

The museum exhibition in the context of dispositive analysis

Veronika Kolaříková

Mgr. et Mgr. Veronika Kolaříková, Ph.D.
Masaryk University
Faculty of Education
Department of Social Education
Czech Republic
e-mail: kolarikova.veronika@mail.muni.cz
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7726-6913>

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The aim of this study is to propose and present a suitable methodological framework based on the principle of discourse analysis, which would be suitable for the implementation of research on the museum environment, in particular museum exhibitions and their narratives. The potential of the dispositive analysis of the museum phenomenon is enormous, but the elaboration of this methodology in the context of museum research in our environment is lacking. This study aims to add to this underdeveloped area and provide readers and researchers with key information concerning the possibilities and uses of this methodology. As a suitable methodological tool, the study chooses dispositive analysis, which has the advantage of allowing the analysis of materializations in addition to the discourse plane, which is an advantage for the analysis of exhibitions and the exhibits housed therein. Dispositive analysis, which in the study is primarily based on S. Jäger's approach, enables the examination of materializations without overlooking the role of visitors and the broader context of the exhibition, which, by its very nature of membership of a cultural institution, is always discursively conditioned. The relationship between the museum and discursive reality is thus a thematic part of the study, as is the exploration of the topics of discourse (Foucault) and the dispositive.

Keywords: Museum exhibition, narrative, discourse, dispositive, dispositive analysis, Foucault, Jäger

Nowadays, museums are regarded as important cultural and educational institutions, which is one of the reasons why museum research is on the rise. However, it is not easy to investigate the social reality of museums, as they are complex institutions with many areas of interest, functions, roles and meanings in which various social actors are involved. In my sociological and museum research, I am primarily concerned with the analysis of museum exhibitions, which I see as places closely related to social discourse, on whose form they are based, yet the exhibitions themselves participate in some way in its construction and preservation. Given this fact and my research experience, I see methods from the field of discourse analysis as beneficial for museum research. However, their elaboration in the field of museum research is insufficient in the Czech Republic and in the Slovak Republic as well; one can say that they are almost absent. Therefore, the aim of this study is to propose, construct and present a methodological tool suitable for researching museum exhibitions, which would be anchored in a discursive analytical framework and would enable a comprehensive analysis of museum exhibitions.

As a suitable methodological tool I chose dispositive analysis, which falls within the field of discourse analysis. Dispositive analysis is a specific analytical method that enables the examination of a broad social reality, its phenomena and elements, by observing both the meaning of social

structures and the level of social actors and their actions. Herein lies dispositive analysis's great potential to contribute to the field of museum research. The issue of the influence of social structures and the role of social actors is closely related to the issue of museums and their exhibitions. Exhibitions, as an aspect of the museum institution, create a certain social structure in which visitors move. But it is important to realise that this structure has been created by the people – most often curators and other museum staff – who are involved in the process of creating the exhibition. Thus, to a large extent, the exhibition is the result of the actions of social actors (museum workers), even though they are influenced in their actions by a certain type of discursive knowledge that is typical of a given society, institution or research circle. In relation to other social actors (visitors), the exhibition subsequently acts as an external social structure, as an objectified reality. However, its meaning is not immune to the thinking of social actors; it is not firmly dictated to them. Rather, visitors themselves are involved in the process of creating the meaning of the exhibition, i.e. social actors themselves participate in the construction of the meaning of the exhibition. Dispositive analysis enables analytical attention to be paid to all aspects of this social (museum) reality.

The first and foremost benefit of dispositive analysis is that it enables a comprehensive analysis of the exhibition itself – its narrative and the exhibits and exhibition situations placed within it. The exhibits in the analysis represent materializations whose meaning, context, and other aspects the analysis focuses on. The possibility of analysing materialisations in their social and cultural context is crucial for research on exhibitions. Another important element to which dispositive analysis pays attention is the discursive dimension of the research, which represents the social dimension of the exhibition and the phenomenon presented and constructed by it. Being interested in the discursive dimension of research is important in dispositive analysis, as museum narratives and their form are strongly influenced by social discourses. The discursive anchoring of the research does not necessarily mean that the researcher is only interested in the power relations and effects of museums in the analysis, which are the topics that come to mind most often in the context of discourse analysis. Rather, in the context of dispositive analysis, it is an attempt to explore and understand the exhibition as a whole, without overlooking the individual parts of this whole, which is assumed to contain meaning that mirrors not only the thinking and research background of the museum in question, but also the cultural and social aspects of society, i.e. that dominant social discourses are involved in its form. At the same time, it is possible to observe, for example, to what extent the studied exhibition diverts from social discourse and subverts it, or to what extent it copies and deepens it, etc.

For the purpose of applying dispositive analysis to the museum environment (specifically the field of museum exhibition research), the study first introduces the phenomenon of museum exhibitions with regard to their narrative and meaning, which is constructed and interpreted within the communicative process taking place in a particular discursive reality. Next, the study will open up the issue of discourse (Foucault) and discourse analysis, in order to subsequently address the clarification of the notion of the dispositive and dispositive analysis (Jäger). In the final stage, the study will apply the given information to the field of museum research and present a possible procedure for the dispositive analysis of a museum exhibition.

1. THE MUSEUM PHENOMENON

1.1. The museum exhibition

The museum is a social space that conveys a variety of information to visitors through exhibitions and exhibits. These are mediated to visitors through the museum presentation, through which, according to Stránský,¹ the mission and meaning of the musealization of reality is fulfilled. It is through this presentation that the memory of musealized reality influences social consciousness. Stránský² understands musealization as a process of acquiring museality – a certain cultural and memory value, which is not only based on the knowledge of reality, but also on the adoption of a value relationship to it. The value relationship to reality then implies the need to preserve this cultural value, which is related to the need for its presentation. By means of this, the museum participates in the formation of cultural awareness of individuals and society, as well as in the formation of culture itself. For the purpose of the museum presentation, exhibitions and displays are created in the museum, in which museum objects are represented by exhibits.³

Experts across paradigms differ in their opinions on whether the individual exhibit or the exhibition as a whole is the carrier of information and meaning in a museum. Along with this, scholars also take a different stance on the exhibit itself and its position within the exhibition. Advocates of the previously predominant phenomenological approach perceive an exhibition as a collection of exhibits, whereby an exhibition comes into being by gathering in a particular place a number of exhibits, phenomena that tell us about themselves.⁴ From a phenomenological perspective, an exhibition is composed of unique exhibits endowed with certain attributes, associations or histories that cause them to bear a special meaning, significance or simply be charming in nature. The exhibit therefore stands at the centre of the exhibition and can constitute an exhibition in itself. The meaning of the exhibition is then determined by the correlation of the meanings of the exhibits presented within it. In practice, exhibitions situated in this way can be imagined as previously typical museum rooms full of showcases with exhibits representing outstanding and unique pieces perceived by curators as worthy of display. Often these are formalist displays that are non-contextual, offering no explanation or story, focusing only on the object itself⁵ and making no attempt to reinforce its narrative value. These are usually gallery-type exhibitions that aim to create a neutral environment in which the exhibits are to stand out undisturbed.⁶

A different approach to the issue is taken by structuralism, which began to assert itself in the exhibition industry in the middle of the twentieth century and today represents the dominant paradigm here. Structuralists are convinced that the exhibit has no content or meaning of its own, that it means nothing in itself, it is “just” a sign of the exhibition. Its meaning and significance are formed only in the context of the exhibition, by its inclusion among other exhibits and its distancing from them, while attention is paid not only to which exhibits are present in the exhibition, but also to which are absent. The emphasis in this approach is not on

¹ STRÁNSKÝ, Zbyněk Zbyslav. *Archeologie a muzeologie*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2005, p. 129.

² STRÁNSKÝ, *Archeologie...*, pp. 111–113.

³ By an exhibit Stránský means a displayed (not just a thesaurised) museum piece.

⁴ WOLF, Jakub. Exponát a expozice, dekonstrukce. In: *Muzeum*, 48(1), 2010, p. 18.

⁵ ŠOBÁŇOVÁ, Petra. *Expozice jako místo pro vzdělávání Metodika ke tvorbě expozic zohledňujících vzdělávací potřeby návštěvníků*. Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum, Metodické centrum muzejní pedagogiky, 2017, p. 22.

