

## **A dispositive approach: Unveiling structural and symbolic violence against women**

*Un enfocament dispositiu: presentació de la violència estructural i simbòlica contra les dones*

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Violence against women, as a widespread societal phenomenon, consists of different manifestations of historically unequal power relations and is deeply inscribed in social structures. As the transposition of the complexity and of the social roots and contexts of violence against women constitutes a rather ambiguous undertaking, the discussion in this paper aims to approach the disclosure of how women's anti-violence initiatives shape the social accounts of gender-based violence and underlying ideological concepts enclosed in their material. Which theoretical and methodological approach is capable of unveiling the dimensions of structural and symbolic violence in audiovisual discourse? Based on the concept of apparatus, the Foucauldian *dispositif* (Deleuze, 1989; Foucault, 1980; Jäger and Maier, 2009), I will show the core considerations towards a suitable setting to identify visualised dispositive power arrangements displayed through the (audio)visual material provided by the women's anti-violence movement.

### **KEYWORDS:**

gender-based violence, discourse, anti-violence communication, gender, dispositive.



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### **RESUM:**

La violència contra les dones, com a fenomen social generalitzat, consta de diferents manifestacions de relacions de poder històricament desiguals i està profundament inscrita en les estructures socials. En la mesura que la transposició de la complexitat, les arrels socials i els contextos de violència contra les dones constitueixen una empresa bastant ambigua, l'anàlisi en aquest article pretén abordar la divulgació de com les iniciatives de la dona contra la violència configuren els relats socials de la violència basada en el gènere i els conceptes ideològics subjacents inclosos en el seu material. Quin enfocament teòric i metodològic és capaç de desvetllar les dimensions de la violència estructural i simbòlica en el discurs audiovisual? Basant-me en el concepte d'aparell, el *dispositif* de Foucault (Deleuze, 1989; Foucault, 1980; Jäger i Maier, 2009), mostraré les consideracions centrals cap a un escenari adequat per identificar les disposicions de poder a través del material (àudio)visual proporcionat pel moviment de dones contra la violència.

### **PARAULES CLAU:**

violència de gènere, discurs, comunicació antiviolença, gènere, dispositiva.

## Introduction

Violence against women, i.e. gender-based violence, is a widespread societal phenomenon deeply inscribed in social structures. Assuming discourse as constructing and interpreting our thinking and the social world, it is of central importance how discourse on gender-based violence is constructing and nourishing the knowledge and understanding of this complex social problem. Audiovisual communication through television is the most important source of information about domestic violence, which is the most frequent form of violence in Europe (European Commission, 1999 and 2010).<sup>2</sup> Presumably, the (audio)visual as such constitutes a crucial account of discursively created social meaning on gender-based violence. Hence, it is vital for the issue of gender-based violence, as well, to acknowledge the visual as a key for the “cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies” (Rose, 2001: 6).

A review of literature shows that media programmes and formats are depicting rather similar narratives of clichéd imagination on intimate partner violence, whereas the systemic nature of the problem mostly remains hidden (Wolf, 2013a, 2013b and 2018). In news reportage, women are over-represented as victims of violence (Macharia, 2015) and more likely to be personified, filmed in close-ups or depicted in a sensationalised way (Carter and Weaver, 2003; Geiger, 2008; López Díez, 2005; Marin *et al.*, 2011). Female victims are portrayed as “helpless”, “weak”, or they are even blamed for their own victimisation; male perpetrators are represented as “monsters”, as moved by “pathological obsessions”, or as “men, who couldn’t help themselves” (Almansa and Postigo, 2003; Byerly and Ross, 2006; Geiger and Wolf, 2014; Geiger, 2008; López Díez, 2005; Meyers, 1997; Marin *et al.*, 2011). Violence has become an aesthetic space recurrently appearing in advertising and internationally recognised fashion imagery (Castillo Martín, 2008: 126). Films display male violence against women as a core element of narrative, showing the violent act as abnormal incidents, sensationalising and eroticising victims (Bernárdez *et al.*, 2008; Carter and Weaver, 2003; Frus, 2001; Guarinos, 2003). The narratives not only tell a story but also stand for a repetitively displayed symbolic order, reinstalling engendered power relations and myths on gender-based violence (Frus, 2001; Eiter, 2006). Male heroes use violence to resolve conflict more frequently than females, who are portrayed as significantly more helpless and afraid (Miller *et al.*, 2016).

