewings become the structuring visual mode that informs both his shift from the language of apparatus to *dispositif* and his formalist readings of modern works of political theory.

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ment" (to adjust, to place in an arrangement); and finally, "En termes de peinture, arranger des groups, des figures, adjuster les draperies, disposer les accessoires" (in terms of painting, to arrange groups, figures, adjust draperies, and dispose accessories) (*Dictionnaire de La Langue Française*, s.v. "agencement"). The dictionary of the Académie Française, in contrast, defines "agencement" as "Manière d'arranger, de mettre en ordre" (a manner of arranging or placing in order) as well as in architecture, "dispositions et rapport des différentes parties d'un edifice: l'arrangement, les proportions relatives des divisions d'un plan, d'une façade, d'une décoration" (dispositions and relations of the different parts of an edifice: the arrangement, or the proportions of the relative divisions of a plan, a façade, or a decoration) (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, s.v. "agencement").

8. See Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation," *Critical Inquiry* 42 (Autumn 2015): 124–48.

9. See Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," interview with Alain Grosrichard et al., in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, trans. Gordon et al., ed. Gordon (New York, 1980). Here Foucault famously affirms the following:

> What I'm trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the [*dispositif*]. The [*dispositif*] itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this [*dispositif*] is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. 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 [*dispositif*] a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an *urgent need*. The [*dispositif*] thus has a dominant strategic function. This may have been, for example, the assimilation of a floating population found to be burdensome for an essentially mercantilist economy: there was a strategic imperative acting here as the matrix for [a *dispositif*] which gradually undertook the control or subjection of madness, mental illness and neurosis. [Pp. 194–95]

While it is true that Foucault offers a reading of Manet's paintings in his late 1960s lectures, it is also true that he develops a way of reading by means of the paintings. Thus, he comes to the archetype of the Panopticon that becomes such a decisive feature of his thinking about political power in the 1970s. In his accounts of disciplinary *dispositifs* of governmentality (the Panopticon chief among these) what matters is an attention to a *dispositif*'s capacity to arrange spatialities and visibilities. In other words, the Manet canvas allows Foucault to appreciate Jeremy Bentham's architectural drawings of the Panopticon *as* drawings on a flat surface and thus to read his writings as if they were tableau-like objects that render available perceptibilities. This is because his viewings of Manet's paintings and his account of the *tableau objet* therein enable a perceptual mode that is attentive to the formal aesthetics of the canvas, to the formal dynamics of the Panopticon, and ultimately to the formal distributions in Bentham's own writings. In short, Foucault's viewings of Manet's *tableaux*, and his discovery of the *tableau objet*, provide him with a perceptual mode for reading the works of governmentality he explores in the 1970s lectures.[10] And that kind of viewing and reading is dependent on articulating the medial objects of political theorizing as *dispositifs* with dispositional powers.[11]

Part 1 of this essay introduces and engages some of the more influential studies on Foucault's *dispositif* in recent years, while part 2 constructs the parallels between Foucault's treatment of Manet's canvases and his subsequent readings of the Panopticon. By constructing these parallels I not only want to draw the relevant insights of Foucault's aesthetic and political innovations; I also want to emphasize the formalist reading practices Foucault develops in his Manet lectures that he then enlists in his 1970s Collège de France lectures and, of course, in *Discipline and Punish*. What will become evident, and what will seem to go against the grain of many Anglo-American receptions of this period of Foucault's work, is that there is a decisive resistance to drawing immediate normative conclusions from the formal analyses he provides. Part 3 draws out the political stakes of the shift from the apparatus to the *dispositif* or what I am calling the political ontology of the *dispositif*. Here too *political* is not reducible to *normative*. Rather, the focus is on the nature of dispositional powers, their indirectness, and what modality of cause we might imagine from medial objects if the vector model of influence is insufficient to attending to their modes of existence.

10. I have elsewhere articulated this as the sentimental style in political theory; see Davide Panagia, "Rancière's Partager," *Rancière's Sentiments* (Durham, N.C., 2018), pp. 19–39.

11. See Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* (New York, 2011).

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Matteo Pasquinelli shows that there is little in Giorgio Agamben's account of the *dispositif* that is persuasive.[12] For Agamben, the term *dispositif* "designates that in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being," and he ties this claim to the translation by the Latin Fathers of the Christian Church of the Greek *oikonomia* as *dispositio* (that is, the source of the French *dispositif*).[13] In his essay, however, Pasquinelli convinces us that Foucault's adoption of the term *dispositif* is actually indebted to his mentor Georges Canguilhem.[14] For Pasquinelli the connection that matters between Foucault's and Canguilhem's treatment of the *dispositif* involves the importance of the concept of normalization that Foucault inherits from Canguilhem. But more than this, the fact that the mechanical language to which the *dispositif* is tethered is, as he says, "first tributary to the emerging mechanical craftsmanship of the 17th century and to a technological view of power rather than to a Hegelian translation of the paradigm of positive religion."[15] The result of Foucault's innovation is to abstract the *dispositif* from the domain of Canguilhem's biophilosophy and adapt it to this technological view of power in the modern period. Rather than a secularized form of divine power, as Agamben would have us believe, the *dispositif* is for Foucault a kind of automated force—in the most mechanical sense of the term—for the distribution and arrangement of bodies.

In a more generous reading of Agamben's disquisition, Jeffrey Bussolini recuperates something helpful in the etymology of *dispositif* from the Latin *dispositio* and shows how it relates to the verb *dispono* that "concerns placing here and there, setting in different places, arranging, distributing (regularly), disposing; it also addresses specifically setting in order, arraying, or settling and determining (in military or legal senses)."[16] In other words, and though Bussolini doesn't make this connection, the etymological root of *dispositif* from *dispositio* ties the activities of Foucault's intermedial objects to the ancient rhetorical tradition of *dispositio*, or the order and organization of oration. The classical sources here are Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, and Quintillian's *Institutio Oratoria*, all of which delineate in their own specific manner the parts of a speech, from *exordium* to *peroratio*,

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12. See Pasquinelli, "What an Apparatus Is Not."
13. Agamben, *"What Is an Apparatus?"* p. 11.
14. See Georges Canguilhem, "Machine and Organism," in *Knowledge of Life*, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg, ed. Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers (New York, 2008), pp. 75–97; hereafter abbreviated "MO."
15. Pasquinelli, "What an Apparatus Is Not," p. 85.
16. Bussolini, "What Is a Dispositive?" p. 96.

and the importance of the arrangement of the parts.[17] As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca note, the order of the parts of a speech are essential to their persuasive effect, and "in choosing the order in which arguments are to be presented in persuasive discourse, account should be taken of all the factors capable of furthering acceptance of the arguments by the hearers."[18] There is no doubt that the orator must know her or his audience so as to best arrange her or his words accordingly. But this ambition differs in both matter and form from the activity of demonstration, which, in the case of oration, is not an objective of speech.

Following the classical authors, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca distinguish the *dispositio* of an argument from the demonstration of a proof. In the demonstration everything is given and (as the word implies) what is given need only be shown. "In argumentation, on the other hand, the premises are labile. They can be enriched as argument proceeds, but they always remain precarious, and they are adhered to with a shifting intensity. The order of the arguments will accordingly be dedicated in large measure by the desire to bring forward new premises, to confer presence on certain elements, and to extract certain agreements from the interlocutor."[19] Premises "remain precarious," in other words, because arguments are not demonstrative proofs but are constituent forms and thus "labile."[20] Such sensibilities of the *dispositio* suggest that the *dispositif* is not reducible to a medium of communication wherein demonstrable propositions are enunciated and represented, and can be clearly identified, analyzed, and transmitted. Quite the contrary. Communication has little to do with the practices of *dispositio* because *dispositio* is not a matter of transmission of meaning but rather of formal arrangements emergent from the dynamism between orator, audience, and the ornament of parts.[21] In

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17. This connection is also made by James Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Cinema* (Chicago, 2013), pp. xiv–viii.

18. Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1971), p. 491.

