

# The Multiple *Dispositifs* of (Early) Cinema

## Les multiples dispositifs du cinéma (des premiers temps)

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### Résumé de l'article

Au cours des débats récents concernant les effets de la numérisation sur l'institution cinématographique, la notion de dispositif est généralement évoquée pour désigner le type de positionnement du spectateur défini dans les années 1970 par Jean-Louis Baudry. Par conséquent, quand il est question de l'« explosion du dispositif cinématographique » au  $xx^e$  siècle, on reprend cette conception monolithique qui ne tient pas compte des différentes manières dont les spectateurs ont pu voir des films au cours du  $xx^e$  siècle, diachroniquement aussi bien que synchroniquement. En critiquant une telle conception, cet article propose d'aborder le concept de dispositif dans une perspective de pragmatique historique et de l'utiliser en tant qu'outil heuristique pour analyser tout l'éventail des différents dispositifs cinématographiques qui ont existé historiquement ainsi que les nouveaux dispositifs qui émergent aujourd'hui.

# The Multiple *Dispositifs* of (Early) Cinema

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## ABSTRACT

In recent debates regarding the effects of digitalization on cinema, the concept of *dispositif* is generally used to refer to a model of spectatorship that was defined in the 1970s by Jean-Louis Baudry. Consequently, when theorists affirm that there is an “explosion” of the cinematic *dispositif* in the twenty-first century, they partake in this monolithic conception, which does not acknowledge the fact that watching films in the twentieth century occurred in a variety of ways, both diachronically and synchronically. Critiquing such a view, this article proposes to understand the concept of *dispositif* from the perspective of a historical pragmatics and to use it as a heuristic tool to analyze the vast range of moving image *dispositifs* that have existed historically, as well as the new *dispositifs* that emerge in today’s digital mediascape.

In 1996, the year when the celebrations of cinema’s centenary were still in full swing, the International Film Festival Rotterdam introduced a programme section that they called “Exploding Cinema” and which was meant to react to the developments that occurred in the domain of moving images at that time. The internet was about to become an increasingly important element in everyday life, video games provided new forms of visual entertainment, CD-ROMs offered the possibility to create interactive movies, and artists’ installations brought movies into spaces other than the conventional film theatre. The title of the section was undoubtedly a reference (and maybe reverence) to Gene Youngblood’s 1970 classic *Expanded Cinema*, which had already explored the possibilities of a different kind of cinema, moving way beyond the traditional forms of moviegoing.

It is useful to look back to the mid-1990s or even the early 1970s to appreciate the continuities, but also the differences in the ways in which the expansion or explosion of the cinematic *dispositif* is

discussed today. A first observation, then, would be that the dominant *dispositif* was called into question already fifty years ago (and one could probably find without too much effort that it has been challenged even earlier than that), but that it appears to have been able to survive rather comfortably the various technological and cultural threats it had to face. Secondly, both Youngblood and the Rotterdam programme section focus on alternative, experimental and artistic forms that aim at going beyond traditional feature films technologically, and in many cases also aesthetically. Thirdly, both are about transcending mainstream cinema, about leaving it behind, replacing it by other forms and industries, be it “synaesthetic cinema” in the case of Youngblood, or the emerging computer game industry in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

In more recent discussions, the migration of cinematic images into spaces such as galleries and museums, their use in installations and other screen-based arrangements, continues to play an important role, and frequently the question is raised whether these ways of displaying moving pictures can still be considered to be “cinema” (Bordina, Dubois and Ramos Monteiro 2009; Vancheri 2009; Aumont 2012; Bellour 2012). On the other hand, however, digitalization clearly also has an impact on mainstream cinema, and its effects are often even looked upon as a threat to the economic survival of the institution of cinema as it has functioned for more than a century. Indeed, today the movie theatre is no longer the predominant or privileged space where fiction feature films are being watched. So these discussions are less concerned with new kinds of audiovisual products, but with the economic effects of digitalization for the narrative films that are still the main output of the movie industry. New channels of distribution and exhibition have become available, and films can be consumed almost anywhere, provided that there is an internet connection allowing a user to stream moving pictures. Digitalization, in other words, transforms feature films into “content,” which can be displayed on all sorts of platforms. These developments have thus led to another kind of “explosion” affecting the traditional cinema *dispositif* (Gaudreault and Marion 2013; Casetti 2015).

