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Sun-Ha Hong, François Allard-Huver

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Governing governments?

Discursive contestations of governmentality in the transparency *dispositif*

Sun-ha Hong and François Allard-Huver

University of Pennsylvania, USA and Paris Sorbonne University, France

In a world of controversy and suspicion, transparency promises a ‘virtuous chain’ of informed citizens, rational deliberation and democratic participation. In contrast, this essay conceptualises transparency as a Foucauldian *dispositif*: a network of discourse, tactics, institutional processes and local subjectivities which articulates what kinds of actions and statements are admissible and tactically profitable. Notably, transparency discourse mobilises individual citizens to audit the state – to *govern governments*. This becomes the basis upon which the state and other institutions may legitimise and delegitimise one another through strategic uses of transparency discourse. We illustrate these processes through an examination of the ‘Séralini Affair’: a prominent controversy over GMO, scientific expertise and transparency in France. We analyse transparency discourse invoked by major stakeholders in the Affair, drawing tools from critical discourse analysis and French discourse analysis.

Following his election as the President of the United States, one of Barack Obama’s first communications was a memorandum titled ‘Transparency and Open Government’ (Obama 2008). This resolution, and its guarantees of ‘accountability’ and ‘information’ for citizens, epitomises the normative and moralised form in which transparency in politics presents itself today. It declares: “Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens about what their Government is doing [...] Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government.” The memorandum conflates mere openness with accessibility (the ability to acquire, consume and understand) of information; with public trust (in government) with new technologies; with public participation; and finally, a somehow ‘strengthened’ democracy. The government reveals; the public examines. To produce ‘transparent’ information itself becomes an act of veridiction; as its counterpart, the citizen is morally *obliged* to do the work of observing, to stay informed, to participate. These connotations and connections expose transparency as a *régime du savoir*, which in turn embodies contemporary notions of political citizenship and ‘good government’. The rise of transparency discourse symptomises the intersection of an active and liberal subject (Foucault 2008; Rose 1993, 291), the growth of political cynicism (Sloterdijk, 1987; van Zoonen, 2012), the politics of visibility in the age of new media (Thompson 2005), and continuing transformations of modern Western governmentality. In this chapter, our objective is to analyse transparency as a Foucauldian *dispositif* – not only an ideological and linguistic construct, but a heterogeneous network of logistics, discourses and subject positions that demarcates ‘zones of intelligible contestation’ (Rose 1999, 28; also see Introduction in this volume). In conflating data with information, access with accessibility, accessibility with critical-rational debate, transparency deploys a specific field of struggle which schematises what kinds of actions and statements are admissible, and moreover, tactically profitable for the actors at hand. Overhanging such a contest is the idealistic slogan of ‘good government’,

which anchors accuser and accused, citizen and state, NGO and government bureaucrat, scientist and skeptic. This identifies contemporary transparency controversies as a struggle for ‘governing governments’, a multidirectional deployment of governmentality wherein it is the *notion of government* that is the object of contestation by citizens, the state, NGOs and the media.

This essay explores the above conceptualisation of transparency as a governmental *dispositif*: first schematically, in terms of general principles of operation; then empirically. For the latter, we turn to the constellation of stakeholders, documents and utterances that constituted the Séralini Affair of 2012 – an international controversy over genetically modified foods and conventions of scientific verification. In it, Séralini, scientists for and against his research, government agencies in France and abroad, and the media were all embroiled in multiple contesting assertions and accusations of transparency. The Affair thus constitutes a media polemic wherein we can trace a clear circulation of *formules*; specific lexemes and syntagms that deploy the transparency *dispositif* for tactical objectives. These discursive artefacts thus instantiate the ideological, axiological and normative dimensions of the governmental *dispositif*.

1 The self-presentation of transparency

The form in which transparency presents itself to society is as a transcendent moral ideal that enables the Kantian public use of reason. In a world of controversies and global suspicion, transparency promises to enable a virtuous chain of informed citizens, rational decisions and democratic deliberation. Transparency has become a dominant criterion of legitimacy for public relations strategies online. When organisations look to improve or restore public trust, they invariably claim to be ‘transparent’; when public, economic or scientific actors attempt to prove their honesty and goodwill in public space, transparency is brandished forward as a sovereign Word which guarantees their independence and accountability. Notably, this legitimising force is manifest primarily *in discourse* and only secondarily in the act of exposure (of information). This is evident in the fact that, as in Obama’s Memorandum, transparency is rarely defined in terms of rigid or precise objective states, but as a kind of vision or attitude. Transparency’s moral efficacy – that is, its ability to ensure good government – is established not through a final confirmation of information’s correlation to political change, but through discursive confluences of openness and participation; that is, an idealistic projection of Habermasian publicness.

This self-presentation of transparency as a unified and transcendental vision rides upon a set of interconnected assumptions about the nature of communication, of the citizen, and of democratic government as a whole (also see Vattimo’s 1992 notion of the *self-transparent* society). Most obviously, it conflates the availability of information with the act of communication. It presumes unproblematic linkages between transparent information, its communication to publics, subsequent deliberation, and rational, consensual decision-making (e.g. Dahlberg 2007; Wojcik 2010). Yet informing is not communicating; the literal ‘availability’ of information does not necessarily entail the public’s actually consuming, comprehending and making use of that information (Wolton 2009). As such, this transcendental vision of transparency carries *axiological and normative* consequences. Transparency, by virtue of its assumptions, prescribes the ways in which the heterogeneous elements of political contestation – including citizens and the state, information and its host ‘texts’, and indeed, transparency discourse itself – may be deployed. It is in this sense that we must understand transparency as a *dispositif*, which includes both its ideological and strategic / practical aspects. And, as we will show later, *discourse* is one key object which traverses both dimensions, both in its semantic content and its performativity.

2 Transparency as *dispositif*

A *dispositif* is a network of actualised elements that make *actionable* a particular state of affairs. What does this entail, and why should transparency be conceptualised as a *dispositif*?