19. Ibid., p. 492.

20. One of the compelling ambitions of logical positivism in the twentieth century is to reorient the rhetorical status of argument away from its precarity and towards the demonstrable proof. For more on this nexus within the context of postwar fiction, see Michael LeMahieu, "'Indigestible Residues': Ludwig Wittgenstein, Aesthetic Negativism, and the Incompleteness of Logical Positivism," in *Fictions of Fact and Value: The Erasure of Logical Positivism in American Literature, 1945–1975* (New York, 2013), pp. 22–51.

21. Relevant to this part of my argument is John Guillory's point that "the communication concept emerged in early modernity as an explicit challenge to the system of rhetoric. . . . Rhetoric assumed that the speaker occupied a forensic position, in which his own thoughts and feelings were best kept to himself. Communication by contrast posited the transfer of the

dispositio what matters is not the transparency of meaning expressed in speech but how what is said is posed (and poised) so as to call attention and bestow notice: *dispositio* is a modality of collective participation. Hence the importance of the *dispono* of the *dispositive*—the active placing of parts, one in relation to the other, resting between and among each other.[22]

Another way of saying this, the way Canguilhem expresses it, is that a *dispositif* is a

> configuration of solids in motion such that the motion does not abolish the configuration. The mechanism is thus an assemblage of deformable parts, with periodic restoration of the relations between them. The assemblage consists in a system of connections with a degree of freedom: for example, a pendulum and a cam valve each have one degree of freedom; a threaded screw has two. . . . In any machine, movement is thus a function of the assemblage, and mechanism is a function of configuration. ["MO," pp. 76–77]

Like the practices of *dispositio* in classical rhetoric, the *dispositif*'s role is not that of transmission of meaning but of arranging moving parts. Canguilhem's emphasis is on dispositional activities or what he will call the "cinématique" principles ("the elementary concepts of kinematics") of the *dispositif* that enable assemblage formation ("MO," p. 77).[23] And just as the order of premises needs to be precarious so as to move an audience, so the order of parts in a *dispositive* is deformable so as to produce a "configuration of solids in motion." These *cinématique*/kinematic elements raise the problem of machinic vitalism—an old problem that dates back (for Canguilhem) to René Descartes but really, as he notes, to Aristotle's ontology of movement and the latter's likening of "the organs of animal motion to *organa*, that is, to the parts of war machines (e.g., the arm of a catapult, which launches a projectile), and he compares the course of their movement to that of machines capable of releasing, after being set

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speaker's thoughts and feelings accurately to the mind of the auditor" (John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36 [Winter 2010]: 327).

22. In this regard, I would want to begin considering the *dispositio* of the *dispositif* in relation to Theo Davis's discussion of ornamental aesthetics where she contends that "ornamentation is about how one object rests upon and in relation to another; how an object carries and even carries out human attention (one approaches and touches something by ornamenting it, which is quite different from expressing an idea about it); how both writers and readers work with and among objects of attention; and how objects both shed and receive notice, light, and value" (Theo Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson and Whitman* [New York, 2016], p. 19).

23. See Canguilhem, *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris, 1992).

off, a stored-up energy, automatic machines, of which catapults were the typical example in his period" ("MO," p. 79).[24]

Whereas Pasquinelli notes the aspects of the *dispositif* that connect Foucault's use of the term to Canguilhem's, I want to emphasize the kinematics of the *dispositif* and specifically Canguilhem's central observation that "movement is thus a function of the assemblage, and mechanism is a function of configuration"—an observation that remains pressing in Foucault's adoption of the term. The *dispositif*, in other words, is a device of disposition, arrangement, and movement (normalization) and precisely not an instrument of representation and domination (normativity). What Canguilhem's formulation allows Foucault to do is to develop his critical analytics of power on the basis of the motility of things rather than on what will appear as a static and linear reflex function implicit in the model of communication that the apparatus will exploit (that is, the stimulus-response of interpellation).[25] From an analytic perspective, then, this is the great shift that the *dispositif* enables, allowing Foucault to distance himself from what Knox Peden rightly notes as the perceived "conceptual poverty of the 'State apparatus,' in either its repressive or ideological incarnations."[26]

The dilemma, however, is more severe than even Peden's phrasing allows. The problem isn't just the conceptual poverty of the state apparatus and the political stakes that follow from this. The real issue engages the

24. See also Jessica Riskin, *The Restless Clock: A History of the Centuries-Long Argument Over What Makes Living Things Tick* (Chicago, 2016), pp. 51–53.

25. In a related vein, we see Gilles Deleuze addressing a similar series of concerns in his critique of Christian Metz's film semiotics as it is played out in his books on cinema. On this last point, see especially Francois Dosse's discussion of Deleuze's dissatisfaction with film semiotics and his turn to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiology for an alternative mode of semiotic classification for cinema that took into account the dimensions of time and movement of the image; see Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minnesota, 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minnesota, 1989), and François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (New York, 2011), pp. 409–11.

26. Peden, "Truth and Consequences," p. 37. Peden is critical of this move by Foucault, which he considers "the central move in his effort to develop a mode of historical analysis that would not be a form of political judgment in itself." And Peden continues: "In a word, Foucault seeks to de-politicize the account of history grounded in the concept of the 'mode of production' on offer from Althusser, while retaining many of its relational and structural components." And thus, Peden concludes, "what does seem clear is that Foucault's denial of relations of production as primary in any sense, political or otherwise, is not a matter of disproof or a demonstration of theoretical inconsistency. It is rather a denial that is political in its essentials, which means that any critical take on Foucault's writings and lectures of the 1970s—the years in which the Foucaultian concept of power was forged—will bear an unavoidably political character as well" (pp. 37, 38, 47).

political ontology of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) and its inability to register any form of interactivity other than stimulus/response; or, to pose a different formulation of the same problem, the issue is whether the political function of media is always reducible to forms of domination that operate exclusively as neurosignaletics in the reflex function. For Foucault, the Marxist take on behaviorism in Althusser's account of ISAs is too committed to the private/public distinction (recall that for Althusser the ISA is a private relation that differs from the Repressive State Apparatus [RSA] and its application of violence upon publics); moreover, this model is equally too enmeshed with the causal logic of the reflex as the engine of ideological coercion/influence.[27] The ISA operates via a stimulus-response feedback loop; this much is clear from the infamous interpellation scenario. Ideology is reflex by another name, and the ISA is the behavioral device whose causal mechanism functions on the neural model of stimulus/response signaletics. In short, for something to "*function 'by ideology'*" means that, from the perspective of causal powers, it is an automated, reflexive, stimulus/response influence machine.[28]

With these brief remarks I suggest that the shift from apparatus to *dispositif* in the work of Foucault is (in part) invested in a dissatisfaction with the idea that political life operates on the model of the reflex circuit.[29] In light of this we can begin to rethink Foucault's work of the 1970s as an attempt to recalibrate the commitment of ideology critique to representing social and political domination exclusively on the behavioral mechanics of stimulus/response. Thus, it's not just the case that the ISA is

27. See Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (New York, 2014). Importantly, though it is beyond the purview of this essay to expand upon this point, Althusser's later writings on aleatory materialism, and especially his book on Machiavelli, stop deploying the language of apparatus and instead adopt the term *dispositive*; see especially Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us* and *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, trans. Goshgarian (New York, 2006).

28. Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, p. 244. A further discussion needs to be developed about the inheritance and responses to the theory of the reflex in postwar French thought and its relationship to theories of ideology, and especially to the critique of Cartesian automation and Pavlovian stimulus-response therein. Key thinkers here are Canguilhem and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston, 1967). Due to spatial constraints, I'm unable to pursue that discussion in these pages. For a helpful initial foray and a historiography of the reflex, see Riskin, *The Restless Clock*.