What is striking in all these discussions is the monolithic perspective on the cinematic *dispositif*. The authors generally focus

more or less exclusively on fictional feature films (which are, of course, the culturally dominant product of the moving-picture industry), leaving aside the entire range of nonfictional films, amateur films and others. In addition, they also privilege a specific type of spectatorship, forgetting the caveat that Christian Metz formulated already in the 1970s. In his seminal essay on “The Fiction Film and Its Spectator,” he underscored that his reflections concerned only “certain geographical forms of the institution itself, those that are valid in Western countries,” and that they constituted “only [...] *one* ethnography of the filmic state, among others remaining to be done” (1976, 99 and 100). To this, one could add that the way in which the *dispositif* of the classical narrative fiction film is taken as a default option ignores the fact that between and even within Western countries spectatorship is subject to cultural and social differences. Moreover, the experience of moviegoing itself has been anything but historically stable, so that, in the words of Jacques Aumont, one could indeed ask whether the canonical cinema *dispositif* ever actually existed in real life (2012, 77).<sup>2</sup>

### **The Cinematic *Dispositif*: Singular or Plural?**

A central issue concerning the above-mentioned debates is whether the term “cinematic *dispositif*” can actually be used in the singular. This clearly is the implicit presupposition whenever the “expansion,” “explosion” or, even stronger, the “shattering” of the *dispositif* is brought up as a reaction to the transformations that result from the rapid digitalization that takes place on all levels of the institution, be it production, distribution or exhibition. When Jean-Louis Baudry, in the mid-1970s, described the cinematic *dispositif* (translated into English as “apparatus”<sup>3</sup>), he addressed, on the one hand, the technological arrangement as such, which connects the projector, the screen and the spectator-subject, while, on the other hand, the kind of spectatorship he describes is quite precisely that of a narrative fiction film.<sup>4</sup> In his earlier essay on the basic cinematic apparatus, Baudry had insisted on the importance of narrative continuity as an “essential ideological stake” (1986a, 293). So the *dispositif* comprises not only the technology and the subject, but also a specific textual form that is particularly apt to serve the end to which it is used. In Baudry’s words: to “offer the subject perceptions

‘of a reality’ whose status seems similar to that of representations perceived as perceptions” (1986b, 314).

Translating this into the semio-pragmatic terminology proposed by Roger Odin (2011), we might say that Baudry is indeed concerned exclusively with the “space of fictional communication,” requiring the spectator to fully adopt the fictionalizing mode of experiencing a film. This means, conversely, that all other spaces of communication in which moving pictures can intervene are not taken into consideration when the term “cinematic *dispositif*” is used. Spaces of educational, documentary, instructional, promotional, or family communication are left aside, or even willfully excluded, because these are not “cinema.” Yet, what are these spaces of communication, if not *dispositifs*, that is projections including the subject to whom the projection is addressed, as Baudry (1986b, 317) described the *dispositif* he analyzed? The point is, however, that they imply very different communicational intentionalities, and that these manifest themselves in textual forms, rhetoric strategies and modes of address that differ from those of a narrative fiction film.

Baudry’s influential essay, in other words, has led to a somewhat simplified use of the concept of the cinematic *dispositif* or “apparatus,” as it is generally seen as exclusively referring to the viewing situation of narrative fiction films in a movie theatre. Therefore, given the current transformations of the audience’s viewing habits, Francesco Casetti, for his part, draws the conclusion that it is time to abandon the concept completely: “I believe it is time to take the issue in a more radical direction: to renounce the very notion of the apparatus and replace it with the concept of the *assemblage*, which can restore to the dispositive its proper boundaries” (2015, 78). Casetti thus argues in favour of the more open notion of *assemblage* that he adopts from Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Foucault’s concept of the *dispositif*, which, however, should not be confused with Baudry’s.<sup>5</sup>

But there is still another possibility to escape the theoretical rigidity (or dogmatism) as well as the problematic a-historicity of the so-called apparatus theory, which Casetti critiques in his book. When reframed in the perspective of a historical pragmatics, there is not just one cinematic *dispositif*. There is, of course, a culturally dominant one, which is the one that is the object of Baudry’s theory. Yet, this does not exclude also considering as *dispositifs* the entire