1. Structurally, *dispositif* entails a fluid and heterogeneous set of connections that encompass the ‘said as much as the unsaid’ (Foucault 1980, 194); a network whose *relationalities* demarcate what counts as truth, as knowledge, as a valid form of subject. Recall that transparency prescribes and makes profitable certain techniques and states of speaking, of making visible, of being ‘true’ (transparent, open). It takes the practice of politics and the object of government and subjects them to its own “curves of visibility and curves of enunciation” (Deleuze 1992, 160). Laurence Monnoyer-Smith (2013) argues that a *dispositif* is a source of constraints - but that these constraints have the virtue of provoking actors’ creativity. Because *dispositifs* configure the means by which one may ‘count’ as a subject and become visible, analysing their parameters, their design, can reveal what kinds of connotations, presumptions, idealisations, become systematically privileged. Foucault argued that every discursive act is at the expense of other possible acts (see Introduction in this volume). One corollary is that every invocation of transparency draws from, perpetuates, and challenges these structures of visibility and sayability.
2. In contrast to a more diffused and even supra-societal imagery of epistemes, *dispositifs* “respon[d] to an urgent need” (Deleuze 1992, 195); they form and reform in “a perpetual inventiveness” (Bussolini 2010, 88), guided by this strategic purpose. A critique of transparency as ideology (or Althusserian *apparatus*) encourages a linear and deconstructive criticism that becomes stuck in a Freudian repetition: transparency is false consciousness, transparency is ideology, transparency is illusion... An understanding of transparency as a *strategic site*, on the other hand, prepares us for ways in which different social actors can each make use of transparency discourse for competing strategic ends, and how this discourse becomes a tool for a *critique of government* as well as an *instrument of governing*.
3. Agamben locates the genealogy of Foucauldian *dispositif* in young Hegelian positivity, a historically constructed set of “rules, rites and institutions that are imposed on the individual... [and] become, so to speak, internalised” (2009, 5-6). The term’s initial appearance in Foucault’s theory in the 1970s was more or less a response to his earlier emphasis on discourse, turning outward to find a system that he had once looked for within the statement. The etymology of *dispositif* reveals “legal meaning of the force or finding of a decision”, a “judgment which contains the decision separate from the motivations” (Bussolini 2010, 86-7, 105). Transparency does not consist only of a transcendent moral discourse, but the ways in which this discourse distributes subjects and utterances along normative spaces of veridiction and legitimacy – the distributed positions from which subjects then make their own strategic moves. Analysis of the transparency *dispositif* therefore addresses relationship between the technical constraints and the social production of discourses and knowledge within those constraints (Monnoyer-Smith 2013).

These properties – relationality, strategic orientation and deployment/enforcement – have key implications for our understanding of transparency. In contrast to its common representation as a general and unified belief in visions of ‘open government’, the transparency *dispositif* embodies a viscous and diffused kind of knowledge, instantiated in many different places as ways of relating to politics and government. Of course, pieces of government regulation, conventional process or speech do not necessarily reify a singular body of transparency-knowledge. Nevertheless, they resemble

similar forms of *referencing* and *legitimizing* particular relations between subjects and institutions that are retroactively identifiable (and identified by stakeholders) as an ideal, ideology or norm. This relative flexibility means that transparency is not simply a (false) vision that is oppressively forced down the public's throats by a determined government (or 'society'). Rather, it is a specific mode of critique that can be strategically deployed by, for, and against the state as well as other social actors.

3 Transparency as governmentality

It is in this sense we designate transparency as a problem of governmentality and of 'governing governments'. The meaning and utility of 'governmentality' as a general concept has been well summarised elsewhere (for example, see Foucault 2007, 108-9; Gordon 1991; Lemke 2002; Rose 1993, 287-8; Rose 1999, 7, 15-7, 20-1; Introduction in this volume). Here, we will focus on aspects of the notion most relevant to the transparency *dispositif*.

Foucault noted that the modern notion of 'government' arises from anti-Machiavellian literature in the 16th century, which opposed the sovereign and external figure of The Prince with an immanent and heterogeneous set of institutions and instruments (2004, 88-92, 121-2). This led Foucault to a dual definition of governmentality: generally, as an ensemble of things that look to shape the conduct of a person or persons; specifically, as the ensemble of Western state institutions that developed in the modern era (Foucault 2007, 108-9; Gordon 1991, 2-3). Notably, this involved a disembodiment of the notion of government. In contrast to The Prince, whose retention of power allegedly directed every aspect of Machiavellian theory, anti-Machiavellian literature developed a notion of government that was based on the nature of its task, its *strategic need* (see Foucault 2007, 88-92, 98-9; Rose 1999, 7). That is to say, governmentality is not necessarily *what the government (state) does*, but the *problem of governing* whose 'solutions' transform the state itself as much as the state's subjects. This dovetails with our understanding of the transparency *dispositif* as deploying a specific zone of political contestation. What Foucault originally said of political economy is also instructive for transparency. Foucault argues that political economy emerged from a strategic need – to maintain an inter-state equilibrium for optimal market competition – and developed into an *external, critical rationality* that could criticise and advise politics precisely because it lay outside the realm of politics. (Foucault 2008, 12-4) Governmentality has often been summarised as the 'conduct of conduct' (Gordon 1991, 2). Transparency as conduct of conduct includes not only the question of how government governs, also how government itself *should be governed*.

What does it mean to 'govern governments'? Firstly, it extends the genealogy of liberal governmentality. Not only is the active, liberal subject trained to 'govern themselves' according to the needs of government, he/she is enjoined to monitor the government, thoroughly inform themselves of its activities, and correct it through democratic process when it does not adhere to the normative principles of 'good government'. In this context, what transparent politics demands of the citizen is qualitatively different from earlier forms of petitioning grievances and injustices: the long Western history of petitions, from written pleas to the Roman Emperor to the *cahiers de doléances* in 1789 France; or beyond the West, large drums peasants could beat on to present a petition to the King, such as the *Vinijayabheri* in 19th century Thailand or the *Sinmun-go* in 15th century Korea. Such earlier forms involved an *extraordinary* action by subjects, who would break out of their prescribed political role to raise grievances that were intimately tied to their particular demographic's interests. The responsibility of redress, remained in the hands of the governing Prince. For instance, mid-16th century English petitionary rhetoric constituted a 'privileged communicative space' which neither in principle nor practice called upon a public to *listen* or to *act upon*, but constituted a direct and private

communication from the periphery for the state which remained ultimately *responsible* (Zaret 2000, 59). This was also the case for the literary trope of the King who speaks with his subjects in disguise to hear their grievances – most famously Shakespeare’s Henry V, and James V of Scotland’s legend as ‘King of the Commons’. Here it remains the King who must listen, to *gather data*, to make his population legible, and to reconfigure his apparatuses of government according to that knowledge. The transparency *dispositif* redistributes these responsibilities and relationships in a way we would call ‘neoliberal’, or to be precise, in alignment with the post-WW2 emphasis on self-improving, self-discovering and self-enterprising subjects of interest (e.g. Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 989; Foucault 2008, 226; O’Malley 2008, 71-2; Rose 1999, 145). The state’s primary responsibility is to ‘be transparent’, that is, make information available to the public (or, make information available *upon request* by the public). This is an essentially passive position, where it is the citizen’s responsibility to paternally scrutinise the state. The King has no need to disguise himself as a peasant; any peasant can enter the Palace, he claims, and pore over the voluminous records of his government at their leisure, and *tell him what to change*. (This remains the case even in incidents where governments refuse to be ‘transparent’, and citizens take them to task for it; should they succeed, the task of examination, research and eventual correction remains the citizen’s.)