29. In this respect, one could read much of Foucault's research from 1970 onwards as returned engagement not just with Canguilhem but also with Merleau-Ponty's critique of behaviorism in Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*. For a contemporary engagement with Merleau-Ponty's critical phenomenological account of the reflex circuit and behavior modification, see Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minnesota, 2013), pp. 101–23.

insufficiently attentive to the microphysics of power that Foucault will analyze throughout the 1970s, nor is it the case that such models of analysis have yet to cut off the head of the King (as he famously quips). In fact, there is nothing in Althusser's account of ISAs that would prevent an analysis of the microphysics of power, and—notably—all of Althusser's ideological institutions (schools, the military, prisons, and the police) are the same institutions that Foucault will examine in his treatment of disciplinary *dispositifs*.

For Foucault, the problem is greater than the issue of an image of power; it's an analytic one where, as Robert Sinnerbrink notes in a different but related context, "The link between perception and action . . . is a *complex* rather than reflex movement."[30] The apparatus and its commitment to the reflex circuit cannot take into account complex participation and thus reduce political and aesthetic power to a behavioral model of linear causality. This is because the model of the apparatus (as we shall soon see) retains all the vestiges of a representational regime of perception like the one outlined in Foucault's reading of the mirror function in *Las Meninas* (fig. 1). In contradistinction, the *dispositif* will be a site of complex movement of perceptibilities and actions that queer the private/public dividing line of Althusserian ideology critique. Hence the notable importance, for Foucault, of Manet's *tableau objet*.

The status of the complex in perception and action is also the tenor of Gilles Deleuze's observations on Foucault's *dispositif*. Deleuze describes the *dispositif* complex as a "multilinear ensemble" that holds "curves of visibility," "curves of enunciation," and "lines of force."[31] It is neither a specific device nor a linear function but an ontology of entanglement; it is a relational mechanism, a complex of associationism; in short, the *dispositif* involves the dispositional powers of constituent assembly. We exist within *dispositifs*. In this respect they share with ISAs the fact that there is no outside to them: "lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing or giving rise to others, by means of variations or even changes in the way they are grouped."[32] Foucault's *dispositifs* are for Deleuze not unlike his own sense of cinema as an assemblage machine (recall Canguilhem's *cinématique*), as when he says that in cinema "An image never stands alone. The key thing's the relation

30. Robert Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (New York, 2011), p. 34.
31. Deleuze, "What Is a *Dispositif* ?" pp. 159, 160.
32. Ibid., p. 162.

FIGURE 1.   Diego Vélazquez, *Las Menminas* (1656).

between images."[33] The ontology of the reflex constitutive of the apparatus, in other words, can't grasp the complex ensemble of associations that the *dispositif* makes available—movements that, I should add, are not beholden to the subject/object dualism implicit in an ontology of the reflex. And one senses this distinction (between the private individualism of the reflex and the associationism of the complex) when Foucault explicitly addresses the term *dispositif* in his 15 January 1975 lecture for the first time:

33. Deleuze, "On the *Movement-Image*," in *Negotiations 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York, 1997), pp. 51–52.

> The eighteenth century, or the Classical Age, also set up a State ap-
> paratus [*appareil*] that extended into and was supported by different
> institutions. And then—and it is on this that I would like to focus,
> or which I would like to serve as background to my analysis of the
> normalization of sexuality—it refined a general technique of the ex-
> ercise of power that can be transferred to many different institutions
> and apparatuses [*appareils*]. This technique constitutes the other side
> of the juridical and political structures of representation and is the
> condition of their functioning and effectiveness. This general tech-
> nique of the government of men comprises a typical . . . [*dispositif*],
> which is the disciplinary organization I spoke to you about last year.
> To what end is this . . . [*dispositif*] directed? It is, I think, some-
> thing that we can call "normalization." This year, then, instead of
> considering the mechanics of the disciplinary apparatus [*appareils
> disciplinaires*], I will be looking at their effects of normalization, at
> what they are directed toward, the effects they can achieve and that
> can be grouped under the rubric of "normalization."³⁴

The *dispositif* is "a general technique of the exercise of power" (or, a "gen-
eral technique of the government of men") that is also—and this is crucial
to our appreciation of the aesthetics and politics of the *dispositif*—"the
other side of the juridical and political structures of representation." So
now we have an ontological power with complex forms, for the "configura-
tion of solids in motion," that is the "other side" of juridical and political
structures of representations. In short, as a power for the arrangement
and disposition of elements and their relations (that is, a power of gover-
nance) the *dispositif* is not a device of representation (like, say, a constitu-
tion might be a device of representation, or a Diego Velázquez canvas).
The power of governance is not reducible to the power of representation;
in fact, as we learn throughout the 1970s, governmentality has little to do
with representation.³⁵ This is why Foucault turns to modern tactics of disci-
pline—not, that is, because discipline identifies the coercive and oppressive
modes of domination in modern state forms, but because discipline is a
complex dispositional modality not reducible to the privacy of the reflex cir-

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34. Quoted in Pasquinelli, "What an Apparatus Is Not," p. 81. I cite from Pasquinelli as
he's done the work of noting, in the text, the distinction between the two relevant terms (*ap-
paratus/dispositif*). The original source of the passage is Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the
Collège de France, 1974–1975*, trans. Burchell, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni
(New York, 2003), p. 49.

35. See Kirstie M. McClure, "Taking Liberties in Foucault's Triangle: Sovereignty, Disci-
pline, Governmentality, and the Subject of Rights," in *Identities, Politics, and Rights*, ed. Aus-
tin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1997), pp. 149–92.

cuit. In this regard, consider this earlier (28 November 1973) invocation of "dispositifs disciplinaires:"[36]

> This triple function, this triple aspect of the techniques of the accumulation of men and of the forces of work, is, I think, the reason why the different disciplinary [*dispositifs*] were deployed, tried out, developed, and refined. The extension, movement, and migration of the disciplines from their lateral function to the central and general function they exercise from the eighteenth century are linked to this accumulation of men and to the role of the accumulation of men in capitalist society.[37]

What the political ontology of the *dispositif* offers Foucault is a complex dynamic of vectors and forces (that is, a "triple function") that is foreclosed by the apparatus and its ontology of reflexive causality qua political domination.

Under the summary above, Foucault's descriptions of the *dispositif* and attributions of its formal elements start to look and feel decidedly like descriptions and attributions of the formal elements of a modernist canvas. All the elements are there: it is a nonrepresentational surface, it is an entangle of multiple vectors of perceptibility, it is a medium of assemblages and dispositions, and it is a site of dispositional powers and practices. The *dispositif* is also a domain where lines of visibility, invisibility, flatness, straightness, and curvature intermingle. It is a plateau wherein linearity itself—the capacity of lines (of sight, of writing, of drawing, of narrative, of agency) to hold shape, form, and representation—is placed under duress and rendered precarious. The *dispositif*, in other words, shares an undeniable family resemblance with the *tableau objet* that Foucault discovers in his viewing of Manet's paintings; it is a dispositional power in a world where the traditional logics of mimesis (that sustained the authority of sovereignty) no longer hold sway.

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One of the most remarkable things about Foucault's treatment of Manet is how decidedly acute it is in relation to his analysis of *Las Meninas*. This shouldn't surprise us, of course, because he is dealing with two very

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36. Foucault, *Le Pouvoir psychiatrique : Cours au Collège de France, 1973–1974*, ed. Ewald, Fontana, and Jacques Lagrange (Paris, 2003), p. 74.
37. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973–1974*, trans. Burchell, ed. Jacques Lagrange (New York, 2006), p. 72.

different painters in two very different historical periods; one of the vir-
tues of the exposition of *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things* (however
accurate or debatable it might be) is Foucault's attention to its status
as a representational object and (more importantly) its archetypal stature
as a painting that is of and about representation. Hence the lines of look-
ing move us in and out of the painting and are consistently inflected by a
desire to explain how representation qua reflection works therein. And of
course, all of Foucault's descriptions about the inner mimetics of the paint-
ing are directed at bringing us towards the missing spectacle, outside the
painting, but implied in the painting, by the gaze of the figures therein look-
ing out: "A condition of pure reciprocity," as he affirms, "manifested by the
observing and observed mirror." In short, the painting confers upon the
mimetic operation a reflex function: The reflection "restores, as if by magic,
what is lacking in every gaze."[38]

   In contrast Foucault's treatment of Manet moves us across the viewing
surfaces of the canvases, not in and out of them. From Foucault's perspec-
tive, Manet's tableaux are a completely different object from Velázquez's
because the reflex surface of representation is wholly absent. The latter
would likely not recognize the former's works as painting at all, because
Manet's works seem to have little to do with the reflexive power of repre-
sentation; as if Manet (for Foucault like for Michael Fried and for Stanley
Cavell) "was *forced* to forgo likeness" altogether in order to paint.[39] Fou-
cault is explicit about this in his introductory remarks when he discusses
a general set of ambitions of painting since the quattrocento that typically
revolve around the reflexive circuit of representational perspective and that
create in painting an illusory space, "a represented space which denies, in a
sense, the space on which it is painted."[40] But Manet breaks with this am-
bition; he interrupts representation.

38. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. pub.
(New York, 1994), pp. 14, 15.
   39. Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge,
Mass., 1979), p. 21. The full sentence reads as follows: "Painting, in Manet, was *forced* to forgo
likeness exactly because of its own obsession with reality, because the illusions it had learned
to create did not provide the conviction in reality, the connection with reality, it craved." Yet
the formulation that follows from this is Cavell's assertion that "We can say, painting and real-
ity no longer *assure* one another" (p. 21). In a similar vein, I would like to say that for Foucault,
the apparatus no longer assures us a conviction in our analytics of power; we must forgo the
aura of likeness (that is, of representation, of *Las Meninas*, of the prose of the world) implicit
in the mimetic ontology of the Ideological State Apparatus because in the modern period,
power and reflexivity no longer *assure* one another.
   40. Michel Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, trans. Matthew Barr (London,
2009), p. 29; hereafter abbreviated *MOP*.

The rectangular surface, the large vertical and horizontal axes, the real lighting of the canvas, the possibility for the viewer of looking one way or another, all of this is present in Manet's pictures, and given back, restored in Manet's pictures. And Manet reinvents (or perhaps he invents) the picture-object [*tableau objet*], the picture as materiality, the picture as something coloured which clarifies an external light and in front of which, or about which, the viewer revolves. This invention of the picture-object [*tableau objet*], this reinsertion of the materiality of the canvas in that which is represented, this I believe is at the heart of the great change wrought by Manet to painting and it is in this sense that one could say that Manet really turned upside-down, beyond what could have foreshadowed Impressionism, all that was fundamental in western painting since the quattrocento. [*MOP*, p. 31][41]

In this section, I want to pick up on Foucault's viewing practices when looking at Manet's paintings and on his insistence that Manet's canvasses move the viewer "about." In doing so I want to recreate the mood, the "curves of visibility," the "regimes of light," and "the lines of force" that enable Foucault to attend to and develop his attentions to the *dispositif* as a medium of modern political life. In short, what I wish to put on display is Foucault's development of the *tableau objet* as a transmedial consonant of the *dispositif* and show that what he says about Manet's tableaux becomes a portmanteau for a set of formal aesthetic and political concerns that inform his analysis of politics in the modern period (and especially his analyses of governmentality in the 1970s).[42] It becomes clear that after Manet, Foucault will no longer be interested in looking at the function of representation in works (of art, of writing, of political theory) but will instead look for the practices of organization and arrangement that constitute a formal political aesthetics of the modern period.

We know that in 1967 Foucault signed a contract with Éditions de Minuit for a book on Manet entitled *Le Noir et la couleur* (The Black and the Color).[43] But all that remains from this projected book are a series of student notes of a 1971 lecture on Manet's paintings delivered in Tunisia

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41. Also see Joseph J. Tanke, *Foucault's Philosophy of Art: A Genealogy of Modernity* (New York, 2009), pp. 67–71. The English translation translates *tableau objet* as "picture-object." For purposes that will become clear throughout, I will retain the original French and insert it in parentheses in direct quotations from the English translation.

42. On transmedial consonances, see Brent Hayes Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 2017), p. 7.

43. See Maryvonne Saison, *La Peinture de Manet, suivi de "Michel Foucault, un regard"* (Paris, 2004), p. 11.

where Foucault had been living and teaching since September of 1966, and where he penned *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).[44] We are assured, by Foucault's life-long partner and estate manager Daniel Defert, that nothing else exists of Foucault's extended study of Manet; all notes and the hundred or so pages of the book that Foucault is said to have written have been destroyed.[45] The text of the lecture, however, is enough to go on given its richness, and recent writings by Joseph Tanke, Gary Shapiro, and Catherine Soussloff have also added much to our appreciation of Foucault's interest in Manet.[46]

Foucault's lecture focuses on three aspects of Manet's overturning of representational painting: the space of the canvas, lighting, and the place of the viewer. Many points Foucault raises throughout the lecture, and especially his discussion of the flatness of Manet's paintings, align him with some of Manet's contemporary American interpreters—Cavell, Clement Greenberg, and Fried chief amongst these—all of whom affirm that an important dimension of Manet's contributions to modernist painting is an acknowledgment of the fact of painting as something other than a representational art (see *A*, pp. 302–4).[47] To quote Greenberg, "All through the 1860s it was as though each picture (save for the still lifes and the seascapes) confronted Manet with a new problem. It was as though he could accumulate nothing from experience. . . . Each painting was a one-time thing, a new start, and by the same token completely individual."[48]

Foucault's lecture seems to want to address Manet's confrontation with the problem(s) of painting by focusing on the three elements mentioned above. The discussion of space, and specifically the space of the canvas, deals with the problem of what constitutes painting once the quattrocento dependence on Brunelleschi's vanishing point disappears as a necessary element of the pictorial arts. That disappearance, Foucault has already indicated in his introductory remarks, is a principal site of the break that Manet introduces. The result is the displacement of the effect of depth in the can-

44. See Tanke, *Foucault's Philosophy of Art*.

45. See Saison, *La Peinture de Manet*, p. 11.

46. See Tanke, *Foucault's Philosophy of Art*; Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago, 2003), hereafter abbreviated *A*; and Catherine M. Soussloff, *Foucault on Painting* (Minneapolis, 2017).

47. See Michael Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, 1998), p. 37; Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 103; and Clement Greenberg, "Modern Painting," in *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago, 1993), pp. 85–93. The importance of acknowledgement here cannot be explored in great detail, though I do want to signal that acknowledgement for Fried and Cavell (and, I also want to say, for Foucault) is a complex and not a reflex.

48. Greenberg, "Manet in Philadelphia," in *Modernism with a Vengeance*, p. 243.

FIGURE 2. Édouard Manet, *A Masked Ball at the Opera* (1873).

vas, foreshortening its space and, of course, rendering it flat. "Not only is the effect of depth effaced," he will detail, referencing Manet's *The Masked Ball at the Opera* (1873), "but the distance between the edge of the picture and the back is relatively short such that all the figures find themselves projected forward" (fig. 2). And then he will affirm: "You do not really have space *per se*, you have only something like packages of space, packages of volumes and surfaces which are projected forwards, towards the viewer's eyes" (*MOP*, p. 36).