Mainstream media discourses mostly reconstruct these misconceptions and obscure the social roots and dimensions, which in the Foucauldian sense of apparatus compose a formation of force comprising the real contexts of gender-based violence as unsayable and invisible (Deleuze, 1989; Foucault, 1980).

The arenas of feminist activism and social/NGO movements under NGOisation (Adelman, 2008), together with institutionalised supranational and state entities like women’s ministries or departments, and women’s/gender sections, mutually

and overlappingly made essential and indispensable contributions to the discourse on gender-based violence, e.g. the policies implemented by the last socialist administration in Spain from 2004-2011 have been labelled “feminist” (Gámez Fuentes and Maseda García, 2018: 11). Therefore, the women’s anti-violence movement and the institutionalised correspondents as such constitute crucial players in the field of prevention and awareness-raising issues. Prevailing agencies, their initiatives and campaigns are of major importance and supposedly provide alternative representations appropriate for contrasting the mainstream (“malestream”) gaze of the media on the subject, as mentioned above.

However, there is a significant gap between research regarding the contributions to prevent and end violence against women through information and awareness-raising activities, and the respective (audio)visual discourse. This research deficit exists, even though information, awareness-raising, and the role of the media are one of the key targets in the most important conventions and declarations endeavouring to overcome violence against women – e.g. the Council of Europe (CoE) (2011) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Although research on violence against women has noticeably increased since the 1970s, there is neither a common theory which encompasses all aspects of the complex phenomenon of gender-based violence (DeKeseredy *et al.*, 2005; DeKeseredy, Schwartz, 2011), nor can we rely on specific theoretical approaches concerning violence against women in media or visual studies. The theoretical approaches that do exist are rather fragmented and do not provide a contextualisation of the media or (audio)visual discourse and violence against women as such, but only exist partly in media and film theory or in gender theory in general (Kendrick, 2009; Weise, 2007; Wolf, 2018). The scholarly deficiency in these contexts creates an obstacle for research on the subject itself as there is no solid theoretical foundation in media or visual studies directly interlinked to the issue of violence against women to be found.

My Ph.D. thesis was dedicated to generating new insights into how the anti-violence against women movements contribute to the construction of social meaning on the subject of gender-based violence. The goal was the disclosure of the visual panorama created through the agency of the women’s anti-violence movements and to question if their discursively created contributions are capable of contrasting and breaking with circulating myths and stereotypes. In searching for adequate approaches, the conception of the *dispositif* seemed to be functional to map or draw this “unknown landscape” of imagery on gender-based violence and to follow the elements and lines of discourse without losing the dispositive perspective on the societal phenomenon manifesting in direct, structural, discursive and symbolic violence. As the transposition of the complexity and of the social roots and contexts of violence against women constitutes a rather ambiguous undertaking, the discussion in this paper aims to approach the

disclosure of how women's anti-violence initiatives shape the social accounts of gender-based violence and underlying ideological concepts enclosed in their material. This paper, therefore, will discuss the central considerations on how to approach this issue adequately, i.e. comprising the complexity of the societal phenomenon, the media and visual research in contexts of representing gender-based violence. The central question therefore is the following: which methodological approach is capable of unveiling the dimensions of structural and symbolic violence in audiovisual discourse? How can discourse and its underlying power relations be disclosed to substantially challenge, shift, re-work and/or resignify misconceptions as to circulating myth, re-victimisation and gender stereotypes or other predominant representations?