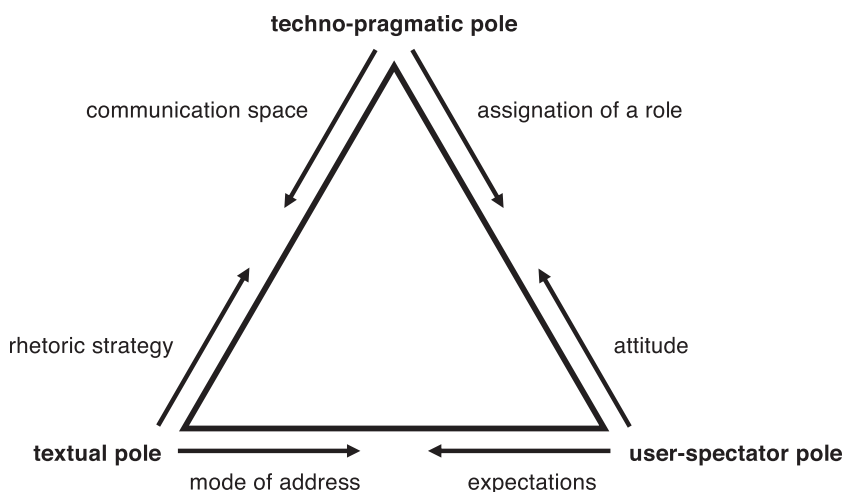
range of configurations in which moving pictures can intervene, both synchronically and diachronically. What I want to argue here is that it may be more productive to adopt the notion of *dispositif* in an analytical perspective rather than as a normative category.<sup>6</sup> The question, then, would not be whether a given media configuration actually *is* or *constitutes* a *dispositif*, but what happens when we *study* it as a *dispositif*.

What does that mean? The term *dispositif*, from the viewpoint proposed here, does not designate a specific configuration of technology, subject and textual form, as is the case for Baudry, when he describes the viewing conditions of a classical narrative film viewed in a movie theatre, but can be used to understand the functioning of an entire range of media configurations involving these three poles.

### **Analyzing Media *Dispositifs***

In order to make the concept productive as an analytical framework, it is necessary, however, to make explicit the complex interrelationships that link the three poles. To begin with, the pole constituted by the technology (the projector and the screen, in Baudry's two articles) needs to be broadened. As we have seen, it is not solely the technology and its affordances that can define a viewing situation: the pragmatic dimension of the communicational situation needs to be taken into account as well. So it seems to be more adequate to speak of a techno-pragmatic pole, which comprises both the media technology intervening in the communication process and the ends to which it is used (to entertain, to persuade, to inform, to instruct, etc.).

The textual pole equally has to be considered in a much broader sense than simply the features of the text itself. In many cases there is also a performance element involved. Obviously, during the entire silent period live music was part of a film show, and for many years, lecturers intervened in various functions. In educational screenings, films were introduced and maybe even commented upon during the projection. As for films made to be shown in classrooms, teachers might prefer them not to have a soundtrack, so that they can stay in control of the pedagogical process and orient the pupils' attention towards the relevant aspects in the image.<sup>7</sup> In film clubs, presentations and discussions framed the audiences' experience.



**Figure 1.** The three poles of the *dispositif* and their interrelationships.

The “text” of a projection, in other words, may go far beyond the images projected onto the screen and the recorded sounds coming out of the speakers.

Finally, the “spectator-subject” is seen here rather as a position in the communicational process and has been reframed as the user-spectator pole (to include also other forms of engagement with media configurations than those implying spectatorship in the strict sense). In this way, in other words, the user-spectator pole is actually determined by how it relates to both the textual and the techno-pragmatic pole. More precisely, each of the poles is positioned in relation to the two others. The techno-pragmatic pole constitutes, on the one hand, a communication space within which the text functions, and, on the other hand, it assigns a role to the user-spectator with regard to the communication process that is taking place. The textual pole is oriented towards the techno-pragmatic pole by means of a rhetoric strategy that is related to the communication space, and it deploys a mode of address towards the user-spectator. The latter, finally, answers to the role that it is assigned in the communication process with a corresponding attitude (while, of course, every empirical user or spectator can reject this role, but then the communication process will fail), and with expectations with respect to the textual form.