In other words, it's not so much that Manet is, for Foucault, dealing with a problem of conviction in the pictorial arts (as Fried and Cavell have affirmed), though that is indeed part of it. Foucault's Manet is attacking the problem of "the reproduction of the perception of everyday life" when the reflex function of representation no longer convinces as a pictorial achievement (*MOP*, p. 41). The problem, then, is how to paint the force of perception rather than representing the world? Foucault finds a possible answer to this question in Manet's treatment of the surface of the canvas as a space of pictorial perception. Thus, referencing *The Execution of Maximilien* (1868), Foucault will note that "what Manet was using, what he was playing with in his representation, was above all the fact that the canvas
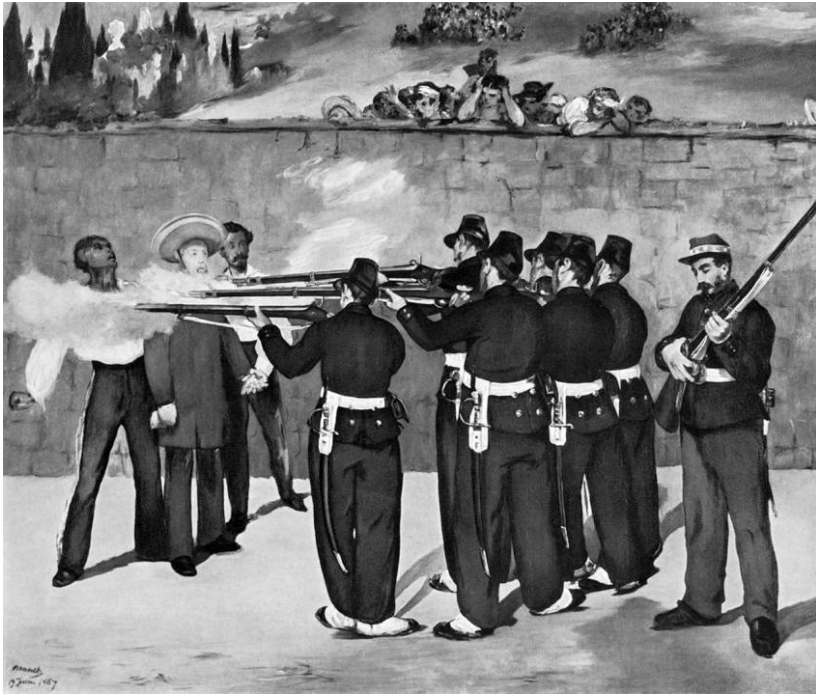
FIGURE 3.   Édouard Manet, *The Execution of Maximilien* (1868).

was vertical, that it was a surface in two dimensions, that it had no depth; and in a way Manet was trying to represent this absence of depth by diminishing as far as possible the very thickness of the scene which he represents" (*MOP*, p. 42) (fig. 3).[49] In short, rather than trying to trompe l'oeil, Manet's paintings will depict perception *tout court*.

To clarify: quattrocento painting made perception a condition of perspectivism and thus required the viewer to occupy a specific position in order to view the painting as a representational object. This fact conditions the viewer's access to the painting in Foucault's discussion of *Las Meninas*. That entire discussion revolves around an in-and-out movement of perception that consolidates the sense of the canvass's depth. This, ultimately, is the interpellative work of representation that will later be considered a theatrical ambition: the work requires that the beholder occupy a situation in order to experience the painting as it ought to be

49. I should note that though I cannot develop it at great length in this essay, to me this account of Manet's canvas comes closest to Foucault describing his commitment to a kind of formal reading when dealing with the matter of discipline in Bentham's architectural drawings and writings on the Panopticon.

experienced.[50] But Manet eliminates depth of field and compresses the canvas, absolving the viewer from the conditioning of *the situation* and the normative demands of looking. The canvas, in other words, stops being a reflex(ive) surface. Rather than lines of entry and exit, Foucault's viewing of Manet's canvases emphasizes vectors of visibility, verticalities, horizontalities, and repetitions. What Manet's canvases thus offer Foucault is "the interior architecture of the picture" (*MOP*, p. 48).

Attention to the tableau's interior architecture is the formal aesthetic insight that will allow Foucault to present Bentham's political writings and architectural drawings as he does; that is, not as normative spaces of ideological positioning (the apparatus qua reflex) but as surfaces upon which dispositional powers do their work of arranging and adjoining (the *dispositif* qua complex of *agencement*):

> There is a circular building, the periphery of the Panopticon, within which cells are set, opening both onto the inner side of the ring through an iron grate door and onto the outside through a window. Around the inner circumference of this ring is a gallery, allowing one to walk around the building, passing each cell. Then there is an empty space and, at its center, a tower, a kind of cylindrical construction of several levels at the top of which is a sort of lantern, that is to say, a large open room, which is such that from this central site one can observe everything happening in each cell, just by turning around. This is the schema.[51]

What interests me in this famous account is less the specifics of Foucault's description than his schematic mode of hovering over the surface of the drawing. In the original French lecture, he doesn't so much conclude that "this is the schema" but affirms "Voilà le schéma" as if we were frontally facing the entirety of the tableau.[52] And it is this sense of facingness that makes the description so striking. We are facing an architectural

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50. It is for this reason that, in the first lines of Fried's "Art and Objecthood," he effectively affirms that the enterprise of objecthood is "ideological" because "it seeks to declare and occupy a position" (Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood*, p. 148). This fact of positionality that, in turn, compels the viewer to have to spatially occupy a position in order to view the work as a work (that is, it demands a subjection of the viewer to the work) is what allows Fried to argue that "the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater now is the negation of art" (p. 153). This of course is not surprising since Manet becomes, for Fried, a central figure in the history of antitheatricality; see Fried, *Manet's Modernism, or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago, 1996).

51. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, pp. 74–75

52. Foucault, *Le Pouvoir psychiatrique, p. 76.*

drawing and thus can traverse (and transverse) its surface, hover here and there along and across its vectors, curves, lines, and forces. But more importantly, and again as in the case of Manet's canvas, Foucault's description of looking at the Panopticon drawing offers no hint of depth, of entering or exiting the space. It is a flat surface where (at least in the account he gives) "the effect of depth" is "effaced."

The second thematic Foucault raises is lighting. Recent studies of Manet (not available to Foucault at the time of his lectures) have remarked on the unusualness of Manet's use of light in his canvasses. Manet's works are lit in atypical ways and (once more) in a manner decidedly related to traditional chiaroscuro, quattrocento painting. Rather than representing light from a position interior to and above the painting, Manet's light is frontal and external to the painting. The suggestion that has been offered by some scholars is that frontal lighting might indicate (indeed *does* indicate to Beatrice Farwell) Manet's adoption of photographic lighting techniques and perhaps also his adoption of the practice of using daguerreotypes as models for his paintings—a practice, I should add, famously disparaged by Charles Baudelaire (in "The Modern Public and Photography") but also famously in vogue during Manet's time.[53] There is much that can be said about such transmedial consonances in Manet's canvases, and Alexi Worth's perspicuous account of Manet's "counter-photographic style" is a tour de force in this respect.[54] But once again for reasons of space I want to focus on how Foucault portrays lighting as an intensity that provides a stark superficiality to the tableau in his treatment of Manet's *The Fifer* (1866) (fig. 4):

> Here, on the contrary, you see that there is absolutely no light coming from above or from below, or from outside the canvas; or rather all the light comes from outside of the canvas, but strikes it absolutely at the perpendicular. You see that the face presents absolutely no modelling, simply two little hollows either side of the nose to indicate the eyebrows and the hollows of the eyes. You notice, however, that the shadow, practically the only shadow which is presented in this picture, is this tiny little shadow here under the hand of the fifer and which indicates that in effect the lighting comes from absolutely opposite since it is behind the fifer, in the hollow of the hand, that the only shadow of the picture is drawn, with this one [under his left foot] which assures stability, as you see, this tiny little shadow, which is the indication

53. See Alexi Worth, "The Lost Photographs of Edouard Manet," *Art in America* 95 (Jan. 2007): 59–65, and Beatrice Farwell, *Manet and the Nude: A Study in Iconography in the Second Empire* (New York, 1981).