⁶ ŠOBÁŇOVÁ, Petra. *Muzejní expozice jako edukační médium. 2. díl: Výtěžek současných českých expozic*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2014, p. 398.

the exhibit itself and its uniqueness, but on the exhibition as a whole and its message, theme and statement. Researchers are aware that within another exhibition with a different theme, the exhibit might take on a different meaning. This is why structuralists are also concerned with the question of power and the problem that the exhibition and its theme exert a certain amount of power pressure on the exhibit, as they determine what the exhibit will become in a given exhibition, or what meaning it will take on with respect to the theme of the exhibition.⁷

In practice, this approach is reflected in the contextual exhibitions of contemporary modern museums, which are more oriented towards the viewer and their emotions, experiences and active stay in the museum. Therefore, these exhibitions

offer a description and explanation of a phenomenon in context; the exhibits presented have a connection of meaning and, together with numerous accessories, form a complex picture of the natural or cultural reality presented; various classical and contemporary means (dioramas, multimedia scenes) are used to create a period or natural atmosphere, and the wider phenomenon and context are conveyed through the exhibited object.⁸

For a researcher analysing museum exhibitions, it is important to find a balance between these approaches and to clarify how to approach individual exhibits. In this study, I take more of a structuralist approach. However, leaning towards a contextual view of the exhibit and the exhibition does not necessarily mean that the researcher does not give individual attention to the exhibit. This is still an important part of the analysis. However, despite examining the meaning, function and nature of a particular exhibit – which is certainly important – we cannot overlook its context as determined by the exhibition, by which the exhibit's meaning is modified, co-created and reinforced. Stránský already pointed this out when he said that the degree of impact of an exhibit

depends on its own communicativeness, i.e., what it is able to communicate. If we take two exhibits and situate them in space in a relationship of meaning, we multiply not only their own action, but we create a sign system that has a higher communicative significance than the individual components involved.⁹

In my view, this is precisely because the context of the exhibition and the exhibits within it ultimately produces a certain narrative through which the exhibition is interwoven, and which not only conveys certain information to the visitor, but also places that information in the context of the exhibition, to which it adds a certain narrative. The exhibition narrative can be more or less explicit and legible to the viewer. Narratives represent and unify the knowledge present in the exhibition and, together with the exhibits, create meaning. Through it, the exhibitions then communicate with the visitors.

1.2 The museum narrative

The term narration refers to oral or written narratives. A narrative is characterised by the presence of a story, a kind of action that is linked to the actions of the actors and therefore to the changes of events and a certain temporality – the change of the plot. It is true that all events in a narrative are causally connected, otherwise it is not a narrative. It is not necessary,

⁷ WOLF, Exponát a..., pp. 17–21.

⁸ ŠOBÁŇOVÁ, *Expozice jako...*, p. 22. This and other quotations are translated by the author.

⁹ STRÁNSKÝ, *Archeologie...*, p. 127.

however, that the causal relations be explicitly explained in the narrative. It is sufficient if they are immanently present or derive from commonly known facts that the recipient intuitively deduces and adds to the story.¹⁰

There is no doubt that this explanation of narrative applies to literary works and oral folklore. However, narrative is also found in museums and their exhibitions, as they also try to portray a certain story that can be grasped by the visitor through their exhibits and their specific arrangement and presentation methods. Narrative can take various forms. It can be a presentation of the life of a particular character or, conversely, the social life of a particular historical epoch or geographical location; it can be a demonstration of the development of an artistic style over the years, or it can be “storytelling” linked to the development of a particular culture or social group – for example, a nation or the inhabitants of a particular region. Therefore, for an exhibition to construct a narrative it does not have to use only contextually placed exhibits that create a series of continuous scenes or are part of temporal etudes. An exhibition, or a part of one, can present a narrative even if it explicitly depicts only a single event, provided that it is an event whose causation and context are common knowledge among visitors. Similarly, a single exhibit can take on meaning without being contextually anchored within the scene of a particular part of the exhibition, provided that the symbolism of the exhibit can be intuitively inferred by the viewer, perhaps because it is a commonly known symbol in a given nation state or other social group, handed down through generations, or because it references a narrative that is part of the collective memory. When analysing exhibitions, it is therefore appropriate to pay attention to the social discourse that influences not only the form of the exhibition itself, but also the knowledge frames of visitors. It is equally important to pay attention to the exhibits themselves and their meaning, not just in the given exhibition but in society as a whole. This process leads us not only to think about which objects are presented in the exhibition, but also to realise what is absent with regard to the presented topic.

This is all related to the fact that the narrative of the exhibition can be presented either as a given truth,¹¹ or the museum staff can seek to build a more open narrative that tries to include all levels (or at least more of them) in the presented story, thus taking into account multiple points of view on the topic presented by the exhibition. In a (post)modern exhibition, the idea is to avoid imposing a single truth and view of reality on visitors. An “open” museum narrative is one of the requirements for modern museums today, and the active participation of the visitor in creating the meaning of the exhibition is assumed. This draws our attention to the interconnection of the theme with constructivism,¹² a paradigm which sees the social actor as an active constructor of social reality and therefore as an agent actively participating in the construction of the meaning of the exhibition and its narrative.

1.3 The interpretation of the exhibition as a communication process

Visual methodology, along with semiotics, which forms a sub-part of it, are important disciplines for the analysis of museum exhibitions, although they are themselves more

¹⁰ Cf. RIMMON-KENAN, Shlomith. *Poetika vyprávění*. Brno: Host, 2001; CHATMAN, Seymour. *Příběh a diskurs: narativní struktura v literatuře a filmu*. Brno: Host, 2008.

¹¹ This approach was very common in history, and at the time when museums were being opened to the general public, society could predominantly encounter this way of creating exhibitions.

¹² For a more detailed discussion of the relationship of the museum exhibition to the constructivist paradigm, see KOLARÍKOVÁ, Veronika. Konstruktivistické teorie učení a jejich využití v edukační realitě muzea. In: *Pedagogická orientace*, 28(3), 2018, pp. 496–540.

concerned with the interpretation of artworks. However, the development of their analysis and interpretation is nevertheless inspiring, as their approach to the interpretation of paintings can be applied to other types of exhibit, as well as to the exhibition as a whole. Indeed, an exhibition is an act of visualization which is then subjected to the interpretation of the visitor. According to Schärer, the exhibition is a site of interpretive visualization of absent clusters of circumstances (facts and situations that form the context of the exhibition or display), objects (exhibits) and staging elements (display cases, lighting, colours, images, audiovisual materials, etc.), which all together function as signs referring to social reality (the outside world).¹³ These signs often function as visual means of acting on the human senses. In the process of construction and interpretation of meaning, signs and their meanings are also influenced by components related to the exhibition space (the appearance of the room, etc.)

According to Stránský as well, a specific feature of museum presentation, which he understands as a communication channel, is the use of visual language, which, alongside the “ordinary” language captured in text, forms the key means of communication of the exhibition. “The visual, museal-presentational language works with its own specific vocabulary (space, objects, forms, graphemes, texts, colours, sounds, lights, movements) and has different compositional principles and forms of its own.”¹⁴ Therefore, it is important to pay analytical attention to the visual language, or the form of the exhibition. A brief excursion into the historical development of the interpretation of artworks that are related to visibility and are also a specific type of exhibit can thus be a starting point for the following analytical considerations, as knowledge of the development of these analytical tools can be useful when thinking about the analysis of the exhibition.

Art historians, starting from the positivist paradigm, first perceived the artwork as an impartial and politically neutral representation. Later postmodernists, however, noticed that representation was an inseparable part of social processes, including the processes of domination and control, and began to examine systems of representation as instruments of power that served specific ends. Thus, over time, there has been a shift in scholarly interest from what an artwork signifies to what it does; we can clearly see here the influence of poststructuralism and a move towards poststructuralist critique. The work ceased to be seen as the product of a particular creative individual and began to be seen as the product of the specific social situation in which it was created and continued to function. Interest in the contextuality of the work came to the fore, and, due to the linguistic turn in the social sciences, the interpretation and analysis of visual objects began to draw heavily on linguistic paradigms and practices.¹⁵

Art, which is one type of museum object, is understood in this study as a sign system. This viewpoint is inspired by Černý and Holeš¹⁶ who consider the main characteristic of artworks to be their sign character and classify artworks as fuzzy polysemous signs, as a result of which no single universally correct interpretation of the work is possible. This is because interpretation depends on a whole range of circumstances, such as the characteristics, experience and knowledge of the interpreter. Art is not only created by the painter, but also by the one who

¹³ SCHÄRER, Martin R. The exhibition – a place of limited dialogue. In: *Museologica Brunensia*, 1(1), 2012, pp. 14–17.

¹⁴ STRÁNSKÝ, *Archeologie...*, p. 128.

¹⁵ OWENS, Craig. Reprezentace, přivlastnění a moc. In: KESNER, Ladislav (ed.), *Vizuální teorie: Současné anglo-americké myšlení o výtvarných dílech* (pp. 189–220). Jinočany: H & H, 2005.

¹⁶ ČERNÝ, Jiří – HOLEŠ, Jan. *Sémiotika*. Praha: Portál, 2004.

looks at the painting is how Mikš¹⁷ summarises one of the main ideas of the work of the eminent art historian Gombrich,¹⁸ who dealt with the psychology of pictorial representation and emphasised that the meaning of a work of art is not only based on the work itself and the goals intended by its author, but also on the recipient of the work and the individual way in which the viewer interprets it. Gombrich¹⁹ understood art as a process in which certain ends are achieved by certain means, and the achievement of these ends is not a matter of the artist's self-conscious declarations, but a matter of the effect of the work on the person viewing it. This is because when an observer of a painting inserts their own knowledge and previous experience into the painting, they see, and then interpret and complete the depicted scene in its context. Art can thus be understood as a communication process in which the author of the work sends a certain message to the viewer. The viewer interprets and reacts to this message in a specific way. It is a process of communication in which the meaning and sense of the artwork is shaped, communicated and maintained.