Studying the interrelationships between the three poles constituting a *dispositif* allows us to describe and analyze different types of mediated communication and does not limit the term to narrative fiction films watched in a movie theatre. Moreover, understood in this way, the concept of *dispositif* makes it possible to focus the analysis on any one of the poles, while still taking into account the two others, depending on the issues one aims to explore.

### ***Dispositif-Diversity***

Looking at the current changes that have led many commentators to talk about an “explosion” of the *dispositif*, there are different issues lumped together, so it is worthwhile to consider them separately.

First of all, and in some respects most importantly, there is the fact that “cinema” (a term referring by default, as it were, to narrative fiction films) is no longer exclusively watched on the screen of a movie theatre, but on a variety of (digital) screens: so-called home-cinema installations, portable DVD players, laptops, tablets, even smartphones. The diversification of viewing devices for moving pictures, however, is a process with a very long history, which includes not only television, VCRs, or laserdiscs, but also, for instance, Super 8 versions of theatrical films to be screened in private homes. Television in the 1950s and home video in the 1980s, in particular, were seen as serious threats to the movie theatre, yet the “moviegoer” is far from being an extinct species. Even less have these technological changes caused irreparable damage to the industry as a whole. A quarter of a century ago, Douglas Gomery stated:

VCRs have caused numerous important changes in movie watching in the United States. [...] By the mid-1980s households with VCRs rented more than one hundred million cassettes per month, or an average of almost a movie a week. By the beginning of the 1990s revenues from tape rentals in the United States were moving well past ten billion dollars per year. Some one hundred thousand outlets rent tapes. Movies on tape ranks with the innovation of the nickelodeon, the picture palace and the multiplex in shaping the movie-watching habits of Americans. (Gomery 1992, 287)



Given the sheer magnitude of the video rental phenomenon, it is obvious that exhibitors in the U.S. suffered from the competition, but, as Gomery adds, “by successfully exploiting video sales and rentals the Hollywood movie companies were able to reach a position of prosperity unseen since the days of World War II” (288). And one might add that over the past years, video and later DVD rental and sales shops have all but disappeared in many cities. Obviously, many cinemas had to close, too, but others were opened, while there is hardly a chance that the rental shops will return.

In other words, while there are distribution channels, platforms and devices that are competing with the movie theatre, the product (or “content” as it is referred to today) has not substantially changed. Yet, the changes that do occur by the “relocation” of cinema, as Casetti (2015) calls it, lead to a very complex reframing of the experience that is referred to by the term “cinema.” Casetti argues that this leads to a two-sided attitude that tries to identify these new viewing contexts with the traditional one, while accepting that there are fundamental differences:

In broad terms, we move from a certain idea of cinema that is part of our cultural patrimony, and we compare it with the situation, in which we find ourselves implicated, careful to bring out the typical traits of cinema (identification) and to confirm the fact that what we have before us is cinema, no matter its appearance (acceptance). It is thanks to this double feat that we can solve spurious situations such as many of those created by the relocation of cinema, and we can recognize as cinematographic experiences those such as watching a film at home, on a trip, in a waiting room, on a DVD player, or on a computer, and chatting about what we are watching on a social network. (Casetti 2015, 209)

Casetti’s observation is very pertinent with regard to the positions taken by authors such as Aumont, Bellour, Dubois, Gaudreault and Marion, or Vancheri in the discussions on what “cinema” means today. Their respective answers depend largely on the extent to which they identify the “typical traits of cinema” in current practices, and the degree to which they are willing to accept that other elements of the traditional film viewing experience change or even disappear.

Secondly, there are several new practices that emerge in connection with narrative fiction films, such as, most notably, the possibility to have online exchanges with others even while we are watching. Other developments of this kind are practices linked to what is called the “second screen,” that is tablets or smartphones that moviegoers are encouraged to use during the screening. This kind of “live” interaction has become quite current in contemporary television (Van Es 2017) but is also introduced into movie theatres and seems to be particularly successful in Asia. The *danmu* (“bullet curtain”) is a practice that migrated from online video sites to cinemas.<sup>8</sup> Spectators can type comments on their smartphones, which then appear directly on the screen, overlaying the images of the film itself. Another way to use the second screen is to allow the audience to collectively decide at certain points what decisions a character should make or to otherwise have an influence on the narrative.<sup>9</sup> As Casetti (2015, 179–201) put it, the spectatorial regime shifts from “attendance” to “performance.”