54. Worth, "The Lost Photographs of Edouard Manet," p. 61.

FIGURE 4. Édouard Manet, *The Fifer* (1866).

of the rhythm that the fifer prints on his music in tapping his foot: as
you see, he lightly raises his foot which gives, from this shadow [under
the left foot] to this one [in the right hand] the large diagonal which is
reproduced clearly here by the fifer's flute case. So we have an entirely
perpendicular lighting, a lighting which is the real lighting of the can-
vas if the canvas in its materiality was to be exposed to an open win-
dow, in front of an open window. [*MOP*, p. 58–59]

Foucault didn't have the advantage of having read Farwell's study, or
Worth's development of its suggestive insights, and so he assumes that
the light upon the canvas of *The Fifer* was coming as if from an open win-
dow; in fact "in front" of an open window. And though Foucault's analogy
may turn out to be technically inaccurate, it is also visually exact because
what it suggests is that the canvas itself is totally exposed to light precisely *like*
a silver plate is exposed to light in a daguerreotype. The frontality of light in
The Fifer also produces the sense of uprightness and thus facingness of the
canvas, the fact that—as Foucault says—the lighting renders the perpendic-
ularity of the canvas and, indeed, of the fifer's image. In Foucault's account
we also have the matter of the slight shadow of the front left foot, which, for
him, doesn't indicate an angle of light (as a shadow typically might) but
rhythm, the rhythm of the beat of the music to which the fifer is playing.
This, to me, is an astounding observation that returns us to the description
of the Panopticon cited above from the 28 November 1973 lecture. In both
the Manet and the Panopticon descriptions we are given a sense of facing-
ness (and thus beforeness) of these objects that refuses the ideal of entry
and exit available to quattrocento accounts of representational perception.
The viewer of the painting and of the architectural drawing is decidedly in
front of it, viewing it, but not in it or even drawn into it. In Manet's works,
this is accomplished by the canvas's flatness and the frontal lighting effects.

  The above observations allow us to begin to raise some suspicions re-
garding the general reception of Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's
Panopticon writings, a reception that wants to view the example of the ar-
chitectural form as an archetype of interpellation, indeed as an ISA. But
as my reconstruction of the dynamics of surface viewing suggests this in-
terpretation of Foucault's descriptions (assisted by the ease with which
English translations substitute *dispositif* with *apparatus*) are not conso-
nant with the formal aesthetic operations available in Foucault's descrip-
tions of these modern (or better, modern*ist*) political media.[55] Indeed, Fou-

55. See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nine-
teenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992). In this regard, my account of Foucault's concerns

cault's insistence that the viewer of Manet's canvas and/or the Panopticon drawing is before (and thus not in) the object seems to suggest, at the very least, that such institutions don't function on the interpellation model of a reflex circuit.[56] Rather, they are technical objects that coordinate and distribute dynamical forces which arrange and dispose bodies in precisely the way that Manet's canvas is a surface upon which forces, intensities, visibilities, and spatialities are disposed. What becomes most effective about *dispositifs* is their way of distributing power without imposing themselves upon bodies or demanding a point of view. And this is explicit in Foucault's rendering of the Panopticon's scopic field. It is true that the Panopticon can be used as an architectural form for all of the institutions Althusser had listed as belonging to the ISA. But whereas the structure of visibility in the dynamics of ISAs is necessarily vertical so that lines of sight penetrate (that is, move in and out of) the privacy of the subject, the scopic field of the *dispositif* is horizontal and flat. In order for the Panopticon to work, in other words, the lines of visibility between the viewer and the object viewed are planar such that the object of visibility is fully frontal and totally there. It is the exact same line of visibility that we find in Manet's canvas with exactly the same light exposure: "The panoptic [*dispositive*] arranges

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with disciplinary *dispositifs* and their relationship to looking in the modern period goes against the grain of Jonathan Crary's treatment of modernist vision as acts of a detached observer. From Crary's perspective, my account is clearly too enamored with the ruptural "fanfare" of traditional accounts of the modernist avant-garde (p. 4). But from my perspective, Crary's account of the observer is too invested in collapsing the distinction between the normative and normalization and thus treating a regime of vision as if it were exclusively a system of domination. Hence the normative sense of the operative term *techniques* in his title that wants to look at optical devices "as sites of both knowledge and power that operate directly on the body of the individual" (p. 7). I remain indebted to Crary's important work, though I also acknowledge that his work does not appreciate the extent to which Foucault's own assessment of vision in the modern period remains tethered to Manet's aesthetic achievements and to their ruptural fanfare.

56. My argument is indebted to Frances Ferguson's reconstruction of the structures of perceptibility and value ranking that Bentham's utilitarian architectures and techniques sought to develop. In this regard, I wholeheartedly agree with her formulation that "Foucault captured Bentham's interest in creating social structures that displayed the actions individuals performed and that systematized this display to make it possible to see the relative value of those actions instantaneously" (Frances Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory: What Utilitarianism Did to Action* [Chicago, 2004], p. 17). I differ from Ferguson in two ways. First, I expand this insight by showing how Foucault's experiences of instantaneity in perceptibility are emergent from his viewership of Manet's tableaux. Second, I differ from Ferguson by downplaying the normative weight of complicity and coercion in Foucault's descriptions; for her objection to Foucault's account of utilitarian social structures, see Ferguson, *Pornography, the Theory*, pp. 18–21. Like Ferguson, I acknowledge the perversity (to use her word) of the seemingly Quixotic endeavor of detailing the limitations of Anglo-American receptions of Foucault's readings of Bentham that conflate disciplinary structures with ideological coercion.

spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately." And this, Foucault adds, is enabled by "full lighting."[57]

As an aside I should remark that my interpretation of the relation between Manet and Bentham in Foucault is at odds with Shapiro when he suggests that the Manet canvas "becomes the inverse of the Panopticon. The 'central lodge' of the latter is the undisputed point of view for the inspector, a position from which every prisoner appears in the window of his or her cell" (*A*, p. 315). It should be clear by now that I believe the opposite to be the case: the Manet canvas and Bentham's Panopticon are two exempla of the *dispositif*. This doesn't mean that the Manet canvas is a disciplinary structure like the Panopticon. But in both cases the viewer (whether painterly beholder or guard) is equally absolved from having to occupy any one position in order to look and see what is there: that is, in both cases the viewer is before the canvas/structure. This renders visibility totally there in exactly the manner that Bentham suggests when he claims that (to cite Shapiro's paraphrase) "the activity of the inspectors is like the common occupation of looking out the window" (*A*, p. 315).

Recall that Foucault had placed Manet's canvas in front of a window in order to explain the sense of total lighting. This total exposure to light is Foucault's way of suggesting that there is no specific norm of attention vis-à-vis the *dispositif*. The *dispositif* is an antirepresentational medium that doesn't demand a point of view. This is as true of the Manet canvas as it is of the Panopticon: the canvas doesn't demand a specific angle of viewership in the way that quattrocento representational painting does, and the Panopticon doesn't require a specific individual to go to a determined place and look inside, like the early modern dungeon did. With both Manet and Bentham we have "axial" lines of visibility and an "automatic functioning" of dispositional powers that are radically de-individuating because no representation of subjectivity is necessary in order to determine who or how to look (*DP*, pp. 200, 201).[58] Foucault's ambition in turning to the language of *dispositive* is not only a political and aesthetic retort to Althusser's theory of ideology but also raises the problem of how to account for, ex-

57. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 2012), p. 200; hereafter abbreviated *DP*.

58. As is well known, one of the great criticisms of Manet's canvases was that his figures were too ordinary, that they had no specific qualifications, and that they could be easily accessible to an ordinary (nonspecialized) audience; the same absence of qualification is built into the ubiquitous applicability of the Panopticon that could be used for anything and by anyone (indeed, the design of the building is such that if there were a prison riot, the inmates could just as easily operate the disciplinary *dispositif* as the inspectors, and the inspectors could just as easily be inmates).

plain, and critically engage the proliferation of *dispositifs* in the modern period—that is, the proliferation of media that don't wield powers of representation but dispose, organize, and assemble bodies, visibilities, and enunciations.

The aspects of the Manet canvas discussed thus far build towards the final element Foucault will address; namely, the *tableau objet* (picture object). The last painting considered in the lecture is *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–1882) (fig. 5). In his description of it Foucault brings to bear the aesthetic insights he has already raised. He will show that like *The Masked Ball at the Opera* "there is not really any depth" and like *The Fifer* the lighting is "entirely frontal" and "strikes the woman in full shot" (*MOP*, p. 74). The French transcription has Foucault affirming that the light strikes the woman "de plein fouet."[59] The metaphor is a nineteenth-century French military expression and it refers to the horizontality of a direct shot of a pistol or a rifle towards a visible target, *fouet* also being the French word for whip. Thus the metaphor suggests that light strikes the canvas directly or in a fully frontal manner in the way that a whip or the shot of a pistol strikes its victim directly.