The communication process as a tool for constructing meanings is not only related to artworks, but also to other types of exhibit and the exhibition as a whole. Schärer²⁰ agrees with this, and according to him this process of communication takes place between the author of the work, the curator and the visitor, who is an active participant in the communication process, not just a passive recipient of meaning (which is why Schärer does not refer to the visitor as a recipient of meaning in museum communication, but as a participant in communication). We can assume that the communication process and its meaning-making potential affects the whole social reality as such. According to Habermas,²¹ society is based precisely on communicative action – on interactions between actors whose aim is to achieve understanding. Human action derives from a dialogical process of mutual understanding and negotiation of reality with other actors. In the case of art, this takes the form of communication between the author of the work and its viewer; in the case of a museum exhibition, it is primarily communication between the curators and the museum management and its visitors. Communication with visitors is primarily through the exhibits, which may also represent other actors in the exhibition (authors, collectors, curators, museum educators, but also historical figures or local residents, etc.). Primarily, however, through the existence of a socially constructed sign, exhibits represent a group reality that is negotiated and affirmed in communication with visitors.

Other factors also enter into this communication. In addition to the author/curator or other museum representative and the viewer, the time of the object's creation and, last but not least, the social and cultural conditions in which the object is interpreted play a role:

It is said that every painting tells a story, but we all know from our own experience that if we don't understand what the story is, we can't 'read' it in a painting nearly as easily as we can read it in a book. Most narrative painting is based on the artist's belief that the particular story they is telling is well known to the viewer.²²

¹⁷ MIKŠ, František. *Gombrich: Tajemství obrazu a jazyk umění: Pozvání k dějinám a teorii umění*. Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2008, p. 43.

¹⁸ Gombrich himself was not a representative of post-structuralism, and he distanced himself from cultural relativism and the processes of deconstruction. Nevertheless, we can see that he was also aware of the important role of the viewer in the process of perceiving works of art (in KESNER, *Vizuální teorie...*)

¹⁹ MIKŠ, Gombrich..., p. 44.

²⁰ SCHÄRER, The exhibition..., pp. 14–17.

²¹ ŠUBRT, Jiří. *Postavy a problémy soudobé teoretické sociologie: sociologické teorie druhé poloviny 20. století*. Praha: ISV nakladatelství, 2001.

²² STURGIS, Alexander. *Jak rozumět obrazům*. Praha: Slovart, 2006, p. 10.

This statement is important in order to be aware of the cultural context of the work, knowledge of which is necessary to understand the painting, and again any other type of exhibit or cultural object and its meaning, since the time and environment in which the object was created, as well as the time in which it is subsequently interpreted, has had and continues to have a profound effect on it.

Post-structuralism thus pointed out that it is impossible to look for objective meaning in art, which would be (consciously) inserted into the work by the author. At the same time, it drew attention to the need to perceive the specificity of the cultural, social and historical situation that determines the construction of the work and its meaning. This relativity of interpretation applies not only to art, but also to other museum exhibits and the exhibition as a whole. The point is that the meaning of an exhibit or exhibition is not a whole, pre-given entity but something that is formed only in the process of interpretation. The meaning that people attribute to objects (and not just objects of a physical nature) is created in the course of human interaction.²³ Meaning is therefore always social and, as such, is socially determined. According to Foucault,²⁴ meaning is socially agreed upon within a conscious or unconscious consensus, or emerges within a discussion. Society uses signs as meaningful units operating within a given discourse.

Logically, then, the meaning of an object is not fixed, but can be variable both in terms of time (an exhibit in a museum today has a completely different function and meaning than it did in the past at the time of its common use) and in terms of the socio-cultural environment of the social actors who ascribe meaning to the object. Indeed, members of a particular social group share what Taborsky²⁵ refers to as a common group reality that provides social actors with a particular way of looking at the world that is specific to their group. At the same time, there is agreement within a given social group about the meaning of a given object. Therefore, meaning tends to be stable over time and space. However, this does not mean that the meaning of an object is permanently assigned, nor that it cannot change over time, or that a particular feature cannot have multiple interpretations. Meaning can change and a sign can take on different meanings. But the number of such meanings is not infinite. On the contrary, the meaning of a sign as a sign unit is closed in the sense that a sign cannot take on any random form of meaning (if only because meaning always arises within a social group), nor can it take on all meanings simultaneously. The number and style of meanings assigned to an object is limited.

The meaning of an object is formed in the process of interpretation. The difficulty of interpretation, however, stems from the fact that museum exhibits, unlike literature, use various, often symbolic languages, which require a certain prior knowledge and cultural competence on the part of the visitor in order to decode the meaning of the exhibit. This brings us to a problem already noted by Bourdieu in the 1960s – that is, that the form of interpretation of exhibitions and the objects placed in them (in Bourdieu's concept of paintings) is linked to the possession of a certain type of capital, i.e. competences, skills and knowledge related to the theme, even if it is only knowledge of national or local myths and stereotypes. We return to the fact that the

²³ Cf. KESNER, Ladislav. Teorie, vizuální zobrazení a dějiny umění. In: KESNER, Ladislav (ed.). *Vizuální teorie: Současné anglo-americké myšlení o výtvarných dílech* (pp. 11–70). Jinočany: H & H, 2005; MANGUEL, Alberto. Čtení obrazů: o čem přemýšlíme, když se díváme na umění? Brno: Host, 2008; KRESS, Gunther, VAN LEEUWEN, Theo. *Reading Images: Socio cultural aspects of language and education*. Australia: Deakin University Press, 1990.

²⁴ TABORSKY, Edwina. The discursive object. In: PEARCE, Susan (ed.). *Objects of Knowledge: New Research in Museum Studies: An International Series* (pp. 50 – 77). London: The Athlone Press, 1990.

²⁵ TABORSKY, The discursive...

visitor interprets the meaning of objects from the position of the culture and society in which they lives and whose values, norms, knowledge, stereotypes and ideas about the world and about life they has acquired. After all, culture is made up of signs to which people attach meaning.²⁶ Signs are forms with socially constituted meanings. Signs are framed²⁷ by various discursive practices, institutional arrangements, value systems and semiotic mechanisms. These cultural and social frameworks and the visitor's experience play an essential role in the interpretation of exhibits. Thus, it is not only a person's "external" knowledge, gained by being educated in the field that the exhibit presents, but also the knowledge derived from their everyday life in a given culture and society that influences their interpretation process. Thus, we can speak of the museum visitor as an "empirical viewer"²⁸ who is embedded in their time, culture and habits, making meaning of the images by reaching into the source of their own experience, thinking, emotions and relationships rather than being educated in art²⁹ or history.

The role of the museum visitor is therefore active; visitors are active co-creators of the meaning of the object, the exhibition, the narrative. This brings us back to social constructivism, which works extensively with this very idea of the social actor as a co-creator of social reality and confirms the above-described process of interpreting the work as a communicative process in which the visitor – as a social actor with specific characteristics, knowledge, attitudes and interests – is actively involved.

1.4 The museum and the discursive reality

When I argue that exhibits reflect the social reality in which they were created, but also the reality that now surrounds them, it means not only that they are contextualised or framed, but above all that the exhibits are discursively embedded and based on the form of social discourse that manifests itself in people's everyday lives. "Everydayness" is the typical experience of every human being. Berger and Luckmann³⁰ say that the reality of everyday life is perceived by people as self-evident, ordered, intersubjective and originating in people's thoughts and actions, by means of which this reality is being created and maintained. A museum exhibition and its exhibits can be part of the narratives which are perpetuated in a given society and which, in their own way, tell a story about social reality. These narratives are all the more interesting to us as researchers because museums have been regarded by people as professional institutions associated with unwavering knowledge ever since they opened to the general public. As scientific institutions, museums are perceived as sources of truthful information collected by

²⁶ BAL, Mieke – BRYSON, Norman. Semiotics and Art History. In: *The Art Bulletin*, 73(2), 1991, pp. 174–208.

²⁷ Bal and Bryson, following Culler, propose not to speak about context but about "framing" the sign. They, like other semioticians, find the notion of context problematic because context itself is composed of signs requiring interpretation. For example, determining the context of a work's creation, or the context of its viewing at the time of its creation, is very difficult, since our historical records do not capture all that is relevant; they do not usually tell us how the general public reacted to the work, and any records are attuned to the power discourses and practices of the time. According to Bal and Bryson, the notion of framing better describes the situation of the signs and the process of their interpretation. They point out that the art historian, in analysing art, is always part of the process of constructing meanings that they or she influences. What they considers as positive knowledge is the product of his or her interpretive decisions and the interactions he undergoes when examining the social factors that frame the sign. As we can see, one could say, with reference to constructivism, that there is no such thing as an objective and a priori meaning.

²⁸ FULKOVÁ, Marie. *Diskurs umění a vzdělávání*. Praha: H & H. 2008, p. 186.

²⁹ Fulková uses the concept of the empirical viewer most often to refer to children who have not yet been educated in art theory, yet are able to interpret, evaluate and creatively respond to works of art.