In both cases, one should add, the audience’s engagement with the film changes significantly, as these forms of interaction block or rather disrupt the “fictionalizing mode” (Odin 2011, 47–49) that ideal-typically governs the viewing of a narrative fiction film. Not only is the spectators’ absorption in the diegesis continually unsettled as they type or click on the interface of their mobile device, in the case of *danmu*, the visual hierarchy on the screen is actually inverted, as here the written characters become the focus of attention.

Thirdly, Gaudreault and Marion (2013, 197–200) list the fact that movie theatres, today, often show moving pictures other than fiction feature films, in particular live transmissions of operas, ballets or stage plays performed by prestigious companies somewhere else on the globe. While this phenomenon, too, is not an absolute novelty (Kitsopanidou 2012), it may be read as a sign that “cinema” (narrative fiction film) has to compete with other types of spectacle “in its own house” and thus is threatened from two sides: on the one hand, the movie theatre is no longer the exclusive home of the narrative fiction film, and on the other hand, the latter is no longer the only form of moving pictures to be shown on the cinema screen.

Finally, several authors such as Bellour, Dubois or Vancheri refer to the migration of moving pictures from the cinema into other spaces, most notably art galleries and museums, prominent examples of which are *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) by Douglas Gordon or *The Clock* (2010) by Christian Marclay. Here filmic images are “relocated” in an entirely different environment, watched under different viewing conditions, with a different type of text and a different mode of address.

To summarize: the symptoms of the “crisis” that is often evoked when the “exploded” cinematic *dispositif* is discussed concern a variety of issues: the diversification of distribution channels for narrative fiction films that entail viewing practices which make it more difficult to be absorbed in the diegesis; new exhibition practices within movie theatres that, at least temporarily, push aside the narrative fiction film as the focus of the audience’s interest; and the move of cinematic images that often were originally part of narrative fiction films into exhibition spaces other than the movie theatre. All of these new configurations can indeed be analyzed in terms of *dispositifs* that are different from the traditional cinema *dispositif*, creating other spaces of communication, other textual forms, other modes of address, other spectatorial attitudes and expectations. They may or may not end up as institutionalized practices, but that is still an open question, as is the issue to what extent this will have an economic, social or cultural impact on moviegoing.

### **Back to the Future?**

Gaudreault and Marion argue in the media historical model they propose that there is a development leading from “appearance of a technological process [and] the emergence of an apparatus, through the establishment of procedures [to] the constitution of a media institution” (2005, 5). What is striking here is that they talk about the “emergence of an apparatus” using the singular.<sup>10</sup> This is, of course, due to the fact that they are interested in the first instance in the process leading towards the dominant institutional form of a medium, while a technology as such can be used for different communicational ends, as we have seen. In the case of cinema, they see the apparatus (meaning: the cinematic *dispositif*) emerge in the shift from the initial culture of “animated pictures” to the constitution

of cinema as an established and autonomous media institution (2002, 14). With the term “animated pictures” the authors refer to uses of the new medium that are rooted in earlier practices:

[...] despite the “attraction” of the new medium, despite its status as a technological novelty, the medium was nevertheless used back then to do the same old things. Certainly, it was used as a new way of continuing to do what had “always” been done, to perpetuate stage shows and itinerant entertainments, or as a new way of presenting already well-established entertainment “genres”: magic and fairy shows, farce, plays, and other kinds of public performances. It wasn’t until cinema’s practitioners arrived at a reflexive understanding of the medium and until the cinema achieved a certain degree of institutionalisation that the cinema became autonomous. (Gaudreault and Marion 2002, 13–14)

Such a statement, however, implies looking at a historical situation from a retrospective viewpoint, considering the variety of media configurations that can be observed at a specific moment in relation to an ultimately dominant one.<sup>11</sup> When reversing the perspective and looking at the same period as a moment when the way in which animated photography would develop was still largely open, it becomes evident that the coexistence of a variety of practices, which can be considered experimentations and explorations of the possibilities offered by the new technology, can be studied more productively when one does not focus exclusively on the uses of animated pictures for entertainment purposes.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, the latter turned out to be decisive for the medium’s culturally dominant and institutionalized future form. Yet, looking at the multiple configurations of animated photography that one can distinguish around 1900 may help to better understand the dynamics of the historical situation.