## Approaching structural and symbolic violence against women

Violence against women, comprehended as a societal phenomenon, consists of different manifestations of historically unequal power relations between men and women as a consequence of several complex and interconnected institutionalised, social and cultural factors which have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them.<sup>3</sup> The physical, sexual, psychological/emotional and economic violence, including the respective dynamics and effects of violence, are assumed as the dimensions of direct/personal forms of violence (Abramsky *et al.*, 2011; Barnett *et al.*, 2011; Barnett and LaViolette, 2000; DeKeseredy and Schwartz, 2011; Edleson, 2010; Jasinski, 2001; Jewkes, 2004; McClennen, 2010; Pence and Paymar, 1993; Walker, 2009). The indirect types of gender-based violence derive from structural violence (Galtung, 1990, 1996; Hunnicutt, 2009) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001; McRobbie, 2009; Tate, 2011) as well as from discursive violence (Sauer, 2011). On the correlation between direct and structural violence and the patriarchal formation of society, we can refer to Johan Galtung (1996: 40) who explains patriarchy as "an institutionalization of male dominance in vertical structures", highly correlating with gender and position, "legitimized by culture (e.g. in religion and language), and often emerging as direct violence with males as subjects and females as objects". The author states:

Patriarchy [...] combines direct, structural, and cultural violence in a vicious triangle. They reinforce each other in cycles starting from any corner. Direct violence, such as rape, intimidates and represses; structural violence institutionalizes; and cultural violence internalizes that relation, especially for the victims, the women, making structure very durable. (Galtung, 1996: 40)

Assuming that intimate partner violence has been acknowledged as a societal problem by international and European conventions, as well as in legislations in the different EU Member States, the phenomenon itself continues to exist to the same, and even to a more visible extent, because of its being deeply rooted in culture and social structure. The increasing extent of visibility clearly refers to personal forms of violence measured by monitoring and observatories, whereas the structural, symbolic and discursive forms of violence, especially those represented and transmitted by media, remain normalised and therefore invisible. Regarding the symbolic sphere, the image or the visual space – including interface and the digital channels with their multitude of free-floating codes – is interwoven with social structure, ideology and power.

The symbolic, according to Bourdieu (2001), encompasses not only the structures of domination as symbolic power but also subjected forms of recognition practised through communication and performative processes, language and social interactions of the subordinated who, once socialised within the shaping of symbolic power, cannot fail to grant the dominant. He calls symbolic violence “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible, even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (Bourdieu, 2001: 1). Hunnicutt, in her critical article on the concept of patriarchy, describes it like this:

Direct threat and coercion are hardly necessary in a world where gender relations are entrenched and remarkably self-perpetuating. [...] Hegemony is consensual because ideological domination works through a symbolic climate that engineers consent and docility. In essence, women can be said to be enslaved by ideas that cast their subordination as normal, ensuring quiescence. (Hunnicutt, 2009: 561)

It is not the direct force but the symbolic shaping by patterns and social codes corresponding to imaginary on gender, ethnicity, social status, etc. that reinforces established systems of domination and subordination. Consequently, the disclosure of the symbolic violence and the respective underlying ideological concepts and social structures is of central importance, even more as it constitutes a still rather under-researched field in domestic violence against women.

For comprehending “the visual” as an arena of symbolic violence against women, it is of fundamental importance to understand the issue as emerging from interlinked, interrelated, entangled fields of power. In a Foucauldian sense, we can say as emerging from intersecting apparatuses, i.e. from entangled arrangements of power within institutional en-gendered practices in visual culture, in the juridical and political system as a matrix for the creation and construction of meaning, which I will further discuss in the next sections.

## Contextualising reflections on the “dispositif”

For a more comprehensive understanding on these intersections, I want to introduce the concept of Foucault’s *dispositif*. We find one of the most detailed explanations with respect to the notion of *dispositif* from Michel Foucault in *The Confession to the Flesh*, where Foucault (1980: 194) stresses in a first instance that the apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between the heterogeneous ensemble of elements consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions. Secondly, he tries to identify in this apparatus “the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements”:

Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality. In short, between these elements, whether discursive or non-discursive, there is a sort of interplay of shifts of position and modifications of function which can also vary very widely. (Foucault, 1980: 194)

Thirdly, the author points out that the apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function (Foucault, 1980: 195). Indeed, these definitions of the apparatus are very useful to encompass social phenomena as interrelated spaces, as fields of power; i.e. as dispositive arrangements encompassing different elements, mapping the whole landscapes of discourse where social phenomena evolve, as we require for the mapping of visual discourse on violence against women. As a conclusion, we can state that the apparatus enables us to identify the elements involved, to discuss the interrelations, modifications and shifts, as well as to unveil the “strategic imperative” acting as “the matrix for an apparatus”.