³⁰ BERGER, Peter Ludwig – LUCKMANN, Thomas. *Sociální konstrukce reality*. Brno: CDK, 1999.

credentialed professionals who understand their work (as opposed to lay people), and therefore there is no need to question museum presentations – museums have recognised authority.³¹

Thanks to the connection with knowledge, museums are also connected with power, which was noticed by representatives of post-structuralist trends. Post-structuralists are not only interested in what museums say (what information they convey to visitors through the exhibition), but also what they do – how they influence visitors; whether they somehow affect their preconceptions, values and attitudes; how they manipulate information; what they say or, on the contrary, what they withhold on a given topic; how their statements are discursively anchored, and so on. It is a matter of tracing the performative and discourse levels of museum reality, and in this context it is impossible not to mention one of the most important discursive thinkers, Michel Foucault. Foucault³² understands museums as specific places – so-called heterotopias. Heterotopias are not classical free public places. Entry into heterotopias is accompanied by specific rituals, rules, prohibitions, or commands that can even take the form of enforcement, as is the case with entry into prisons and barracks. As another example of heterotopia, Foucault mentions cultural institutions such as theatres, cinemas, museums, zoos and other places such as cemeteries.

Heterotopias are places with a precisely defined function in which time intersects in a specific way with space that is not the classical real space as we experience it in our everyday life (imagine the precisely arranged space of the museum, which incorporates many more spaces and places through its collections) and in which time is accumulated differently than is usual with traditional time (in a museum there is an eternal accumulation of time). According to Foucault:

Museums and libraries are heterotopias in which time never stops accumulating and reaching its peak, whereas as late as the end of the 17th century museums and libraries were expressions of individual choice. On the other hand, the idea of collecting everything, the establishment of a kind of universal archive, the will to enclose in a single place all time, all periods, all forms, all changes of taste, the idea of building a place of all times that is itself beyond all time and its destructive effects, the plan to organize in this way a certain incessant and infinite accumulation of time in one immovable place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias inherent in 19th century Western culture.³³

In his scholarly work, Foucault was preoccupied with analysing social reality and its discourse level, society and the institutions present in it. In describing institutions, specifically barracks, but also hospitals and schools, he focused not only on their function, but above all on their association with disciplinary power, with which museums are also inherently linked. Disciplinary power is typically associated with a specific architecture, which is also characteristic of museums.

³¹ According to Cain (CAIN, Victoria. Exhibitionary complexity: Reconsidering museums cultural authority. In: *American Quarterly*, 60(4), 2008, p. 1143), museums in the USA have won considerable authority and trust of the people in terms of telling the truth about the world, about history, and about society and its members. Most Americans consider museums to be a trustworthy source of information and give even more weight and credibility to museum information than to books or television. Similarly, museums are perceived as authoritative places in Europe – the importance and trust of visitors in museums has been confirmed in research by Voices from the Museum (DODD, Jocelyn et al. *Voices from the Museum: Qualitative research conducted in Europe's National Museums* (EuNaMus Report No. 6.). Sweden: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012), according to which the majority of respondents perceive national museums as having cultural and historical authority and as places that present important information about the nation and its history.

³² FOUCAULT, Michel. *Myslení vnějšku*. Praha: Herrmann & synové, 1996.

³³ FOUCAULT, *Myšlení vnějšku*..., p. 82.

Architecture facilitates disciplinary power by dividing people and their functions in space. The definition of power positions and roles is related not only to the internal distribution of space (the exhibition as a space where visitors are allowed versus the depositories as places only certain museum employees are allowed to enter) and the architectural layout of the exhibition (often the direction of the tour and possible movement in the exhibition is determined); certain elements of power are connected to the museum building itself (a historical building with an aura of artistic value or, on the contrary, a modern building that attracts attention).

The dispositive nature of power is also linked to a specific timetable and schedule that also affects museums in the form of their opening hours. Access to the museum is only possible on certain days and hours. In addition to this, visiting a museum also entails specific rules of behaviour. Everyone knows that in a museum you do not touch the exhibits, shout or run. There are people working in the museum (curators, guides, museum educators, historians and other professionals, including the museum management) who, through public programmes, reinforce their special role associated with knowledge and thus power. It is then these actors who decide what information is presented to the public and in what form. They thus determine the shape of the museum and its role in society.

In thinking about the museum's power functions and impact, however, we should remember that the character of the museum has changed since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We no longer encounter exclusively traditional museums of an imperialist and nationalist character. More than ever before, museums are emphasizing dialogue with the visitor, not only through new forms of presentation but also through educational activities. Moreover, starting from a constructivist paradigm, it cannot be claimed that museum curators can shape all visitors' journeys and thought processes through exhibitions in a targeted way and with the same effect. That is to say, an exhibition and the associated learning process do not have the same impact on all individuals. In fact, individual visitors have different life experiences, attitudes and prior knowledge. Therefore, the process of personalization of symbols (exhibited objects and what they represent) takes place in a unique manner for each visitor. However, this "unique manner" is not completely random; it is discursively anchored, that is to say, it is based on the specific socio-cultural and historical position of the social actors.

2. DISPOSITIVE ANALYSIS AS A VARIANT OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

2.1 The concepts of discourse and the dispositive

The intention of the study – to create a methodological framework suitable for use in museum exhibition analysis – is based on the constructivist paradigm, which is closely linked not only to the issue of social action, but also to the issue of discourse. The concept of discourse is problematic, with different scholars and scholarly perspectives using it in different ways; even Foucault,³⁴ who made the term famous, referred to discourse as a fluid concept with multiple meanings. Building on Foucault, this study sees discourse as a set of utterances carrying a certain type of knowledge.³⁵ Foucault understands discourse as a group of utterances belonging to a system of the same discursive formation, which consists of a limited number of utterances for which a set of conditions for their existence can be defined.³⁶ A discursive

³⁴ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Archeologie vědění*. Praha: Herrmann & synové, 2002.

³⁵ According to Velký sociologický slovník (PETRUSEK, Miloslav (ed.). *Velký sociologický slovník. I. svazek A – O*. Praha: Karolinum, 1996, p. 213), discourse today is understood as an ordered set of sentences about a given subject, a particular form of knowledge.

³⁶ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění..., p. 180.

formation is a set of utterances giving meaning within a single discourse.³⁷ It might seem that these are utterances organised around a common theme, but the relations between utterances cannot be reduced to mere thematic relations. Discursive formations organise heterogeneous utterances scattered in space, whereby the object of interest, and thus its topic, is still being created by discourse³⁸ and further reproduced in the sense that it influences the thinking of social actors through its specific conception.

Foucault³⁹ does not understand an utterance as a mere structure of assertion, nor can an utterance be generalised to a speech act or a mere sentence. In addition to the content of the utterance and its “material” existence (e.g., its pronouncement or writing), the important level of the utterance is also the manner of utterance and the circumstances in which the utterance exists and acquires its meaning (the field of use) and, last but not least, the kind of action that is triggered by the utterance. Discourses and utterances, like knowledge, are determined by a specific socio-historical context, i.e., by existing social structures that take on a specific form due to the influence of a given time, culture, prevailing ideology, social norms, and so on. The analyst should also pay attention to these influences, since the view of history and the identities associated with it is never neutral, but always constructed from a certain contemporary position. From the position of the constructivist paradigm, it is necessary to know the context of the utterance, which helps to discern its meaning. It is evident that at this point the study departs from Foucault’s “thinking from the outside”, within which it is desirable to try to free oneself from all meaning essentialism that seeks to clarify the “true essence” of events, objects, processes or meanings.⁴⁰ The context of the emergence, existence and functioning of an utterance and its meaning, as well as the position of the social actors, is taken into account in the study’s analytical intention.

Discourses can be understood within the framework of the study as certain worldviews that are closely tied to individual epistemes, i.e., epochs characterised by a specific knowledge for a given historical period.⁴¹ This is a broader conception of discourse than the one usually put forward by Foucault. A more comprehensive understanding of the concept of discourse is also provided by Laclau,⁴² according to whom the term refers not only to phenomena concerning texts, but also to a set of phenomena concerning the social production of meaning on which society is based. According to Jäger,⁴³ people are born and subsequently live in certain discursive contexts that determine what knowledge (i.e., knowledge corresponding to a given discourse and epoch) they acquire. Discourses can be imagined as bodies of knowledge – or, in Foucault’s words,⁴⁴ as discursive units – theories, themes or concepts that to some extent influence how social reality is perceived by social actors, as they largely determine what they know or do not know about a given reality and in what form they know or do not know about a given reality.

³⁷ KLAPKO, Dušan. Diskursivní analýza a její využití ve výzkumu edukačních jevů. In: *Pedagogická orientace*, 26(3), 2016, p. 385.

³⁸ HÁJEK, Martin. Čtenář a stroji: *Vybrané metody sociálněvědní analýzy textů*. Praha: Slon, 2014.

³⁹ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění..., p. 125.

⁴⁰ HÁJEK, Martin. Čtenář a stroji..., p. 118

⁴¹ For more on the notion of the episteme, see PETRUSEK, Velký sociologický..., p. 265.