The focus on the *dispositif* of institutionalized cinema and its role in public entertainments tends to exclude a broad range of practices not only in areas such as education, instruction, science, information or propaganda, but even within the realm of entertainment there were practices that went beyond doing “what had ‘always’ been done.” Looking, for instance, at the film screenings integrated

in the programmes of the American vaudeville or the German *Varietétheater*, the animated pictures did in fact introduce a new type of attraction in the form of a “visual newspaper” (Allen 1983, 109–12) or “*optische Berichterstattung*” (Garncarz 2010, 30–51). Such film programmes could also include comedies or trick films, but the actualities and topical subjects offered something that the stage performances with which they shared the bill could not provide. And even if they might be considered “doing what had ‘always’ been done,” the numerous stage productions in which moving pictures were integrated, both in the U.S. (Waltz 2012) and in Europe (Tralongo 2012), did by the same token explore new ways of using the cinematic technologies that did not disappear with the institutionalization of the medium.

The educational multimedia presentations organized by the German *Kinoreform* around 1910, which combined lantern slide and film projections with recorded or live music, sound effects and lectures constituted another performative configuration where the moving image was not necessarily the most important ingredient. The *Kinoreformer* did in fact try to establish an alternative to commercial film screenings in cinemas and other places of entertainment, but even if they were not very successful in doing so, their activities pointed towards a possibility to use the medium’s capacity for ends other than amusement (Kessler and Lenk 2014). They thus wanted to present moving pictures alongside lantern slides within a communication space of entertaining education and instruction, addressing their audiences as spectators willing to engage in such a process.

About a decade earlier already, around 1900, Alfred John West had projected both still and moving images in his patriotic “Our Navy” performances, which lasted two hours and were equally accompanied by live music, songs, and sound effects (Gray 2008). At this point, the moving images were still much more of a novelty, but arguably they were not the only reason why audiences went to see these shows. Here, the communication space and the corresponding mode of address were characterized by patriotic propaganda, and accordingly the audiences were meant to feel proud of their nation’s military power.

These are but a few examples of the way in which moving images were performed in different contexts in the early period, and in

this respect, one could argue that what is now often referred to as the *dispositif* was in fact an always already exploded one. The point I want to make, though, is that the involvement of animated photography in other cultural practices created media configurations that in themselves can be analyzed as *dispositifs*. Not, however, by using this term as shorthand for the institutionalized form called “cinema,” but to analyze configurations constituting communication spaces of a certain kind, in which texts with their rhetoric strategies address and position spectators in specific ways while trying to shape and meet the latter’s expectations.

### To Conclude

So obviously, there is a largely shared general understanding of what is meant by saying “to go to the movies” or “*aller au cinéma*,” “*naar de film gaan*,” “*andare al cinema*,” “*ins Kino gehen*,” “*ходить в кино*,” even though the audiences’ concrete experiences may differ considerably both historically and culturally. Also, it is against the background of this “default option” that other moving picture practices are generally discussed, and there are often good reasons for doing so. Yet, looking at the actual diversity of historical and contemporary practices helps us to avoid a monolithic look at media history and to better understand the various ways in which media technologies such as moving pictures penetrate everyday life in a much more pervasive manner, one that goes far beyond the medium’s institutionalized form. So rather than trying to identify in a more or less normative way what does and what does not constitute a (let alone *the*) cinematic *dispositif*, it may be more productive to understand the term as an analytical tool, as has been proposed here. Or, to put it differently: there is not one transhistorical *dispositif* that now has suddenly exploded under the impact of the digital, but rather constantly transforming media configurations participating in a variety of institutions, some of which may be culturally dominant, but all of which can be studied as *dispositifs*.