59. Saison, *La Peinture de Manet*, p. 44.

But the most significant part of Foucault's treatment of this painting is his discussion of the three systems of incompatibility that appear (or are implied) on the surface of the canvas: "the painter must be here and he must be there; he must have someone here and he must have no-one there; there is a descending gaze and there is an ascending gaze" (*MOP*, p. 78). This "triple impossibility" emerges from the discontinuities between the representation of light, the failure of the mirror's reflection, and the odd disposition of the figures in the canvas—all features, I want to say, that insist on the canvas's being a complex rather than a reflex and thus decidedly antirepresentational. It's in the recounting of these incompatibilities that Foucault is almost explicit about the acute relation of the Manet canvas to *Las Meninas*. (And crucial to this is the different function of the mirror in *Las Meninas* vis-à-vis *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. In the latter painting the mirror is not a reflective surface.) Whereas his reading of the *Las Meninas* had focused almost obsessively on the empty space of the canvas and the plunging that takes you into the painting (or, indeed, situates the viewer in the empty space of the painting as if they were always already in its depths), in his reading of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* he will affirm that there is no empty space at all (see *MOP*, p. 77).

However limited (due to its brevity) the reading of this painting may be, what matters to our purposes is a final insight upon which the entirety of Foucault's viewing will rest: namely, the claim that Manet's canvas is decidedly not a normative space:

> This triple impossibility, whereby we know where we must place ourselves to see the spectacle as we see it, this exclusion, if you will, of every stable and defined place where we locate the viewer, is evidently one of the fundamental properties of this picture and explains at once the enchantment and the malaise that one feels in looking at it. While all classical painting, by its system of lines, of perspective, of vanishing point, etc., had assigned to the viewer and to the painter a certain precise place, fixed, constant, from where the spectacle was seen, so that in looking at a picture one very clearly saw from where it was seen, if it was from above or from below, from an angle or from opposite. Here, on the contrary, in a picture like this one, or in any case in this one, it is not possible to know where the painter has placed himself in order to paint the picture as he has done it, and where we must place ourselves in order to see a spectacle such as this. And you see that with this last technique, Manet plays with the picture's property of being not in the least a normative space whereby the representation fixes us or fixes the viewer to a point, a

unique point from which to look. The picture appears like a space in
front of which and by rapport with which one can move around:
the viewer mobile before the picture, real light striking head on,
verticals and horizontals perpetually doubled, suppression of depth.
So you see the canvas in which there is something real, material, in
some ways physical, is about to appear and to play with all its proper-
ties in representation. [*MOP*, pp. 78–79]

This is the dynamic that will form the crux of what, in the subsequent par-
agraph, he calls the *tableau objet*.[60] And what the *tableau objet* does is gen-
erate rather than fix movement. Viewing is moving, here and there, up and
down; hence the assertion that not only is the canvas decidedly not a nor-
mative space (by which he means a space that locates positionality through
a series of qualifications that enlist the "how" of representation) but that
there is an exclusion that is not an absence or a lack but the unavailability
"of every stable and defined place where we locate the viewer." This is how
Manet's canvases paint modern perception: as movement. In other words,
it's not that viewership is impossible but that there is no specific place as-
signed to it. Manet's canvas is not a normative space because there is no
one place or perspective from which to view it, thereby denuding viewer-
ship of the qualifications of positionality and thus subjectivity.

   Now, from one perspective (the perspective I wish to dispel), this ac-
count of motility around and about the *tableau objet* might seem counter
or even anathema to the claim I made earlier that Manet and Bentham were
not opposing exempla for Foucault but that they stand in transmedial con-
sonance with one another and that both these medial motifs source Fou-
cault's discovery (or invention, or reinvention) of the *dispositif* as a device
for the *agencement/assemblage* and arrangement of things (that is, the *dis-
positif* as a medium of governmentality, or La Perrière's "right disposition
of things"). But in reality there is no contradiction.

   Recall two things about Foucault's treatment of the architectural draw-
ing. First, and most obviously, during his lectures he's talking about a draw-
ing that is (likely) projected upon the flat surface of a screen from the light
of a slide projector (fig. 6). Architectural drawings are flat surfaces whose
flatness is rendered perspicuous when projected upon the scrim of a

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60. For discussions of the tableau form, see Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, pp. 267–80 and
Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before (Cambridge, Mass., 2008); Jean-François
Chevrier, "The Adventures of the Picture Form in the History of Photograhy," in *The Last
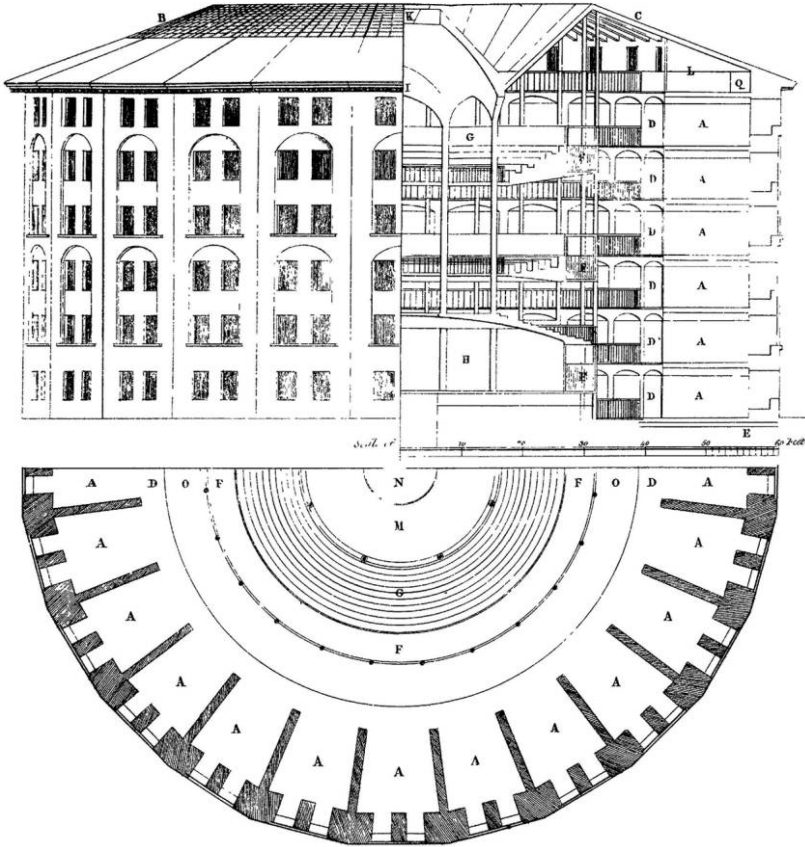Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982*, ed. Douglas Fogle (Minneapolis, 2003),
pp. 113–28.

FIGURE 6.   Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon penitentiary, as drawn by Willey Reveley (1791).

screen.[61] And they are totally in view due in part to their flatness but also due to their being fully lit. Moreover, because of the way that Foucault talks about these structures, there is never the sense that (again in contrast to *Las Meninas*) he is interested in placing his audience inside them. In other words, the language is never one of depth or entering the structure; it is, as I suggested, one of hovering about. Secondly, there is the matter of some of the central features of the Panopticon itself: it is round and curved, there is a central tower, and though that tower could be vacant, no specific qualification for its occupancy is assigned. Indeed, in order for the scenario to work

61. At this point, it's difficult not to recall Cavell's observation that the screen "holds a projection, as light as light" (Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 24).

at all, the assumption of a ubiquitous visibility must be in place (that is, total everywhereness), which is decidedly not a fixed, normative point of view. The tower does exist, just as there is a space of visibility in front of the canvas, but the guard inside the tower is expected to move about and look everywhere, and, indeed, the scenario can only work if and when the expectation of visibility is constant—in constant movement here and there, up and down. No doubt the tower is a fixed structure; but the viewer inside the tower is not fixed but constantly moving. If the prisoners or school children had any clue that someone were either normatively fixed facing only in one direction, or (and what amounts to the same thing) absent, then the entire raison d'être of the *dispositif* would fall apart. The Panopticon works, in other words, like the surface of *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*; it arranges visibility, movement, and lines rather than fixing them "so that finally one day we can get rid of representation itself and allow space to play with its pure and simple properties, its material properties" (*MOP*, p. 79). In fact, Foucault does note that by removing a normative space of viewership the Panopticon did just that—it got rid of "representation itself." "The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application." And "By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance" (*DP*, pp. 202, 203). The ubiquity of total visibility denies a normative place of viewership as well as the confrontation of interpellation.