⁴² JÄGER, Siegfried. Discourse and knowledge: Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and diapositive analysis. In: WODAK, Ruth – MEYER, Michael (eds.). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 32–62). London: SAGE Publications, 2001, p. 42.

⁴³ JÄGER, Discourse and knowledge....

⁴⁴ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění, p. 102.

This is because discourses give rise to a certain organization of concepts, to certain rearrangements of objects, to certain types of testimony, which, according to their degree of coherence, precision and stability, form themes or theories.⁴⁵ We can therefore speak about the discourses of medicine, economics, the humanities and other spheres of human life connected with the category of knowledge, which could be the spheres of politics, mass media, identity or gender, among others. This fact then suggests that discourses can be the specific property – capital – of certain groups well placed in power with respect to a given context of knowledge, to whom the fact of owning a given discourse not only gives the right to possess and understand a certain type of knowledge, but also attributes to them the right to speak (or to conceal) the content of that knowledge and, through this speaking, to act, or to influence the actions of other subjects. Thus, for example, a doctor is the holder of knowledge capital concerning the treatment of people, which gives them the right to tell patients (actors without such capital) how to behave if they want to maintain their health. Similarly, a museum educator or curator is a professional in possession of knowledge capital related to a given exhibit, whose form and the associated narrative, information and knowledge they, as a recognised authority, can convey to visitors.

In other words, discourse is, in Foucault's perspective,

the sum total of all meaningful statements in a given historical period and society and the rules of their production. ... discourse delimits a field of objects, defines a legitimate perspective from the point of view of the cognitive actor, and establishes norms for the production of concepts and theories. Discourse thus structures reality by defining, first, what objects are knowable, of proper interest, or even actually existent; second, who has the right to make true claims about reality and who is excluded from such production; and third, what are the legitimate ways of using and developing the categories by which the world is grasped at any given time.⁴⁶

Discourses are thus an inherent part of everyday reality, whose form they not only describe but also construct. Discourses not only tell us about the shape of social reality and the categorization of groups, both their own and others', but they themselves participate in the construction of social reality and this categorisation through the transmission of knowledge to the social actors on whom they exert power. Through the mediation of certain bodies of knowledge, discourses participate in the ways of thinking and acting of people, who then themselves influence and shape the form of social reality – i.e., not only interpret it.

To summarise, discourse is endowed with knowledge associated with power (the power to disseminate knowledge, to categorise objects of knowledge, to normalise, etc.). Discourse is the site in which power and knowledge intersect.⁴⁷ Discourse can not only be an instrument of power, its producer, its mover, its catalyst; it can also be its barrier, its limitation, and, last but not least, its effect. Discourse carries with it a range of intentions and effects: Discourse thus means elements or tactical blocks in the field of power relations; within one and the same strategy there may be differences, even contradictions; conversely, they may circulate between opposing strategies without change of form.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění, p. 99.

⁴⁶ ZÁBRODSKÁ, Kateřina. *Variace na gender: Poststrukturalismus, genderová analýza a genderová identita*. Praha: Academia, 2009, p. 34.

⁴⁷ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Vůle k věděni. Dějiny sexuality I*. Praha: Hermann & synové, 1999, p. 118.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

In the field of discourse analysis, discourse is most often understood as a communicative utterance usually associated with a text or speech act. Discourse is a speech field within which the meanings of events and objects of social reality are conceptually formed or constructed.⁴⁹ According to Foucault,⁵⁰ discourses can be defined not only as written texts, but generally as any organization of utterances that take on different relations to each other. They can be articulated utterances that are connected not only to the present moment, but also to memory and past situations that have triggered the discursive events in question, as well as to the future, which they can influence and in which they can reappear and transform. Utterances acquire their meaning in relation to the context and conditions in which they occur and in which they take on certain forms and relations with other statements (discourse field). According to Foucault,⁵¹ then, each utterance is singular – unique with respect to its context of being and acquiring meanings.

In the context of Foucault's notion of utterances, it is important to mention discursive practices, which we refer to as routinised speech acts that produce utterances through language or other sign systems.⁵² But it is not only discursive practices that participate in the formation of social reality. Non-discursive practices, which Foucault began to pay attention to later than linguistic utterances, are also important, but are therefore no less important components of discourse. By non-discursive practices, Foucault⁵³ refers to extra-linguistic (symbolic) practices (e.g. human gesture, institutional knowledge, tacit knowledge, etc.) and materializations (architecture, the body, technology, material products and products resulting from non-discursive practices). Discursive and non-discursive practices together form the so-called dispositive.

The dispositive is defined by Foucault⁵⁴ as a heterogeneous set consisting of various discursive and non-discursive elements, namely, discourses, institutions (i.e., learned behaviour that is not an utterance), architectural forms, laws, administrative measures, scientific pronouncements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic statements and other elements that take on different relations with each other. The network and varied form of relations between these elements and their functions is also part of the dispositive. At the same time, as a set of practices, the dispositive responds to the needs and events of a given time (epoch), and from this perspective the dispositive can be seen as a strategic imperative⁵⁵ that has strategic goals, but also carries with it what Giddens would call the unintended consequences of action. As an example of this, Foucault cites the dispositive of surveillance and discipline associated with the architecture of the panopticon, which was first associated with the realm of crime and the prison environment (the goal of eliminating crime and facilitating its surveillance and correction through the

⁴⁹ KLAPKO, Diskursivní analýza..., p. 388.

⁵⁰ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění. Cf. LE, Thao – LE, Quynh – SHORT, Megan (eds.). *Critical Discourse Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2009, p. 6.

⁵¹ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění...

⁵² RECKWITZ, Andreas. Theorizing toward a theory of social practices: A Development in culturalist. In: *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(2), 2002, pp. 243–263.

⁵³ FOUCAULT, Archeologie vědění. Cf. KLAPKO, Diskursivní analýza...

⁵⁴ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 194–196.

⁵⁵ Foucault (FOUCAULT, *Power/knowledge...*, p. 197) even speaks of the dispositive being essentially a general case of an episteme. The difference, however, is that an episteme is understood more as a specific discursive apparatus, whereas the elements of the dispositive are much more heterogeneous and take on both a discursive and a non-discursive nature.

control and self-control of the human body), but eventually the dispositive of surveillance and its panoptical character permeated the entire society of the late eighteenth century, which Foucault calls the disciplinary society.⁵⁶

The dispositive, like discourse, is tied to knowledge – the apparatus of the dispositive is based on strategies of relations of forces that both support a certain type of learning (knowledge) and are themselves supported by that learning.⁵⁷ In this way, dispositives are also linked to power, which Foucault understands as a network of more or less organised, hierarchised, coordinated and constantly conflicting relations of forces. The dispositive is linked to the power to constitute society and the individual. The individual, according to Foucault,⁵⁸ is both the effect of power and its agent precisely insofar as he is its effect: power permeates the individual it has constituted. But the individual is not only the sufferer of power, but also its transmitter and executor. Power⁵⁹ is not a property, but a functioning force that comes from everywhere and is therefore omnipresent.

2.2 Discourse and dispositive analysis

Discourse analysis is a concept that encompasses a number of qualitatively oriented analytical approaches (discursive psychology, critical discursive psychology, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, Foucaultian discourse analysis, dispositive analysis, etc.) which are shaped around the notion of discourse, but which can be defined in various ways based on their different approaches; various authors also work with this notion in the context of analysis. In general, discourse analysis can be defined as a group of approaches that focus on the search for regularities that emerge in the formation of the meaning of psychological and social reality in written and spoken language.⁶⁰

Various approaches to discourse analyses have been introduced by Klapko,⁶¹ according to whom we cannot speak of a single clearly defined methodological approach within discourse analysis. Rather, discourse analysis opens up space for the researcher's own sensitivity and intuition, applying research methods flexibly with regard to research needs. Although discourse analysis can never be considered as definitively finished, as it can always potentially be deepened further, the analyst should make use of all available materials and include rich research data in the analysis. In addition to spoken and written speech and text, this could be visual data, since discourse analysis can deal not only with everything spoken but also with everything produced by the actor.⁶² The actor himself or herself is often also a very important source of data for the analysis. Indeed, discourse analysis is not a tool that examines the assumptions of the researcher, but deals with specific units of analysis, which should also include the interpretations and meanings assigned to the phenomena under study by the social actors (respondents)

⁵⁶ Or also a surveillance society, i.e., a society imbued with disciplinary power, the form of which has been outlined above.

⁵⁷ FOUCAULT, *Power/knowledge...*

⁵⁸ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Je třeba bránit společnost. Kurs na Collège de France 1975–1976*. Praha: Filosofia, 2005, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Power, according to Foucault, is not an institution, it is not a structure, it is not even a force that some are equipped with; it is a name that we attribute to a complex strategic situation in a given society (FOUCAULT, *Vůle k vědění...*, p. 119).

⁶⁰ Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, cited in ZÁBRODSKÁ, Kateřina, PETRJÁNOŠOVÁ, Magda. *Metody diskurzivní analýzy*. In: ŘIHÁČEK, Tomáš et al. (eds.), *Kvalitativní analýzy textů: čtyři přístupy* (pp. 105–138). Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2013, p. 105.