### NOTES

1. Youngblood seems to almost predict digital distribution systems when he writes: “Synaesthetic cinema not only is the end of movies as we’ve known them aesthetically; the physical hardware of film technology is quickly phasing out, and with it

the traditional ways of filmmaking and viewing. We're entering the era of image publishing and image exchange, the inevitable evolutionary successor to book publishing: the post-mass audience age" (1970, 129).

2. For René Barjavel, in his 1944 book *Le cinéma total*, none of the features characterizing the cinema of his time was to escape the transformations that he predicted. In addition to sound and colour, Barjavel saw three-dimensionality as a logical development, and he also predicted that the film strip, and even the screen were to disappear and be replaced by future technologies (51–52).
3. The translation is not unproblematic, as I have discussed elsewhere (in "Notes on *Dispositif*," November 2007, <http://www.frankkessler.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Dispositif-Notes.pdf>), in particular as it makes it more difficult to understand the distinction that Baudry proposes between the "*appareil de base*," the "basic cinematographic apparatus [...], which concerns the ensemble of the equipment and operations necessary to the production of a film and its projection," and the "*dispositif*," "which solely concerns projection and which includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed," while being in itself also part of the basic cinematic apparatus (1986b, 317).
4. More precisely, Baudry declares that "Plato constructs an apparatus very much like sound cinema" (1986b, 305).
5. See Kessler (2011), as well as the above-mentioned "Notes on *Dispositif*."
6. I have developed these ideas in several essays (see Kessler 2003, 2006 and 2011). I therefore agree with François Albera and Maria Tortajada (2011) when they declare that "the *dispositif* does not exist." To begin with, the various authors who use the term (most prominently Michel Foucault, but also Jean-François Lyotard, Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Louis Baudry and others), do use it in different ways and not as one and the same concept (see "Notes on *Dispositif*"). More importantly, a *dispositif* does not—and cannot—exist as an "object," it needs to be constructed (Albera and Tortajada 2011, 38). The analytical model elaborated in what follows can allow facilitating such a construction, at least from the point of view of a historical pragmatics that I propose here.
7. For the situation in the Netherlands see Masson (2012, 88–91).
8. See "Danmu so popular on China's online video sites that it enters the cinema," <https://technode.com/2014/08/07/others-theater-can-see-comments-screen-real-time/>. Thanks to Nina Köll for having drawn my attention to this phenomenon.
9. See for instance the website for the interactive film *Late Shift* (Tobias Weber, 2016): <http://lateshift-movie.com>.
10. "Apparatus" being here the translation of "*dispositif*."
11. It should be added, though, that Gaudreault (2011) does critique such a retrospective perspective when analyzing the emergence of what he calls the kine-attractography of the early period as an intermedial phenomenon.
12. Guillaume Soulez (2015) adopts a similar theoretical position by proposing to operate a section along the synchronic axis and to decompose the notion of *dispositif*. In doing so, he can observe the interrelations between the dimensions that constitute what he describes as the *dispositif*, i.e., the formal aspects (e.g., genres, visual conventions), the technologies and materials (*le médium*, in French) and the economic and social organization of the cultural market (*le média*, in French, a term generally used as the singular form designating one of the mass media). This allows him to highlight the coexistence of several *dispositifs* at the same time within a given *média* (e.g. "cinema," "television") and the interactions (pressure or emulation) between the *média* and the *médium* within a given object.



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## RÉSUMÉ

### Les multiples dispositifs du cinéma (des premiers temps)

Frank Kessler

Au cours des débats récents concernant les effets de la numérisation sur l'institution cinématographique, la notion de dispositif est généralement évoquée pour désigner le type de positionnement du spectateur défini dans les années 1970 par Jean-Louis Baudry. Par conséquent, quand il est question de l'«explosion du dispositif cinématographique» au xxi<sup>e</sup> siècle, on reprend cette conception monolithique qui ne tient pas compte des différentes manières dont les spectateurs ont pu voir des films au cours du xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, diachroniquement aussi bien que synchroniquement. En critiquant une telle conception, cet article propose d'aborder le concept de dispositif dans une perspective de pragmatique historique et de l'utiliser en tant qu'outil heuristique pour analyser tout l'éventail des différents dispositifs cinématographiques qui ont existé historiquement ainsi que les nouveaux dispositifs qui émergent aujourd'hui.