But this is far from a binary of ‘governing populations’ and ‘governing governments’. We certainly do not intend to repeat the insubstantial cliché that new media technologies turn the all-seeing eye upon the powerful in a beautifully empowering reversal. For one, the Panoptic model was a pragmatic solution aiming at aradical reduction of *labour* for the state. Where the synoptic romance *presumes* politically energetic citizens who are all too happy and able to take on this work, the transparency *dispositif* can actually burden citizens with the opprobrium of uncertainty. Further, the age of the Panopticon was already an age of increasing scrutiny of political figures through new forms of mediated visibility and quasi-interaction (Thompson 2005, 31-3). The age of new media today is increasingly an age of big data collection, predictive algorithms, and other instruments by which the population becomes persistently observable (e.g. Andrejevic 2005, 2010; Beer 2009; Lessig 2006; Turow 2006). This is not, inherently or universally at least, resistance striking back. Nikolas Rose has shown how modern liberal-democratic freedom is not a refusal of government and governmentality, but a historical invention as a result of modern governmentality’s *strategic need* for the control and productivity of populations; that to be ‘free’ means to be *responsibly free* (1999, 67, 73, 96-7). With transparency, this responsibility of the free citizen now emphasises that of an *auditor of government*; there is, more than ever, an *injunction to be informed*. The original formulation of governmentality emphasised the need for patience and diligence (Foucault 2007, 99-100). In a transparent world, it is the public which must embody those virtues.

Finally, transparency as ‘governing governments’ emphasises the *dispositif* as a site of struggle involving multiple lines of force, rather than a unidirectional ideological apparatus. Transparency discourse is not the sole purview of the state, nor is it always a discourse that the state is willing to embrace for a given situation. Just as with the discourses and *formules* of liberalism, political economy and freedom, the invocation of transparency furnishes a specific strategic terrain that provides non-state actors with ways in which to evaluate and compel the state – and through that governing of governments, achieve their own interests. As our cases will show, this terrain features a wide variety of actors, positions and alliances, all of which shift fluidly. NGOs in particular play a significant role by combining the expert authority of institutions with a claim to impartiality, even as this participation in the terrain of transparency exposes them to scrutiny and counter-denunciation.

4 Discourse and the *formule*

We now examine the discourse used in the Séralini Affair as one particular case of the transparency *dispositif* at work. Clearly, the heterogeneous nature of a *dispositif* makes it eligible for many different approaches. Among them, discourse is notable in that it is organised into (and it organises language and the world into) conventional and generic forms. The ‘classic’ Foucauldian definition (see Foucault 1972, and the Introduction in this volume), in particular, makes clear how this discourse enable a specific set of knowledge and power relations to be perpetuated across time and space and ultimately institutionalised. Hence, discourse is a dominant – though not unique – mode through which *dispositifs* establish their specific regimes of what counts as knowledge/truth, and position peoples, things and ideas into that regime. Discourse is also specially relevant to transparency as *dispositif*. Following on from our earlier point that being ‘transparent’ does not necessarily entail public consumption and discussion of the available information, it is clear that the discursive invocation of ‘transparency’ as an idea is itself central to the functioning of the *dispositif*. Hence, talking *about* transparency, in many ways, achieves the operation of the transparency *dispositif*.

This notion of discourse has been taken up and modified in many rich traditions of analysis, from critical discourse analysis (CDA) to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. For our purposes, we will focus on the notion of the *formule*, primarily as developed in French discourse analysis (henceforth FDA). The *formule* focuses on the tactical invocation and circulation of specific lexemes/syntagms, like ‘openness’ and ‘transparency’, and how they can colonise an event and/or conversation in terms of a particular discourse regime; that is, how lexical resemblance is used to *circulate* and *infect* new discursive situations with parameters of visibility, validity and value. For example, the *formule* addresses the effect on a conversation on race when the so-called ‘N-word’ is deployed, or how the incantation of the Miranda warning prepares a forensic and legal frame for the ensuing interaction. The *formule* therefore directly emphasises the relationship between discourse and *dispositif*, making it a particularly appropriate tool for our analysis.

In France, the *formule* enjoys a history almost as long as FDA itself. One of the first references to *analyse du discours* appears in *Langages*, the linguistic journal founded in 1966 by Roland Barthes. Joseph Sumpf and Jean Dubois’s influential “Problèmes de l’analyse du discours” (1969) soon followed, and through Michel Pêcheux’s efforts, FDA grew into a sizable discipline, hosting multiple research traditions (also see Maziere 2005). One of these was Jean-Pierre Faye, and his work on the *formule*. In *Théorie du récit* (1972), he identified recurring nominal syntagms “total state” and “totalitarian state” in Nazi propaganda, and their effects on extermination policies. Faye’s work has been popularised and further theorised by Alice Krieg-Planque (2006), who examined the nominal syntagm “ethnic cleansing” during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, and later the term “sustainable development”. Here, we primarily take after Krieg-Planque, who significantly questioned and expanded Faye’s definitions of ‘enunciation’ and ‘*formule*’ itself (Paveau 2012). She describes the *formule* as “a sequence, easily noticeable and relatively stable[, which] works in public sphere discourses like a commonly shared and problematised sequence” (Krieg-Planque 2009). That is, a *formule* is an inherently polysemic ‘soundbite’ which is deployed to organise debate in terms of a specific *mode of problematising* – a judicial problem, a Holocaust problem, a privacy problem. This means that the *formule* is a discursive object defined by its strategic function, rather than a linguistic object defined by its grammatical form. After all, a buzzword (“austerity”) may take multiple grammatical permutations (“austere”, “austerity policy”), as might a more complex syntagm (“threat to our national security”, “keeping America secure”), but the functions we are tracking in the analysis would remain largely equivalent. It is the “social use [which] built and established the *formule*, and

not some predictable linguistic codes or rules” (Mayaffre 2009). By identifying *formules*, one tracks how actors deploy specific discursive objects in order to manipulate this mode of problematisation. The concept thereby explains how an “ensemble of expressions [...] crystallise political and social issues [and simultaneously] help construct these issues” (Krieg-Planque 2009, 7). The specific ways in which a *formule* is established and circulated, of course, vary greatly depending on the context. Studies such as Jeanneret’s (1998), on the popularisation of science through the circulation of *formules*, and Amossy and Burger’s (2011), on how scientific controversies ‘leak’ into the mainstream media, have described particular patterns of such circulation. We will attempt to show what kinds of transparency *formules* are used to what tactical effect in the case of the Séralini Affair.