⁶¹ KLAPKO, *Diskurzivní analýza...*

⁶² Cf. KLAPKO, *Diskurzivní analýza...*; ZÁBRODSKÁ, PETRJÁNOŠOVÁ, *Metody diskurzivní...*

themselves. Social reality is in fact also co-constructed by these actors, and therefore discourse analysis often aims to understand the construction of their everyday social world.

Dispositive analysis is one of the methods that falls within discourse analysis. It builds on Foucault's thinking and deals with the analysis of the dispositive. Its advantage is that it not only deals with linguistic utterances and texts, but also non-linguistic and material elements; more precisely, it brings non-discursive practices, and thus materialization, to the centre of analytical attention. As such, dispositive analysis can be described as discourse analysis supplemented by the analysis of the dispositive. According to Jäger,⁶³ one of the leading representatives of dispositive analysis, its aim is to identify the knowledge of a given discourse or/and dispositive that is valid in a particular place at a particular time, in an attempt to examine the context of that knowledge and its associated power and to subject it to critique. Dispositive analysis relates to everyday knowledge mediated through the media, everyday communication, school, family, etc., as well as knowledge produced by the sciences. Among these institutions, we can certainly include museums that present scientific and cultural knowledge to the public.

2.3 The method of dispositive analysis according to S. Jäger

2.3.1 The concepts of discourse and the dispositive

Jäger⁶⁴ conceives of discourse as the body of all social knowledge that determines individual and collective actions and formative actions that shape society, and thus discourse exercises power. According to him, discourses are not merely manifestations of social practice but also producers of power and social reality, which they shape through their effects on social actors and their actions. Discourses have evolved and become independent of the will of individuals or power groups as a result of historical processes. It is not, therefore, that discourses and the power they contain are something to be owned, capital that one can dispose of at will. Discourses are linked to power through their association with action, and power can be reinforced by their institutionalised and regulated nature. According to Jäger,⁶⁵ discourses form non-static networks with other discourses, with which they connect through collective symbolism, or through cultural stereotypes transmitted in society. These stereotypes and symbols are known by social actors and with their help they construct an image of social reality. The analysis of collective symbolism is also an important part of discourse analysis.

Following on Foucault, Jäger understands the dispositive as a set of interlocking discursive and non-discursive practices and materializations (or manifestations) of knowledge.⁶⁶ By discursive practices, he means forms of speaking and thinking that are based on knowledge, and by non-discursive practices he means any action based on knowledge. Materializations are the products of human labour and human thought. Materializations have a discursive context – or better, a basis, a meaning that humans have assigned to them and with which they were created. The point, then, is that when the discourse itself changes, the meaning of the object changes. According to Foucault, discourses are practices that systematically produce the objects they speak about.

Jäger⁶⁷ goes further in his understanding and explanation of the dispositive, however, by faulting Foucault for his lack of understanding of non-discursive practices, human activity and

⁶³ JÄGER, Discourse and...

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

labour, and their effects and continuities on society and discourse. According to him, due to the influence of the bourgeois era in which he lived, Foucault understood discursive practices as verbal entities, strictly separated from non-discursive practices. Jäger posits that discursive practices are tied to intellectual activity – as opposed to non-discursive practices which are based only on physical labour. But he also attributes intellectual activity and knowledge work to physical work, even though knowledge work can often be routinised. Thus, materializations are not merely the physical product of human labour, but also of human thought. And consequently, in objects, as in social reality, people seek meaning – meaning whose form is discursively conditioned. The assignment of meaning is conditioned by discourse and, in particular, by the largely socially shared collective symbolism, the form of which is also discursively conditioned.

If we understand the dispositive in the way described above, it can be said that dispositive analysis presents non-discursive and materialized knowledge in discursive knowledge.⁶⁸ The analyst gives meaning to the elements of the dispositive and makes the evolving context of knowledge (knowing), action and manifestation the object of his investigation. In doing so, power is associated with both knowledge and objects. It may not be visible, but the analyst can make it visible.

2.3.2 The procedure of dispositive analysis

According to Jäger,⁶⁹ dispositive analysis should include the following steps:

i) Reconstructing the knowledge contained in discursive practices

The first step is discourse analysis, i.e., the reconstruction of knowledge (knowing).⁷⁰ Discourse analysis is important because it focuses attention on the aspects of the dispositive to be investigated. These aspects, according to Jäger, can be the forms in which knowledge appears (the analyst is interested in how knowledge is presented, whether it appears openly or is masked); they can also be materializations belonging to the discourse, as well as missing places in the discourse, etc.

Researchers engaged in the examination of museum exhibitions in the context of dispositive analysis should already be knowledgeable in discourse analysis. Although it is true that the focus of discourse analysis should be primarily based on and oriented by the object of research interest, researchers may also choose procedures within this part of the analysis with regard to their experience and analytical practice. The procedure of discourse analysis may therefore vary from researcher to researcher. The following lines, describing Jäger's conception of the analysis of discursive practices, are therefore more a kind of recommendation or inspiration than a definitive guide.

Jäger himself illustrates his approach with the example of an analysis of printed mass media. In this case, knowledge is mediated by linguistic practice. Therefore, in his text Jäger deals primarily with the linguistic analytical toolkits that an analyst can use. To be able to analyse discourse at all, he argues, it is first necessary to unravel the intricate structure of discourse. To this end, the analyst determines whether their analysis is of a *special discourse* (meaning scientific discourse) or an *inter-discourse*, i.e., an interdisciplinary discourse of which all non-scientific discourses are part. Elements of scientific discourse are constantly flowing into

⁶⁸ KLAPKO, Diskursivní analýza..., p. 400.

⁶⁹ JÄGER, Discourse and...

⁷⁰ *Knowledge* is the original term; ELLIOT, Robert. et al. Towards a material history methodology. In: PEARCE, Susan M. (ed.). *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (pp. 109–124). London: Routledge, 1994.

inter-discourses.⁷¹

In order to identify the structure of the discourse, Jäger proposes the identification of several internationalizing devices with which the analyst subsequently works. These include *discourse stands*, which can be understood as thematically uniform discourse processes. Working with these procedures helps the analyst to identify what has been said and/or what is being or may be said. A discourse stand is made up of so-called *discourse fragments* (traditionally referred to as texts, but not necessarily only texts) that are oriented around a certain theme. Discourse stands contain multiple discourse fragments that are intertwined and refer to different topics. A discourse stand usually includes *discursive events*⁷² that can influence its quality and direction and that are related to the whole *discursive context* of the discourse stand. The respective discourse stands operate on different *discourse planes* (science, politics, media, education, everyday life, economy, administration, etc.). Discourse planes can be understood as the social sites from which speaking takes place. The discourse planes do not exist in isolation, but rather are interconnected; they influence each other and refer to each other.

A useful tool can be the determination of the *discourse position*, by which Jäger means the determination of the ideological position from which those who participate in the discourse (social actor, group or institution) start. This position determines the form of the actor's experienced life situation, as well as their evaluation and perception of life, and this perception is influenced by the discursive position of the actor in question. The analyst is further interested in the *overall societal discourse in its entanglement and complexity*. In a given society, discourse strands form the overall societal discourse in a state of complex entanglement. Jäger points out that a society is never completely homogeneous in terms of societal discourse, and so the analyst must in certain cases work with social subgroups. At the same time, societal discourse is influenced by the shape of the global worldwide discourse, which, according to Jäger, is to a certain extent homogenised in the "Western" world today, and re-polarization can be observed on a global scale ("West" versus "East", etc.). Finally, the analyst is interested in the *history, present and future of discourse stands*. To uncover these, it is necessary to analyse longer timeframes of discursive processes in an attempt to reveal their strength, intertwining, changes, and future forecasts. This would be to do what Foucault did first within his archaeological and then genealogical method. In the practice of the ordinary researcher, according to Jäger, these can only be partial projects telling us about certain discursive areas.

How can an analyst working with these concepts proceed in their discourse analysis? Jäger⁷³ proposes the following procedure: first, the analyst explains why they are working on a particular discourse plane and briefly characterises this plane. In the next step, they set up and process the material base by creating an archive of data. They can then embark on structural analysis, which is based on an evaluation of the processed material. This evaluation takes place with regard to the discourse stand to be analysed. Once this phase is complete, a deeper analysis of one or more discursive fragments that are typical of the sector follows. When working with discursive fragments, these fragments will also be matched to superordinate themes. The process is completed with an overall analysis of the sector under study on the discourse plane (i.e., the sector in question). This means that all relevant results that have been obtained so far in the analysis are incorporated into the overall description of the discourse stand under

⁷¹ JÄGER, Discourse and...

⁷² According to Jäger all events have discursive roots.