Gilles Deleuze (1989: 159) uses *social apparatus* or *apparatus* as the closest available form in English, as there is no straightforward translation for Foucault’s term *dispositif*. McLaren (2002: 90) points out that the term *discourse*, in its broad Foucauldian meaning, is not limited to words or text, and uses the term *discourse* itself to translate Foucault’s *dispositif*. She concedes that this might be a slightly misleading translation, hence she insists that discourse, in a non-misleading Foucauldian sense, is to be understood as a variety of concrete, specific, material practices and social institutions. Therefore, I prefer the distinction between the Foucauldian notions of discourse and dispositive, because the latter, apart from discursive practices, also includes non-discursive practices and materialisations (Jäger and Maier, 2009).

Deleuze (1989: 160) explores the apparatus as a tangle, a multilinear ensemble, composed of lines following directions, tracing balances, where “each line is broken and subject to *changes in direction*, bifurcating and forked, and subject to

*drifting* "...; "visible objects, affirmations which can be formulated, forces exercised and subjects in position are like vectors and tensors". Referring to Foucault's "lines of sedimentation" and "lines of breakage", Deleuze draws lines as subject to changes and points out:

Untangling these lines within a social apparatus is, in each case, like drawing a map, doing cartography, surveying unknown landscapes, and this is what he calls "working on the ground". One has to position oneself on these lines themselves, these lines which do not just make up the social apparatus but run through it and pull at it, from North to South, from East to West, or diagonally. (Deleuze, 1989: 159)

Accordingly, a discussion based on the conception of the *dispositif* invites, attracts and seems to be functional to draw this "unknown landscape" imagery on gender-based violence and at the same time to map structural and symbolic violence with its underlying ideological concepts. The societal phenomenon inscribed in social structure emerges in different institutions and laws, and in art, photography, sculpture, and in the media (television, press, film, etc.). Therefore, the interpretation of the *dispositif* by Deleuze works as a tool to follow the elements and lines of discourse, situate them and demonstrate breakages, fractures and shifts:

These apparatuses, then, are composed of the following elements: lines of visibility and enunciation, lines of force, lines of subjectification, lines of splitting, breakage, fracture, all of which criss-cross and mingle together, some lines reproducing or giving rise to others, by means of variations or even changes in the way they are grouped. (Deleuze, 1989: 162)

Foucault's conception of the apparatus, the *dispositif*, as already said before, does not divide heterogeneous discourse, but provides an instrument enabling the demonstration of the inter-linkages and relations:

To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. (Foucault, 1990: 100)

Regarding the problem of the normalising power of the media and visual culture in the context of gender-based violence, the apparatus, the *dispositif*, can be an appropriate instrument for the purpose of grasping the latter problem.



## Discussing Foucault for feminist purposes

Foucault's work on power and institutional analyses is most useful to feminism, which is always based on a political impetus concerning gender as a frame of reference, a way of seeing the world. Foucault's discussions of the relations between power, the body and sexuality have created a broad feminist interest in his theorising, although he was criticised that his "apparatus of sexuality" (Foucault, 1980) does not relate sufficiently to the issue of gender.

In her reader, gender researcher in philosophy Margret A. McLaren critically questions if feminism can benefit from adopting Foucault, his rejection of universalism, and his theory and conception of power. With respect to *The History of Sexuality* she explains that "discourse [*dispositif*] refers to a multitude of institutions and practices, as well as disciplinary knowledge (as the disciplines of science, medicine, psychology, anthropology, biology, etc.)", and includes "attention to social contexts and differentials of institutional power" (McLaren, 2002: 90). As the author (*ibid*) stresses, for Foucault power and knowledge are joined together in discourse, which can be both instrument and effect of power: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1998: 101).