This approach, and the *formule* as a concept, complements many of the analytical concerns in Anglo-American traditions, such as CDA. CDA emphasises discourse in *conflict*, and thus discourse as the enactment of strategic moves (Fairclough 1992, 206) and domination (Fairclough 2001a, 26; van Dijk 1993, 2001). Similarly, our usage of the *formule* views discourse as an essentially tactical affair. This is especially the case in high-profile, politicised events like the Séralini Affair, though one might argue that discourse can be tactical without its subjects consciously understanding their behaviour as strategic. The *formule*, furthermore, extends the point that discourse lives intertextually (Fairclough 1992, 194-195, 206; Wallace, this volume), and seeks to identify the performed meaning and significance of lexemes in their circulation. This is related to the *formule*’s own historical context, where French discourse analysis in the 1970s saw a push towards “un-compacting discourse formations, to think them as open, permeable and heterogeneous.” (Krieg Planque, 2006) Of course, the affinities between CDA and *formule* are not total; for one, CDA covers a much wider range of discursive phenomena. However, the aforementioned similarities point to ways in which the *formule* could complement other Anglo-American concepts and approaches to discourse analysis. This conversation is already beginning to occur on the French side. Dominique Mainguenu, one of the most prominent figures in that community, has sought to introduce CDA more comprehensively to French researchers, aided also by Norman Fairclough (see Mainguenu 2005). *Semen*, one of the most reputed semio-linguistics journals in France, also published a special issue on CDA in 2009 (see Schepens 2009). Our primary concern in this chapter has to do with transparency, *dispositif* and the empirical case of the Séralini Affair. Nevertheless, we hope to make a small contribution to this conversation by demonstrating a basic usage of the *formule*.

In this vein, we should note that the *formule* also connects directly to certain other Anglo-American concepts. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue that *nodal points* can accrue a certain meaning specific to its native discourse regime, then as floating signifiers, carry that set of significations onto another context. Van Dijk and Fairclough have discussed similar processes in terms of *overwording* – an unusual overlapping of near-synonymic words which typically is evidence of a struggle over meaning (e.g. Fairclough 2001b, 96). Finally, the notion of *boundary object* (Star & Griesemer 1989) also describes how objects can straddle different fields and stakeholders. Such concepts highlight the more technical and linguistic dimensions of the process. Meanwhile, the *formule* stresses directly and primarily the *polemical* and tactical/performative dimension. Following on from our earlier mention of ‘mode of problematisation’, the *formule* stresses how such circulation can be the means for contesting a given ‘description of reality’ (Krieg-Planque 2007, 111). *Formules* are not stable in meaning or context, but are themselves floating terrains of conflict; their semantics may matter less than their contextual, evocative function. Invoking ‘transparency’ in a conflict such as the Séralini Affair not only introduces a new interpretive regime into the event, but creates new possibilities for the *formule* itself, which now gains new connotations and associations. Hence,

lexemes/syntagms which are initially arrayed for or against each other may later become newly distributed as a result of their circulation; each tactical usage of a *formule* is an opportunity for slippage. This process “reminds [us] that discourses produced in contradictory ideological positions do not constitute separated entities, but stay in contact through circulation and exchange of the *formule*” (Courtine 1981).

With this in mind, we now turn to the Séralini Affair. We monitored two major newspapers (*Le Monde* and *Libération*), three major magazines (the generalist *Le Point* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, and a science-focused *Sciences & Avenir*) and relevant blog coverage from September 2012 to November 2013, yielding over 60 articles of French origin.¹ These were supplemented by discursive output from major stakeholder websites such as the EFSA (European Food Safety Agency), the primary target of Séralini’s criticism, and CRIIGEN, Séralini’s independent lab at the University of Caen. Finally, legal documents pertaining to transparency in the European Union were consulted. While discourse in GMO controversies have already been analysed in other ways (e.g. Augoustinos et al. 2010, Bonny 2013, Cook 2004, Horsbøl and Lassen 2011), *this dispositif/formule-driven lens differentiates our analysis*. Our question was not how actors responded to transparency as an ideal, but how the act of *problematizing* the Affair as a transparency scandal was itself tactical. This was particularly visible thanks to an emblematic quality that the vision of transparency has accrued today. Parties in the discursive conflict can hardly ignore an argument in the name of ‘open government’, for instance, and are drawn to reposition themselves around this semantic artefact.

5 On the Séralini Affair

On September 19, 2012, Professor Gilles-Eric Séralini and his team simultaneously published a scientific article, a book and a magazine special issue on their newest GMO study. The article, published in the well-known *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, discussed a study of rats fed with Monsanto NK603 GMO corn and watered with diluted Roundup, the famous Monsanto herbicide. Featuring media-ready images of rats suffering from gigantic, bulbous tumours, the study pressed for stringent GMO bans by governments European and otherwise. Séralini also unveiled his findings through the book *Tout cobayes! (All Of Us Guinea-Pigs Now?)* A selection of journalists were given early access and duly reported on the book’s claims, including the *Nouvel Observateur*’s emphatic “Yes, GMOs are poison” (Maurie 2012). As the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the scientific community and other stakeholders reacted to Séralini’s provocation, each side would explicitly mobilise the discourse of transparency.

The Affair therefore constitutes a point of emergence, a polemical ‘peak’ where transparency becomes at once a cornerstone of the specific political negotiation (over genetically modified foods) and a stumbling stone of a pre-existing liberal governmental apparatus as it attempts to negotiate this new terrain. What began as a local controversy on Séralini’s research validity quickly spilled out of the scientific community and the question of research methodology, turning into a wider debate on transparency and institutionalised risk assessment as a whole. The European, and especially French, public was already well versed in narratives of risk, deception and mistrust vis-à-vis GMOs (Bonny 2003). CRIIGEN (Committee for Research & Independent Information on Genetic Engineering) – Gilles-Eric Séralini’s research lab – insisted that the study’s implications went beyond GMO safety:

¹ All data in original French was translated for this study by the co-author, François Allard-Huver.