⁷³ JÄGER, Discourse and..., p. 53.

investigation.

ii) Reconstructing the knowledge that underpins non-discursive practices

This step involves the analysis of the actions of social actors, or more precisely, the attempt to reconstruct the knowledge that conditions and accompanies these actions (social actions). It is an attempt to understand what leads people to the form of their behaviour. However, the analyst cannot always deduce these things from mere observation and therefore it is often necessary to proceed to the questioning of the social actors themselves.

iii) Reconstructing the non-discursive practices that led to the emergence of materializations and reconstructing the knowledge contained in materializations

The third step is the analysis of materializations, i.e., objects. The analysis of objects is not simple. Objects cannot testify about themselves in the same way that social actors do. Therefore, in trying to reconstruct the knowledge and actions that led to the creation of objects, the analyst first relies on their own knowledge concerning these objects. However, this alone is not enough: the analyst must expand his knowledge (reading books, interviewing experts and users of the objects, etc.). Only then, according to Jäger, will the analyst be able to discern the knowledge associated with the object.

The analyst, as tends to be the case in discourse analyses, never finds and establishes the essential truth within this analysis. They do not obtain this truth from their respondents or from other sources. It is not possible to obtain neutral knowledge, because knowledge is always reinterpreted in some way; statements are always influenced by interpretations. Moreover, as Jäger himself adds, the knowledge that gave rise to a given object and became embedded in it is itself subject to change over time. An object may have been assigned a different meaning in the course of history than the meaning it now takes on.

2.3.3 Analysis of materializations

The question remains of how to analyse materializations in the context of a museum and a museum exhibition. Objects in the context of the museum sphere are mainly dealt with by restoration studies or archaeology. It is the latter that has abundantly inspired analysts. The method of analysis of objects is dealt with, for example, by Elliot,⁷⁴ whose model of analysis could be an inspiration for us, although it is not possible to adopt it completely, since the author used the analysis for different goals and in the context of different interests than ours. His is more of an archaeological or curatorial approach that seeks to reveal the form, function and condition of the object in itself, rather than as the object as an item placed in an exhibition. The purpose of this approach is to encourage the analyst to examine the artefact in more detail at the level of observable data, rather than relying on documentary sources. The analysis procedure is as follows:

1. Direct investigation of an object through observable data, i.e., data that can be determined by sensory examination of the object, which is carried out by the researcher before proceeding to other sources of information.
2. Working with comparative data, that is, information obtained by comparing an artefact with similar (or identical) objects.

⁷⁴ ELLIOT, Robert. et al. Towards a material history methodology...

3. Working with complementary data, that is, sources of information about other characteristics of the artefact (documents, internet, etc.).
4. Drawing conclusions based on all observable, comparative and complementary data.

Each of the steps listed in the analytical method is divided into five categories: areas of inquiry, which are material; construction; function; origin (history); and value. For these categories of artefacts, general questions have been developed that apply to a wide range of very different objects. Because the researcher is primarily interested in what the artefact can say about the culture that created it, the questions lead the researcher to look for evidence of cultural expression hidden in the object. In the material section, the researcher may ask about what materials (natural, organic, man-made) were used to make the artefact and how they affect its appearance. The construction category is about describing the physical appearance of the artefact and the impression it leaves on the observer. The analyst might ask how the artefact was made, whether it is decorated in any way, and whether it is worn. Within the category of function, attention turns to the reasons for the artefact's production. The analyst asks why the artefact was made, what function it served, what its function is today, and whether it has changed in any way. The origin category focuses on the place and time of the artefact's creation, its makers and owners, as well as the evolution that it has undergone up to the present. The value category is concerned with the value of the artefact to the original maker or owner as well as the (cultural) value of the artefact to contemporary society.

An interesting approach to the analysis of artefacts is also provided by Prown,⁷⁵ who suggests that objects encode information (mainly of a cultural nature) that can be interpreted. When interpreting, one should not only draw on the influences of art history and archaeology, but also draw on the methods of cultural and social history, anthropology, sociology, cultural geography and linguistics. The advantage of the method is that it admits the subjective nature of analysis and brings the interpreter's understanding and response into the interpretive framework.

According to Prown, the procedure of object analysis should include the following steps:⁷⁶

i) Description – description of an object based on its observation.

First the object is described in general and then its details are observed. The description begins with a material analysis – of the object's physical dimensions, materials and articulation. The next step is content analysis. This is simple iconography – reading the apparent representations. The content may include decorative patterns or motifs, inscriptions, coats of arms or diagrams. The first stage is completed with a formal analysis which pays attention to the visual form of the artefact – its colour, texture, and so on.

ii) Deduction – interpretation of the interaction/relationship between an object and its observer

In this stage, an empathetic connection between the material (real) or represented world of the object and the world of the observer is explored. The analyst reflects on what it would be like to use the object, to treat it. The first step in the deduction stage is the sensory experience of the object (such as its weight or texture). The analyst then proceeds to work intellectually with the object and tries to deduce its role in society. The goal is to discover what the object

⁷⁵ PROWN, Jules. Mind in matter: an introduction to material culture theory and method. In PEARCE, Susan M. (ed.). *Interpreting Objects and Collections* (pp. 133–138). London: Routledge, 1994.

⁷⁶ PROWN, Mind in matter...

says about its culture. It is clear that at this stage the analyst is drawing on their history and experience, so the results of the inference process may vary from analyst to analyst, and may also vary for the same analyst over the years. Finally, the analyst looks at what emotional reactions the object evokes in the viewer (joy, fear, awe, disgust, curiosity, etc.).

iii) Speculation – a process of creative imagination in which hypotheses and questions are formulated as a basis from which to seek external evidence

The first step here is to review the information developed in the descriptive and deductive phases and formulate hypotheses. This step therefore involves summarizing previous findings and developing theories. This is a creative process that is partly influenced by the cultural attitude of the analyst. The analyst should be aware while doing this that changing cultural perspectives make it impossible to react to and interpret the object in the same way that society reacted to it at the time of its creation. We are entitled to use the knowledge provided by our cultural and historical perspective, but we cannot attribute this perspective to previous generations.

3. DISPOSITIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MUSEUM EXHIBITION

Now that we know what a dispositive analysis is, all that remains is to define a research procedure that the museum analyst can follow in their research. I myself use the discussed methodological procedure in research on museum exhibitions in which I deal with the topic of the construction and presentation of Czech national identity. Dispositive analysis is ideal for this purpose, as it enables the analysis of exhibits (materialisations), the museum narrative, the societal discourse plane of the topic and the analysis of the statements of social actors, by which we can mean both the curators of the exhibition and its visitors. However, the possibility of incorporating a detailed analysis of objects (materialisation) into the research is crucial. It is through objects that abstract concepts, which may include the category of nation, can be thought, expressed symbolically and materially, and shared. According to Hooper-Greenhill,⁷⁷ objects can be involved in the process of identity construction at both the personal and national levels. Objects can be associated with the personal experience and memory of an individual as well as the collective memory of a group (nation). Objects are inscribed signs of cultural memory that help to symbolise, represent, materialise and concretise this memory. They can thus contribute to the co-creation of cultural identity and a sense of cultural belonging. However, objects do not only represent the history of a group, but also perpetuate its values, ideas and experiences. The objects represented by the exhibits in the exhibition are loaded with multiple meanings, which are often constructed or reinforced by the way they are placed in a context. Dispositive analysis allows for sufficient analytical space to be devoted to this context and to the way the exhibits are displayed.

Dispositive analysis can also be applied to numerous other topics in which researchers are interested in exhibits together with the entire context and narrative of the exhibition and the museum as a whole. Being interested in exhibitions and exhibits does not mean excluding social actors from research. On the contrary, they, on behalf of museum curators, museum educators and guides, visitors, and others, are involved in the research and become an important part and source of information. The following sections summarise the steps of dispositive analysis in a museum setting.

⁷⁷ HOOPER–GREENHILL, Eilean. *Museums and the interpretation of visual culture*. London: Routledge, 2008.

3.1 The research procedure of dispositive analysis

The research procedure is defined with respect to the steps of Jäger's dispositive analysis described above.

i) Defining the research topic and characterizing the discourse plane under investigation

At the beginning of the thesis, the researcher should clearly and sufficiently define their research topic. It is assumed that the researcher is familiar with the topic, is knowledgeable about it, and is thus competent to work with the topic in a professional manner.

ii) Determining the research objective

At the beginning of the research, it is important for the researcher to identify and define the research objective(s). This will form the basis for the next step.

iii) Defining the research questions

The researcher defines the main and secondary research questions.

iv) Anchoring the research within a scientific paradigm and choosing an appropriate methodology

At this stage, the researcher has already defined what they are interested in researching and the objectives of the research activity. With this in mind, an appropriate methodology that is anchored within a scientific paradigm is chosen. Knowing and defining this paradigm is important for the researcher, not only because it gives them a basic insight into the subject, but also determines their position in the research and goes hand in hand with the research objectives and the chosen methodology. In our case, the analysis is based on the paradigm of social constructivism, which is intertwined with discourse theories. The chosen methodology is dispositive analysis, which builds on these paradigms.