McLaren advocates for the usefulness of Foucault's conception of power and disciplinary practices and his central discussions on the body and power operating on bodies for discussing gender norms. Feminist efforts and struggles, specifically through the 2nd wave women's movement, focus on the body, and women's right over their own bodies, for instance their sexuality and sexual freedom, reproduction and the right of abortion, as well as violence against women.

Although Foucault has been criticised for his gender neutrality, or androcentrism, discussing the body in gender-neutral terms and neglecting practices applied to the female body only, McLaren illustrates how feminists extended Foucault's discussion of disciplinary practices and his analyses of the disciplined body. McLaren (2002: 93) quotes the work of various authors, using the extension of Foucault's analysis of the disciplined body, to discuss and analyse forces of power working on the shape of women's bodies, on their gestures and on the ornamented surface of the body.

Judith Butler (1999: 119) states that while Foucault's genealogical critique on the categories of sex as an acknowledged emancipatory ideal is in some parts contradictory, he offers an "open and complex historical system of discourse and power that produces the misnomer of 'sex' as part of a strategy to conceal and, hence, to perpetuate power-relations" (Butler, 1999: 121). Thus, although not relating sufficiently to the distinct impact of these repressions and/or dominations for women and/or men in particular, Foucault's theory allows the locating of power-relations, domination or repression, adapting it to various feminist purposes. The conception of the apparatus or *dispositif* remains a significant input for post-structuralism and feminist theory.

## **A dispositive perspective on visual culture and anti-violence discourse**

The value of Foucault for the feminist purpose, especially the immanent struggle for a social change, lies in addressing the question of the subject and the possibility of resistance (McLaren, 2002; Sawicki, 1991). The Foucauldian concept of discourse and dispositive facilitates genealogical and critical analysis about the phenomena in order to see the development of power relations and strategies historically over the course of time, and about the diachronic dimension of changes and continuities of discourse strands over time. In this section I will discuss the facilitation of the concept itself for the synchronic and critical section in order to examine “the finite spectrum of what is said and sayable at a particular point in time” (Jäger and Maier, 2009: 46), “trying to grasp the forms of exclusion, of limitation, of appropriation” and the “instances of discursive control” (Foucault, 1981: 70). Applying this perspective in context with gender-based violence in its structural and symbolical dimensions will allow the situating of the visual discourse of the anti-violence women’s movement in these dispositive power arrangements and thus enable the development of an approach in order to identify resistance and social change, its shifts, modifications and breakages.

According to visual culture, the visual maps expressive and illustrative possibilities inherent in the medium’s broad and multidisciplinary orchestration and compositions of image and text. The visual, the image or the visual space, including interface and the digital channels with their multitude of free-floating codes, is interwoven with social structure, ideology and power, so we need to question the visual in contexts of control and social power. Gillian Rose explains the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded and concludes that the visual is a key in the “cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies”, where the production of the image(s) is never innocent; images are not “transparent windows” but rather interpret the world (Rose, 2001: 6). Or as Judith Butler (2004: 10) puts it, it depends on “who is imaging whom, and for what purpose”. On that basis, we can presume social power working on what is inside and left out in visualisations, as well as who or what is represented or not.

Sauer and Knoll (2006: 17) assume the media as constituting an important sphere, a field of power, not only of a ritual of common consumption of and adaptation to gender patterns, stereotypes and roles, but also of ritualisations of self-assurance of gender and its standardisation. From this we may conclude that the representation of certain types of visualisations of gender-based violence can be understood as ritualisations of gender as self-assurance and standardisation as well. As a consequence, these ritualisations with an underlying strategy of male dominance become obvious in the light of the multitude of representations of women forced into passive and secondary roles, converted into objects, relegated

to the realm of emotions, the private sphere, or reinforced into feminine stereotypes of weakness and helplessness, stigmatising women by victimisation – evidenced by various authors (Carter and Weaver, 2003; Eiter, 2006; López Díez, 2005; Meyers, 1997; Richards *et al.*, 2011; Wolf, 2018). Thus, media function as a sphere of gender standardisations and assurances, the symbolic and discursive violence forms part of these processes.