“the regulatory testing process for biotech and pesticide products should be transparent, open to public scrutiny, subject to independent review and performed independently of their firms in the future” (CRIIGEN 2012a). In the meantime, detractors like the French national Academies of Agriculture, Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences, Technologies and Veterinary Sciences denounced Séralini’s move as a ‘coup’ – “an intelligently orchestrated media mobilisation about research results that offer no valid conclusions” by “a team of authors who saw fit to organise a vast ‘comm/media’ campaign about their work, to an extent that the operation seemed motivated more by ideology than by the quality or the relevance of the experimental data” (French national Academies, 2012).

The question of transparency emerged in the very first magazine article about Séralini’s study, and quickly became the dominant mode of problematisation. Transparency, in this sense, is not reducible simply to the lexeme ‘transparency’: what matters is not the occurrence of the exact word, but discursive elements which clearly *invoke* the family of ideals, logics and affects surrounding the concept today. This means a diverse set of lexemes and syntagms, such as “openness”, “transparent process” and even pejorative mentions of “secrecy” – which do not simply issue their semantic meaning and disappear, but clearly help frame the surrounding discourse. If not quite a speech act, the *formule* often reconfigures the rules of that local debate – *even as the formule itself becomes open for discussion*. Invoking transparency does not make everyone agree about Séralini or GMOs, but it does pressure actors to make their statements *in terms of*, in the language of, transparency. While many other discursive features contribute to ‘framing’ a given discussion (e.g. see Furchner and Münte 2006’s analysis of a local GMO debate), our focus on the *formule* is also a way to understand what kind of different competitive propositions co-exist within a similar discursive formation. For example, CRIIGEN’s website and press releases promoted Gilles-Eric Séralini interview, ‘GMO’s the moment of truth?’:

Gilles-Eric SÉRALINI tells us about the origins of his research, the methods that were used, the difficulties encountered, the financing and the necessary element of secrecy that surrounded his laboratory. [...] *GMO's the moment of truth?* also deals with the credibility issues of the scientific expertise, the lack of transparency shown by the food security agencies and the influence that the industrial lobbies have on the political world. (CRIIGEN 2012b)

The appearance of ‘truth’ in a privileged position in the text is bolstered and further specified by the syntagm “lack of transparency”. Meanwhile, we also have the appearance of ‘secrecy’, whose ambivalent life in the discourses of the Affair we shall address later. What we can observe here in a basic sense is the organising role played by lexemes/syntagms like ‘truth’ and ‘lack of transparency’, and their co-operation under the wider umbrella of transparency-as-concept. They ensure that any further discursive efforts by the food security agencies, for instance, cannot simply bank on pre-existing capital of notions like expertise and institutional authority. Besides explicit terms like ‘transparency’, the Séralini discourse also exhibits other lexemes/syntagms whose deployment shows them to be part of the transparency *formule*:

1. ‘Independent’, and its minor semantic variations like ‘impartial third-party’, occurs in most texts in the corpus. For instance, the EFSA’s own review of Séralini et al.’s paper opened with the disclaimer that “as scientists with respective expertise in the area of GMOs and pesticides, the external reviewers were asked to peer-review EFSA’s statement. Their role was limited to providing an impartial third-party critique of the statement” (EFSA 2012c). ‘Independent’ here functions *in tandem* with ‘transparency’, the former acting as a guaranteeing quality for the latter. Of course, by the very act of labelling it an ‘impartial third-

- party’ and nothing else, the EFSA’s processes, and the identity of its ‘reviewers’, remains non-transparent. Like transparency itself, ‘independent’ in the Affair often mattered more for its evocative, perlocutionary force than any provision of information to the citizen-subject.
2. ‘Data’, including variations like “data sets” or “raw data”, becomes not just a material object, but an entity with inherent truth value which the transparency *dispositif* purports to publicise. In one example, the EFSA proudly claims that it “has today given [Séralini] access to all available data relating to the Authority’s evaluation of genetically modified (GM) maize NK603 [...] under a routine procedure for the release of information known as a Public Access to Documents request” (EFSA, 2012a). Here, the EFSA’s strategy is simple. You want transparency? We will give it to you – at least, we will perform the relevant gesture! By emphasising the ostensible *full availability* of data, and attaching it to the weighty bureaucratic capital of the ‘Public Access to Documents request’, the EFSA defends its transparency creds – and in doing so, reaffirms transparency as the dominant *dispositif* for the Affair. ‘Data’ is thus presented as the truth which nontransparent practices conceal, and in revealing it, ‘data’ claims to set the virtuous chain of information and good deliberation in motion.²
 3. ‘Accessibility’, expressed in derivative forms like ‘release of information’, ‘public access’ or ‘full disclosure’, once again instantiates – and in doing so, fetishises – transparency’s ‘virtuous chain’ of information, truth and deliberation. Notably, these syntagms are produced by Séralini’s detractors more often than Séralini and his advocates. Consider one petition addressing Séralini et al.: “authors may be asked to provide the raw data in *connection* with a paper for editorial review, and should be prepared to provide public access to such data [...] Only a full disclosure of the data can quell any uncertainties over the results you published” (Anonymous 2012). We thus find transparency, instantiated through related *formules* as well as explicit expressions, working both for and against Séralini.

While these *formules* are not necessarily ‘subservient’ to transparency as *formule*. In this context, however, their proliferation clearly responds to Séralini et al.’s original invocation of transparency, and their deployment consistently reinforces transparency as the dominant lens for the situation.

Where the above *formules* cooperate with transparency’s self-appointed guardianship of democracy, we also find *formules* that function as transparency’s necessary (Thierry Libaert 2003) counterparts: opacity and secrecy. Where opacity is technically more appropriate as the inverse of transparency, we ‘secrecy’ is more commonly invoked as the counterpart to transparency: the sin of concealment against the virtue of exposure. Transparency as a conceptual framework cannot exist without clearly defining opacity/secrecy as its limit-points, its negatives; one cannot circulate without the other (Grard 2000). The counter-*formule* of secrecy appears consistently in CRIIGEN’s press releases:

Until 2011, the researchers worked in conditions of virtual secrecy. They encrypted their emails as the Pentagon [does], banned all telephone conversation and even launched a lure study fearing a smear from multinational seed [referring to GMO products] companies. (CRIIGEN, 2012a)

² This contemporary belief in ‘data as truth’ has been closely examined (and criticised) by software studies and related research. For instance, see Amore (2011), boyd & Crawford (2012), Cheney-Lippold (2011), and Mackenzie (2006).