Though potentially normalizing, this is decidedly not a normative space, nor is it a normative play of powers. In front of the *dispositif* you are totally exposed, and it is totally exposed to you. That's the point of the antirepresentational move: to radically uproot the idea that there might be a normative space from which to view and be viewed and that that is a good space, or the right space, or the expert place of viewership. Herein also we find the implicit critique of the apparatus: the *dispositif* doesn't simply point to a different kind of power; it removes the private/public distinction implicit in Althusser's account of ISAs and with that, the propriety of ownership that accompanies the private, situated viewing of the quattrocento vanishing point (and, *ceteris paribus*, of the dungeon).

Now, none of what I have offered up thus far suggests that we need to reconsider Foucault's disciplinary *dispositifs* as normatively good objects or operations. This would be outlandish for more reasons than one, the most important of which is that these are not normative structures but normalizing ones (as Pasquinelli's reading of Foucault's debt to Canguil-

hem reminds us). What I am proposing is that the *dispositif*'s powers are
not the same as the powers of the apparatus, that the *dispositif* is not an in-
strument of domination, that it is not a Tauskian "influence machine." It is,
rather, a site and source for the distribution of powers and intensities made
empirically manifest through lines of visibilities, forms of enunciation,
forces of arrangement, events of discontinuity, and practices of assembly
formation. Instead of a normative instrument of domination, therefore,
Foucault's *dispositif* is best considered (as James Chandler rightly reminds
us) an intermedial form that offers "ways of ordering works and organizing
the worlds represented."[62] It is, I want to assert, an aesthetic-political site of
collective formation.

3

Before I bring this essay to a conclusion I want to raise, however briefly,
some further considerations on the ontological stakes of my claim that the
dispositif is not an influence machine or an apparatus of domination but a
intermedial dynamic of dispositional powers. Recall that one of my ambi-
tions for this essay, echoing Brossat, is to show how Foucault's adoption
and development of the term *dispositif* engages an explicit aesthetic and po-
litical decision that is grounded in his studies on Manet and has extensive
development throughout his lectures of the 1970s (notably the lectures and
writings concerned with governmentality and disciplinary structures, the
Panopticon chief among these).[63] The reception of that material has, of
course, been at once extensive and foundational. I would venture to sug-
gest that few research projects have had as notable of an impact factor in
the social sciences and humanities since the postwar period as Foucault's
studies on disciplinary *dispositifs*. And much of that work has attended
to, amongst other things, the microphysics of power (to use Foucault's
own language) in modern society. The focus of that line of inquiry and
the many strands of interdisciplinary research emergent from it have come
at a cost: few have attended to Foucault's attempt to rethink the forms of
causality relevant to *dispositifs*. My ambition in showing the transmedial
resonance between the Manet *tableau objet* and Bentham's Panopticon is
to suggest that there is—in the aesthetic-political nexus of problems around
the idea of the *dispositif*—an attempt to rethink the nature of media causality
beyond or perhaps even against the standard twentieth-century model of
communication, transmission, and causal influence. If the *dispositif* is ex-
plicitly not a normative apparatus of representation and domination, then

62. Chandler, *An Archaeology of Sympathy*, p. xiv.
63. See Brossat, "La Notion de dispositif chez Michel Foucault."

it is also not an instrument of meaning transmission on the model of a linguistic utterance or a hermeneutic theory of understanding. Perhaps the most radically modernist aspect of the *dispositif* is the implicit claim that it does not function like (nor does it belong to the function of) a language. But the *dispositif* does something; what is, then, the nature of this medium's doing if it's explicitly neither transmission nor influence?

I hint at this question throughout by enlisting the etymology of the term *dispositif*, from the Roman rhetorical tradition of the *dispositio* and its further relation to an aesthetics of ornament (the *dispono* of *dispositio*) to the practices of arrangement and placing and subsequent forms of attention that accompany these and that aren't reducible to a pondering or a reflection. Instead, they are about "how an object carries and even carries out human attention," which "is quite different from expressing an idea about it" (by which I take Theo Davis to mean that to ornament something is quite different from representing it).[64] My point in drawing from these sources is to make explicit my claim that the *dispositif* is an intermediary power of *agencement/assemblage* that augers diverse associational modes and forms (including solidarity, equality, discipline, and comparison) but that neither determines the shape nor the constituency of any such arrangements. In short, the political ontology of the *dispositif* lies in the dispositional powers it makes manifest.

"Dispositions," Stephen Mumford tells us, "are properties, and properties play causal roles in a thing's interaction with the world about it."[65] And though a dispositional power is oriented towards what tends to be, it is also not purely contingent. What a dispositional power makes possible is limited to (in our case) the technical capacities of the *dispositif* itself. "What it is that makes certain artefacts the things that they are is that they have a particular set of dispositions."[66] This doesn't mean that a *dispositif* has specific functions, or that what they do is determined by the specific internal mechanism of the thing. That's precisely the point of the *dispositif*, in one sense: that what it is doesn't determine what it can do; rather, what the thing can be emerges from its dispositional powers.[67] Manet's reinvention of painting is, according to Foucault, a radical break with

64. Davis, *Ornamental Aesthetics*, p. 19.
65. Mumford, *Dispositions* (New York, 2003), p. 118.
66. Ibid., pp. 8–9.
67. Here, I am reminded of Cavell once again and his definition of modernism: "Modernism signifies not that the powers of the arts are exhausted, but on the contrary that it has become the immediate task of the artist to achieve in his art the muse of the art itself—to declare, from itself, the art as a whole for which it speaks, to become a present of that art. One might say that the task is no longer to produce another instance of an art but a new medium within it" (Cavell, *The World Viewed*, p. 103).

previous painting because Manet made available the dispositional powers of the canvas in a manner heretofore unappreciated. There was nothing necessary about the canvas that compelled Manet to make its surface flatness available to the experience of viewing a painting, nor was Manet's *tableau objet* an ideal representation. The *tableau objet* was a dispositional power of the pictorial canvas actualized by Manet's ways of rethinking the technical activities of painting beyond representation. And so we can say that the *tableau objet* was neither a necessary condition of the canvas nor an ideal possibility but something in between, a "dispositional modality." "Dispositionality," Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum argue, "is a primitive, unanalysable modality that is intermediate between pure possibility and necessity."[68] Dispositionality helps explain how we might appreciate the causal powers of the *dispositif* as neither necessary nor normative but as potential forces that may, but need not, actualize. And this form of causal relationality does, indeed, provide a new ontology of media objects.

What the study of the *dispositif* in Foucault shows is not only (or exclusively) a concerted effort to rethink the nature of modern social and political power beyond the image of sovereignty, nor only (or exclusively) an attempt to offer a political alternative to Marxist (and especially Althusserian) conceptions of ideology critique. Foucault's studies of the dispositional powers of *dispositifs* in his lectures on Manet and his 1970s lectures at the Collège de France represent an ambition to develop a new critical theory of media not beholden to a causal ontology of influence as domination. This novel critical theory of media is rooted in an attempt to explore the physics of medial movement; the forces, intensities, and associations constituent of those movements; and the emergent political and aesthetic forms of such intermediary modalities. A new critical paradigm of intermedial causality, and nothing less, is what is at stake in the political ontology of the *dispositif*.

68. Mumford and Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers*, pp. 189, 193.