Besides, Mersch (2004: 78) adheres to the idea that the media, although participating in the constitution of social and cultural processes, do not create meaning. According to the author, the media visualise, make audible, collect, arrange, conserve; the media transpose/translate meaning through transferring, transmitting, deforming or transforming, but do not create it; they presume meaning. Consequently, Mersch (2004: 78) argues that there exists no symbolic, no perception without the media but no medium ever is the *giver/creator* of its occurring [orig. “Geber ihres Ereignens”]. Hence, Mersch (2004: 78 [own translation]) concludes: “media themselves are something, an archive, an image, an apparatus”. Hence, due to selection criteria, programme production and social knowledge creation, we can assume the media as an apparatus of discourse transposition.

Concerning the media, the overall notion of the screen is the surface where visual culture is displayed and perceived, which along with different forms of moving and still images dilutes in the hype of interface appearing in a great variety of devices. The vast amount of image-text compositions and multi-media conglomerates are all perceived through the screen, the interface constituting new interrelations and forms of agency. Thus, I suggest the screen/image/interface as the “locus of mediation” (Lacan, 1998) within this sphere of ritualisations and transpositions, through which meaning can be deformed or transformed, and where awareness-raising and therefore the women’s anti-violence initiatives aim to intervene. The screen or interface is comprehended as spatial location in the visual world, where visionary and resistive images can interfere and open new ways of seeing. In other words, given that visual culture as apparatus cherishes gender inequality and contributes to the symbolic and structural violence against women, this locus of transposition also provides an arena for redrafting and transgressing the obsolete gender norms and dominant visual politics.

Assuming that the media is an apparatus for transposing – deforming or transforming – presumed meanings, and an essential sphere of gender ritualisations, I define the media’s deployments and screens as reflecting surfaces of intersecting gendered apparatuses; i.e. arenas of reassuring, reproducing, reinforcing as well as transposing, transgressing and transforming gendered dispositive power arrangements. Power in a Foucauldian sense means:

[...] the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support

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which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault, 1998: 92)

So I assume that media with the screen as locus of mediation constitute the sphere of transposing these structured fields of power into visibility, and by doing this, bring it into public discourse.

Understanding discourses as shaping how the world is understood, Jäger and Maier (2009: 36) even state that “discourses not only shape but even enable social reality”, and Danaher *et al.* (2000: 31) conclude from Foucault:

Discourses can be understood as language in action: they are windows, if you like, which allow us to make sense of, and “see” things. These discursive windows or explanations shape our understanding of ourselves, and our capacity to distinguish the valuable from the valueless, the true from the false, and the right from the wrong. (Danaher *et al.*, 2000: 31)

Therefore, if discourse shapes social reality, how we understand the world, how we value and distinguish between true and false, then what is included or excluded, what is sayable, utterable, said or unsaid in discourses is of tremendous importance. Or as Jäger and Maier (2009: 37) affirm, “the power of discourse lies in the fact that discourses delineate a range of ‘positive’ statements, which are sayable” and “simultaneously inhibit a range of other statements, which are not sayable”; thus discourses to them “determine the way in which a society interprets reality and organises further discursive and non-discursive practices”. The authors (Jäger and Maier, 2009: 38) stress that discourses take on a life of their own, “transport more knowledge than the single subject is aware of”. For Laclau and Mouffe (1987: 82) the term *discourse* is used “to emphasize the fact that every social configuration is meaningful” and signifies “a systematic set of relations”; these relations with other objects “are not given by the mere referential materiality of the objects, but are, rather, socially constructed”. Thus, the authors assume that discourse constitutes the subject position of the social agent, and the social agent is not the origin of discourse. Rose (2001: 137) explains that we require intertextuality to understand the diversity of forms of articulations of discourse and concludes: “It is possible to think of visibility as a sort of discourse too”. Visual information, codes and narratives in the form of photos, cartoons, films, videos, posters and art works are not only expressions of social practices and nourish knowledge on different issues, but also limit or extend it, serve particular ends, thus nourish, exert and steer power. Adapting from Rose, I propose the definition of visual discourse as anticipatory shaping of individual and collective consciousness, social practices and

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materialisations on intimate partner violence. This means an anticipatory shaping, contributing to and nourishing of the dispositive on intimate partner violence including lines of force, resistance and breakage.