This usage is faithfully replicated in the *Nouvel Observateur*'s initial report:

With him comes the scandal. Today he launches a bomb against GMOs: after two years of work in the utmost confidentiality with a team of researchers in his lab in Caen on 200 rats fed with GM corn, Gilles-Eric Séralini demonstrates that even low dose, the GMO is heavily toxic for rats. (*Nouvel Observateur* 2012)

A year later, the same promotion of heroic secrecy would be used to open the promotional blurb for *Tous Cobayes? [All of us Guinea-Pigs now?]*, Jean-Paul Jaud's documentary on Séralini's findings:

under conditions of total secrecy, Professor Séralini and The CRIIGEN lead an experience with unsuspected consequences. It's the world's longest-lasting experiment: the first independent study of a GMO and the herbicide Roundup. The conclusions are appalling ... (*GMO Seralini.org*, 2013)

This use of the syntagm "secrecy" and its semantic field demonstrates an interesting double bind in the mind of the reader. The researchers had to keep their research secret *in order to* "bring the truth to light" about the GMOs industry secrets. Here, the "secret" surrounding the study is seen as a necessary evil. The implicit argument is that Séralini and his team, as *individual* scientists seeking the truth, are entitled to this 'good' secrecy; the mention of sabotage completes this rhetoric.

This configuration was directly challenged by the press coverage of *Le Monde* and *Libération*. The two newspapers had been frustrated by Séralini's press embargo; he had released his study to only a selection of journalists (primarily, the *Nouvel Observateur*) before its official publication, demanding a confidentiality agreement not to consult with other experts regarding the details of the analysis (also see Arjó et al. 2013 for an academic condemnation of the embargo). This was condemned by *Libération* as an affront to journalistic values: "no counter expertise, interdiction to show his article to other scientist and thus...no critics." (Huet 2012). The two papers' response was to criticise the secrecy of Séralini's study. That is, they accepted Séralini's presentation of transparency, and then worked within its distribution of goods and values to accuse Séralini and CRIIGEN of secrecy. "The militant spirit in which [Séralini's] work was carried out is also a source of embarrassment for the majority of researchers" (*Le Monde* 2012) – the majority who, it is implied, remain true to the values of transparency and impartiality. These critics challenged Séralini's self-presentation as a necessarily secret seeker of truth, positioning his secrecy as evidence of his position as a biased stakeholder. At the same time, the general cause of transparency is retrieved: "his works, even if biased or inconclusive, raise the crucial problem of the independence of expertise" (*Le Monde* 2012). Similar tactics can be identified in responses by French government agencies. The national Academies of Sciences also combined opacity of motive and method in their rebuttal:

In regard to the "conflict of interests" that G.E. Séralini constantly opposes to other scientists, whatever their origins or specialist fields, we can also legitimately surmise if there are not any conflicts of interest for G.E. Séralini and members of his entourage, aware as we all are of their ecological stances and of the financial support they receive from major food distribution groups who base their advertising campaigns on the assertion of absence of GMOs in the food they sell to their customers. (French national Academies 2012)

The general lesson is that many different interests and strategies are able to be pursued within a unifying lens of transparency as a democratic concept. Each deployment of a related *formule*,

including the counter-*formules*, allows actors to tap into the lines of visibility, validity and value. Consider a response by the French Agency for Food Safety (ANSES):

This situation is by no means restricted to GMOs: there are several other areas marked by an equal lack of scientific knowledge and a particularly strong public desire for independent, publicly-funded research. To address this situation, ANSES calls for public funding on the national and European level to enable large-scale studies and research for consolidating knowledge of insufficiently documented health risks, similar to the National Toxicology Program implemented in the US. (ANSES 2012)

Here, ANSES shifts to the scale of a ‘general cause of transparency’ in order to leverage the Séralini Affair for their strategic interests – namely, to legitimise their own policy objectives. In both *Le Monde*’s text and ANSES’s, the notions of independence and expertise are transferred to a general public existence. By depicting the majority of scientists (in *Le Monde*’s case) and governmental institutions (in ANSES’ case) as fundamentally transparent and truthful, they engage in a form of paradigm repair (Bennett et al. 2000), restricting Séralini’s criticism to a localised instance. *Le Monde* further argues that “this penultimate controversy illustrate the necessity – in France and in Europe – of a strong and independent public expertise.” (*Le Monde* 2012) Again, a generalised ‘expertise’ is separated from government agencies and industries – even though those institutions are made up of *the same individual scientists* that would in turn constitute any ‘independent public expertise’! The same few words – public, independent, expertise – consistently appear not as *particular* objects with specific, non-transferable referents, but as instantiations of a larger and more diffuse idea.

If many of Séralini’s critics thus manipulated transparency and its related *formules* for their own strategic needs, this also ended up concretising Séralini’s problematisation of the situation. The government agency primarily called upon to more stringently regulate GMOs was the EFSA. One of its responses to the Séralini Affair was to refurbish its public relations through a new FAQ section on its website, explicitly dedicated to the Affair (EFSA 2012c). A FAQ is, at first glance, a fairly straightforward means by which information is made available and comprehensible to the public. Notably, its formal structure creates an impression of a conversation *initiated by* a hypothetical public. ‘You asked, so we answer...’ The FAQ produces the impression that the EFSA’s discourse does not come from a specific and interested *position*, but is disembodied veridiction. Indeed, the *formule* “independent” appears frequently in the text, and is often supported by association with the terms “critique” and “review”. These co-occurrences reinforce the idea that the critique and review are, and must always be, considered as taking part in an independent governmentality *dispositif*. The EFSA presents itself as if it is participating as a third-party observer. In doing so, they elide and manipulate the genre of *controversy* which by definition opposes, on a scene, two different parties in front of a third party which serves as a judge. A controversy is thus a “regulated debate” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980, 16), a genre of discursive conflict which is fully integrated into the processes of scientific discourse (Latour 1987). But the EFSA’s discursive performance is not primarily directed towards a reconciliation of the two parties (Séralini and those he accuses of nontransparency). Rather, it is produced for another ‘third party’: the reading public. The situation is therefore made *polemical*, rather than controversial; the accused (EFSA) speaks not directly at its opponent, or to some official arbitrator, but to the ‘overhearing’ public and the media (see Yanoshevsky 2003). This performative strategy then licenses EFSA to attack Séralini on the grounds of transparency: “the authors did not respond directly to EFSA’s request for access to their study documentation and procedure” (EFSA 2012c). Rather than making a direct and substantive attack, the EFSA prefers to cry wolf over Séralini’s transparency *to* this presumed public. This chain of accusations reflects the indefinitely

extending trajectory of revelation that is core to the transparency *dispositif*: the document, then the data, then the ‘raw data’, then the name of every expert... Given the impossibility of *absolute* transparency, every actor, including Séralini himself, risks becoming the saboteur hoisted with his own petard.