v) Determining the research sample

An important step in the research is the selection of a suitable research sample. It is typical for dispositive analysis in a museum that there are likely to be several research samples, as the researcher is likely to be working with different types of data that complement each other and whose comprehensive knowledge is central to dispositive analysis. The research sample may consist of a permanent exhibition and the exhibits therein, as well as other data sources (accompanying texts, visual data, models, interactive elements, etc.), and the research focus may be on the museum narrative. Other research samples may consist of curators or other museum staff interviewed by the researchers. Last but not least, museum visitors are also important respondents; researchers may conduct interviews or focus groups with visitors, work with them in video studies, etc. The diversity of research samples suggests that data collection techniques may also be varied in dispositive analysis, and the analyst will use many different types in their research work.

vi) Researcher's self-reflection

As with all types of qualitative research, it is appropriate for the researcher to develop a position of self-reflection. This will introduce the eventual reader of the report to the researcher's position and role in the research and help define any risks or problematic points in the research.

vii) Analysis and description of the societal discourse related to the research topic (i.e., analysis of the discourse plane)

The researcher should pay attention to the discursive plane of the topic as part of the dispositive analysis process. Most often, this will involve seeking knowledge on and describing the societal discourse associated with the phenomenon under analysis. It is assumed that this phenomenon is explored within the dispositive analysis of the museum as a theme of the exhibition and its narrative, of which it is a part.

viii) Creating a data archive

Creating a good data archive is essential for dispositive analysis. Data sources can vary depending on the research objective of the dispositive analysis. Nevertheless, there are items in the data archive that will almost always occur when analysing a museum exhibition. The data archive usually includes:

a) Description of the museum – This includes topics related to the history of the museum, its size (number of employees, size of the building, spaces usable for exhibitions and displays – their quantity and description), its building (architecture, accessibility, barrier-free access), its location within the site (accessibility of the museum, the surrounding environment, the local community), its role in society (its goals and vision), events organised by the museum, characteristics of visitors, etc.

b) Description of the exhibition – This not only introduces the theme of the exhibition, but also its architecture. The entrance to the exhibition itself can be an interesting element; attention may be paid to the way the exhibition is structured, the way the visitor route is organised, the visual aspects of the exhibition, and the way the exhibits are displayed (location and method of display, visibility, lighting, position of exhibits in relation to eye-level, etc.). It is also important to answer the question whether the exhibition is more formalistic or contextual. Data collection may also involve recording the exhibition – photographing it, videoing how people pass through it, and so on.

c) List of exhibits related to the research topic and photographs of them, including a record of their descriptions and accompanying texts present in the exhibition – A list and in-depth description of exhibits is an important part of this, along with a list and description of any accompanying texts, technologies used (video and other visualizations, audio, interactive technologies, etc.). In addition to the information presented in the exhibition itself, the curators of the museum's collections can also provide additional information about the exhibits.

d) Interviews with curators and other museum staff – This kind of data enables the researcher to reconstruct the knowledge that underpins non-discursive practices, such as the goals of the exhibition's curators, their motivations for selecting particular exhibits, etc. Interviews can also provide important information regarding the exhibits themselves (the materialisations *analysed*).

e) Interviews and focus groups with museum visitors – This stage is not simply about finding out whether visitors liked the exhibition or how satisfied they are with the museum: it can reveal how museum visitors themselves interpret the exhibition, its narrative and the presented exhibits.

ix) Data analysis

a) Analysis of materializations – This stage involves analysing museum exhibits and the related museum narrative related to the research topic. Materialization analysis includes the description of selected exhibits and their interpretation. When describing an exhibit, social

science researchers are often not so much interested in the material from which it is made as the meaning it carries, which is legible to visitors to varying degrees. It is about uncovering the meaning that the exhibit takes on in relation to the narrative of the exhibition, in relation to its location within the exhibition (description and interpretation of contextual information such as “visual” aspects – how the exhibit is lit, its position in relation to the eye horizon, etc.) and in relation to the surrounding exhibits. Along with this, it is also about revealing the meaning that the exhibit presents in relation to the social discourse. Last but not least, it is also about the meaning it presents to visitors, or the meaning that visitors interpret through the exhibits. Interpretation is not only based on the knowledge and analytical intuition of the researcher (who at this stage must pay attention to explaining their research position, which influences the data analysis, i.e., the processing of the researcher’s self-reflection); the researcher must also compare and substantiate their findings with expert knowledge and findings from the literature and other relevant sources. The analysis and interpretation is also supplemented by what the researcher has learned about the exhibits from the museum’s curators or other museum staff.

b) Analysis of the behaviour of social actors – This data can be obtained in a variety of ways chosen with respect to the research objective – for example, interviews with museum staff and/or visitors. The two steps of data analysis are complementary. For example, the first phase of the research, where the exhibition is examined through a dispositive analysis of the materialisations and the museum narrative, can be followed by a research phase based on interviews with the curators of the exhibition. The results of the materialisation analysis can be used to develop questions for this phase of the research. Conversely, the results from the analysis of the interviews would then be incorporated into the analysis of materializations phase so that a comprehensive interpretation of the research data can emerge. The same is then true of a potential third phase of research, which could be based on interviews with visitors, the results of which would be incorporated into the overall analysis. However, interviews are not the only way of collecting data relating to social actors. Video recordings of educational programs or museum tours can also be used. These may be of use if the researcher is interested in how visitors move through the exhibition (e.g., along a defined route or otherwise), how much time they spend at individual exhibits, whether they use interactive elements of the exhibition, whether they read accompanying texts on panels, etc. Visitor feedback, in the form of satisfaction questionnaires, entries in visitor books, feedback cards and so on can also be a source of data.

x) Summary of research findings and their interpretation (for each phase of the research and for the research as a whole)

xi) Writing a research report

4. FINAL SUMMARY

Related to the analysis of exhibitions is the issue of how their meaning and narratives are created in the first place. Taking into account theories of the social construction of reality as well as other scholarly theories and sources, the study concludes that the meaning of an exhibition emerges as a dialectical process shaped between the exhibition, which represents the dominant social discourse as well as the goals of the curators (and thus creates a kind of structural level of the phenomenon under study), and the visitors who actively participate in the process of generating the meaning of the exhibition. They bring to its interpretation their existing

knowledge and experience, interpretive frameworks and attitudes, as well as the experience currently lived in the museum. Thus, the study understands the museum exhibition as a social phenomenon which, as a representative of a certain section of social reality, corresponds to Giddens' theory of structuration or Berger and Luckmann's theory describing the construction of social reality as a dialectical process in which existing social structures (by which the authors mean the objectified social world) and the social actors themselves (their thinking, behaviour and actions) participate in mutual conditioning.

In practice, this means that when analysing museum exhibitions and their meanings, it is necessary to pay attention to both the analysis of social structures and the analysis of social actors. Social structure is represented by the discourse plane related to the topic of the museum exhibition, while the structural level is to some extent represented by the museum exhibition itself, which acts as an external objectified structure in relation to the visitors. However, it is not only the dominant social discourses in society that participate in its formation, but also the curators and other museum employees, who represent an equally important level of social actors in the study. A second group of social actors is that of museum visitors, each of whom interprets the exhibition in some way.

It is thus evident that museum reality represents a broad social phenomenon, the careful and complex analysis of which requires a specific methodological approach. I consider dispositive analysis to be a suitable methodological tool for examining museum exhibitions, and it is one I use in my own analytical practice. However, before I was able to carry out my first dispositive analysis of an exhibition, it was necessary to adapt this methodology to the environment and the research objective, which meant that the entire methodological procedure based had to be rebuilt, described and then applied in practice. For this purpose, it was first necessary to study the variants of dispositive analysis in order to become thoroughly familiar with its theory, which is closely intertwined with the issues of discourse and dispositive as described by Foucault. In addition to Foucault's work, Jäger's dispositive analysis inspired the methodological procedure of the research, which I adapted to the needs of museum research and added elements of methods for analysing material objects.

Dispositive analysis is a rather difficult analytical method that requires not only specific analytical competence in discourse and dispositive analysis, but also a thorough knowledge of the topic under study. An advantage, but also a risk for some researchers, may be the fact that the procedure of dispositive analysis is not fixed: it may vary with respect to the professional interests and experience of the analysts and the objectives of the research. Nevertheless, certain procedural rules exist and the analyst can rely on the clues that this study has attempted to present.

The advantage of dispositive analysis over discourse analysis is that it pays attention to the exhibition and its narrative as a whole, as well as to the individual exhibits and situations that constitute them. All the elements of the exhibition and, by extension, the museum reality, are perceived by dispositive analysis in a broad context that is conditioned by the form of the discursive reality itself. The discursive framework does not fall outside the remit of the analysis; on the contrary, it is its central part.

Although the dispositive analysis method is demanding, its use in museum research can be worthwhile, as it is a complex research process that reveals a great deal – not only about the exhibition under study, its narrative and museum reality in general, but also about the social reality itself. In fact, museums participate in the construction and maintenance of social reality in

a specific way, and through their exhibitions they present visitors both with (traditional) culture, history and past experience, and with the present, since exhibitions and the way they are created and presented usually mirror, or at least somehow reflect or grasp, the current dominant social discourses. Thus, research that pays attention to the relationship and role of museums and their exhibitions within the discursive reality of a given society may yield very interesting findings that are important for researchers, museum staff and museum management, and may also be enriching for society itself, as they speak about it in different ways.

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