6 Circulation and boundaries

It is clear that we are not dealing with singular *formules*, possessing an abstract and Aristotelian *form*; rather, every statement involves a *circulation* of that *formule*, establishing a localised meaning even as it problematises and negotiates other instantiations. Each actualisation of the term ‘transparency’ is at once unique and invokes a larger referent of ‘Transparency’ in the virtual plane (in the Deleuzian sense). In this sense, the *formule* is viscous, ‘sticking’ to local instantiations without any single version fully encapsulating its range of significations.³ The problematisation of the Séralini Affair as a transparency debate is thus reinforced through a circulation of *formules* in discourse.

A slew of open letters – drafted by third parties as well as the EFSA – were published in the wake of Séralini et al.’s paper, and exemplify this multi-leveled, multi-sited definitions of transparency. The first “open letter” is a web article (*Independent Science News*, 2012) expressing support for Séralini. It leverages the study to levy a wider criticism at a scientific system “dominated by corporate influence”; a euphemistic *formule* for opacity that we have already seen used by the French national Academies. But the rhetorical effect of this demonstration is reinforced by the willingness to give a list of every researcher’s name endorsing the letter and supporting Séralini. Their point is that while the name of the corporate experts and the corporate data are hidden, “independent scientist[s] working in the public interest” do not hesitate to expose themselves. The technical and scientific debate becomes an unlimited spiral of transparency performances – how much can you reveal? How much of your own skin will you expose? If not – what are you afraid of? On the other ‘side’ of the conflict, the EFSA actually plays the same tactical game when it publishes its correspondence with Séralini. This move is an effort to reverse the field of forces, to itself champion the cause of transparency. The first letter from October 4th 2012 (EFSA 2012b) is a PDF scan of the letter sent privately to Séralini; that is, ‘material’ proof of the EFSA’s claim to transparency. It requests the authors of the study “to provide documentation” behind their claims by October the 12th. Following Séralini’s reticence, the second letter from October 18th 2012 (EFSA, 2012d) emphasises that “until now EFSA has not received a response or documents from [Séralini]”, hence foregrounding their own transparency. This network of transparency requests culminates in the EFSA’s press release of October 22nd (EFSA 2012a). We can identify here numerous aforementioned *formules*: “all available data”, “fullest amount of material possible” “access has been granted to the data” and “public access”. The rhetoric is explicit: the press release is titled “EFSA provides Séralini *et al* with data on GM maize NK603”, duly opens with the EFSA’s compliance to Séralini’s request for data, then describes the EFSA’s own repeated requests for documentation from Séralini et al., which they say has been ignored.

These strategic displacements and manipulations of the *formules* in their circulation reinforce the double bind of secrecy and transparency. Although the EFSA is itself subject to claims of non-transparency (by Séralini’s initial discursive salvo), it plays a tactical game of affirming its transparency through the digital media apparatus (the data-sets made available online) and by

³ We adopt the ‘viscous’ and distributed qualities from Morton’s (2013) philosophy of the ‘hyperobject’.

criticising the lack of transparency of Séralini and his team. Ironically, it is as if pointing out the *lack of available information* from Séralini is even more effective than the information that *is* available to the public. In the case of the latter, the public must wade through large volumes of esoteric discourse to determine the positions of actors in the transparency *dispositif*; without performing this labour that the king has set for him/her, the subject cannot derive any positive conclusion (also see Arjò et al. 2013, 257). Meanwhile, the simple assertion of non-information has a clear and effective significance: they have remained silent, they have failed the ideal of transparency. All the proof you need to condemn Séralini is already provided. We can see that the invocation of transparency does not always, *or even primarily*, work towards an informed public. For actors who criticise others of opacity, the release of information is not necessarily the most profitable outcome, since non-release enables them to continue to occupy favourable ground. Furthermore, once the data *is* released, it provides additional material for dispute over the motive and methodological transparency of that data as discourse – which gives no guarantee that the public will be ‘more informed’. The anthropologist Mary Douglas put it neatly: “the more indiscriminately a sensitive topic is opened to debate, the more intractable it is bound to become” (2001, 146).

This paradox is replicated in the related *formule* of ‘Open Government’ – a term which has been criticised as exceedingly vague and, like the above strategic moves, makes no actual guarantee of public accountability (Yu & Robinson 2012). An example can be found in an online petition directed at Séralini, titled “Dr. Séralini – Please release data from your biotech corn study” (Anonymous 2012). The term ‘biotech corn’ gives away the probable source of this anonymous petition; the wording is traditionally used by ‘biotechnologies’ promoters, such as industry lobbyists and scientists in favour of GMO. Nonetheless, what is most interesting in this petition is the word “data” – repeated 9 times in a text totalling less than 180 – and mostly co-occurring with *formules* associated to transparency (“full disclosure”, “public access”) and opacity (“retention”). The petition also mentions the idea of ‘raw data’, an interesting variation which implies that only ‘raw’, that is, ‘unprocessed’ and ‘unmediated’ data, can fully disclose the truth. Of course, Séralini and CRIIGEN were not blind to this truth-value of ‘data’, either; in their own press release, they announced “legal actions to force disclosure of hidden and poor quality toxicological data” by other institutions. They argue that CRIIGEN’s own ‘raw data’ has already been delivered to a notary, and that public release will follow

as soon as the regulatory agencies or Monsanto do the same for their data, or when governments consent to publish the industry data [...] This will enable a true assessment, contradictory and transparent, and not a pseudo-assessment distorted by lobbies that are more concerned with protecting their own interests than with public health. (CRIIGEN 2013)

This is a rather explicit provocation: ‘we’ll be transparent, as soon as you are.’ Since institutions and studies can rarely be transparent in every imaginable way, the problematisation of the Affair in terms of transparency provides multiple ways in which actors on every side can mobilise the cause of transparency to their strategic benefit.

While we have stressed the evocative and contextually performative force of these *formules*, they are not ‘just’ rhetoric. They influence and depend upon legal principles and institutional practices. For example, the EFSA mentions in its 22nd October press release (EFSA 2012a) a public access procedure which had previously allowed “public access [to EFSA data] on six previous occasion to various parties”. This procedure is indeed mentioned in various internal documents (EFSA, 2003, 2006 & 2009), as well as European Union official texts like *Regulation (EC) No. 1049/2001* (European Union 2001). Such documents are part of an important juridical-institutional kernel within

the transparency *dispositif*, and reflect the discursive construction and negotiation of transparency-related practices within the ‘act of government’ itself. For example, article 12 of *Regulation (EC) No. 1049/2001* is dedicated to “direct access in electronic form or through a register”. Predictably, digital media is invested with a capacity to inform the public and actualise the positive effects of transparency: “opinions and other documents such as reports, statements and guidance documents will be made publicly available on the EFSA website.” But the limit-point is never far away in these *dispositifs*. Since no institution can practically make *everything* transparent, there emerge conventional forms in which transparency is delimited and tolerated margins of opacity – akin to the ‘good’ secrecy of Seralini – are established. The document describing day-to-day transparency practices of the EFSA is entitled “openness, transparency and confidentiality”:

There is however a need to be clear as to how EFSA intends to operate these principles in practice and in particular to clarify those circumstances in which information may be sought from EFSA but will not or not immediately be made available. Openness on this point, including the need for confidentiality, is in itself an essential point of building trust with stakeholders. (EFSA, 2003)

This leads to the paradoxical statement that transparency is ultimately predicated on some confidentiality:

Confidentiality needs to be allowed for internal scientific debate on issues to ensure that those participating feel free to challenge any view put forward from any perspective. Full openness for such a debate would be likely to inhibit discussion in a way which would be damaging to consumers’ interests and reduce the likelihood of a high quality final (public) opinion. (EFSA, 2003)

This articulation unpacks the power relation embedded within transparency’s idea of ‘governing governments’. On one hand, the transparency *dispositif* defers some of the labour of governing to the figure of the auditor-citizen. On the other, it is precisely the means by which a trust in the system as a whole (that is, the system of government, transparency, information and public debate) is maintained – what Giddens (1990) calls, via Luhmann, an ‘abstract system’. Hence, it is no mere irony that transparency is ultimately predicated on secrecy. Where secrecy previously possessed an open authority as *arcana imperii*, it now persists as a pathologised yet condoned *modus operandi*. The secrecy of a transparent government is itself a secret (see Birchall 2012, Horn 2012). By reserving the right to restrict the operation of transparency for the sake of efficiency or confidentiality, the state is able to make transparency ‘sacred’: transparency is “removed from the free use of men” and reserved for a specifically constrained deployment (Agamben 2009, 18). The transparency *dispositif* is thus shown to be delimited in two ways: in terms of institutional self-regulation and practice, and in terms of other *formules*, other discourses, other *dispositifs* – such as confidentiality and privacy – which keep transparency in check. The Seralini Affair would have one such postscript: in January 2013, EFSA published its data on Monsanto’s GM NK603 maize, the product at the heart of Seralini’s experiment. Monsanto would reply with judicial threats to safeguard its confidentiality rights, arguing that it “firmly supports transparency in European regulatory decision-making, but strongly objects to EFSA’s unilateral publication of Monsanto’s data” (Starling 2013). No debate is ever confined to a single *formule*, a single *dispositif*.

7 The politics of transparency discourse

In examining the S eralini Affair, we have sought to demonstrate how transparency operates as a *dispositif* and through *formules*, deploying modes of problematisation across time and space to serve both short-term tactical interests of the actors and the long-term aggregation of transparency as a regime of knowledge. We have also examined how the liberal idea of ‘governing governments’ plays out in specific, empirical situations. Our analysis turns away from any synoptic dream of ‘resisting’ governmental power and the neoliberal drive to responsabilised subjects, any simple contrast between ‘governments that govern’ and ‘governing governments’. Through the S eralini Affair, we identify a qualitatively distinct level of effects: governmentality as a network of axiological determinations which organise what is valid, proper, possible, within a democratic society. Whether it is the public auditing the government, secret researchers exposing government agencies, or NGOs governing scientific communities, our analysis of ‘governing governments’ re-emphasises Foucault’s original formulation: governmentality is not, fundamentally, a technique for governments to subjugate its people. It is a regime by which certain rules for subjugation and governing, and for *judging* extant such practices, are made available to all actors.

We would now like to conclude by briefly mentioning the ethical and political implications of the transparency *dispositif*. If transparency does not deliver rational and informed publics as it purports, and if demanding more transparency is not necessarily an emancipatory politics for the subject, what is to be our attitude? Our emphasis has been on how transparency makes government itself – as well as other stakeholders – the subject of governmentality. This is, of course, not new; rather, this flexible directionality was central to the very emergence of liberal governmentality. Foucault suggested that it was when the *market* as a ‘natural force’ became a general principle of governing that government could finally become a form of scientific knowledge, that ‘good’ government could be judged from the ‘bad’. One could then say: that is not an effective way to exercise your sovereignty, that is not good government (Foucault 2007, 350-1). Yet, crucially, this does not mean any heroic kind of ‘resistance’ where the citizen is empowered to be free of governmental deception or coercion. Rather, the notion of ‘good government’ was precisely a mode of problematisation which organised politics around its particular set of questions and values. Similarly, what we have tried to show through the S eralini Affair is that transparency is not an ideal unfulfilled; it is an *already fulfilled* configuration of political contestation. It is a schema wherein a general *governmentality* organises a distribution of forces and subject positions that *includes* both government’s critique of itself and its subjects on one hand, and subjects’ critique of government and themselves on the other.

In other words, the transparency *dispositif* creates a situation where transparency does not necessarily correlate to resistance or empowerment. Again: what should then be our attitude to transparency? One suggestion is that it is the *dispositif* itself that should also be subjected to critique; that is, we might need to think about the ‘structural’ question of a transparency society as much as specific actors and their ‘failures’ to be transparent. Here, a governmentality perspective might ask: How does the state represent and problematise itself? How is the population problematised as an object of knowledge and intervention? For instance, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) have shown how a vision of the state as *vertical* and *all-encompassing* guides the state’s conceptualisation of its own activity in a case of an Indian health project, while Bigo (2002) has argued the state sees itself as a body or container for the polity in immigration discourse. In the case of transparency, we recall earlier suggestions that the state conceptualises itself as a *passive entity*; a storehouse and archive which is not directly *responsible* for citizen engagement or public deliberation, but merely facilitates it. Inversely, the *population* becomes the active agents that must seize the keys as offered, search the archives, learn the ‘transparent’

information, and make something of it. This line of critique exposes the sheer vagueness of transparency policies in many state and corporate institutions; the distribution of responsibility between public and state and its possible re-negotiation; and how the celebratory rhetoric of citizen engagement and participation can actually *contribute to states' irresponsibility*. A *dispositif* critique of transparency therefore questions what this fixation with transparency makes us value and makes us forget; what kinds of labour it now demands of us, and divests of others; and what speech and action become thought of as possible and impossible within a transparency 'problem'.

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