For instance, the recalcitrant under-representation of women as news subjects by failing to mention them adequately in their real responsibilities and roles in present society (Macharia *et al.*, 2010: 15) constitutes a form of symbolic violence carried out by the media as active players in the construction processes of gender hierarchy and hegemonial misogynist visuality; i.e. the strategic imperative of maintaining male power as a matrix for the apparatus is not only true for the apparatus of gender-based violence, but also for the visual apparatus. Consequently, the interplay of these entangled apparatuses stipulates gender inequality and gender-based violence and procures hegemonial visuality on both.

Gender norms for behaviour – the disciplinary practices – transmitted by the media and by visual culture can be assumed as elements enhancing the dispositive arrangements of continuing violence against women and entangling the social apparatus, visual apparatus, gender apparatus. Media and culture, with its homogeneous ensemble of different elements and bifurcated lines open to change and breakage, enmesh mainstream discourses of force; i.e. reproducing symbolic violence, as well as discourses of resistance by displaying alternatives of gender equality. In their reader about discourse and discourse based on the Foucauldian tradition, Maasen *et al.* (2006: 7) introduce images as elements and vehicles of dispositives, which we recognise as our visual culture. In this context, the authors refer to Foucault's and later Deleuze's preferences for the visual, the visible, the gaze, and emphasise the importance of Foucault's discussions of images and of the visible as an effect of power relations within his oeuvre. They see a constitutive relevance of visual conceptions for Foucauldian tools, and assume from Foucault's power and subject theoretical premises that:

Bilder bilden nicht einfach Realität ab, sondern beteiligen sich an der Konstruktion von gesellschaftlicher Realität; Bilder tauchen in bestimmten Macht – Wissens – Konstellationen (Dispositiven) auf, verteilen im intermedialen Zusammenspiel mit Texten oder architektonischen Formationen Sichtbarkeiten, erzeugen politische Relevanzen und ermöglichen die Verortung entsprechender Subjektpositionen. [*Images do not simply represent reality, but participate in the construction of social reality, images appear in certain power – knowledge – constellations (dispositifs), diffuse visibility in the inter-media interaction with texts or architectural formations, generate political relevance and allow the localization of corresponding subject positions.*]. (Maasen *et al.*, 2006: 19 [own translation])

The adaption of Foucault's dispositive (1980) applied to the visual discourse on intimate partner violence enables the identification of the elements involved, to discuss the interrelations, modifications and shifts.

On this basis, I establish the images emerging from the entanglement of apparatuses as elements and vehicles of dispositives (Maasen *et al.*, 2006), the media as the arena of transposition and the screen as locus of mediation (Lacan, 1998). If we consider the media as a locus of intersecting gendered apparatuses then – referring to Deleuze (1989) – we can identify lines of force (as to structural, symbolic and discursive violence against women) and lines of resistance or breakage (supposedly as to the struggle and contributions of the anti-violence movement in order to prevent and end gender-based violence). Such an approach allows identifying the sayabilities and visibilities, the unsayabilities and invisibilities of (audio)visual discourse on gender-based violence. Accordingly, the repetitive transposition of en-gendered imagery through media and visual culture, transmitting and disseminating clichéd representation and myth, or the deconstruction of the latter, function as variables indicating if power arrangements form lines of resistance and breakage or lines of force. We may thus understand the dispositive and discursive arrangements as the lines of light and enunciation (Deleuze, 1989), structuring fields of visibility and invisibility, of speaking out, uttering or silencing the sayable and visible in dispositive power arrangements to question the formation of discursive and non-discursive social practices in stipulating or preventing violence against women. The anti-violence movement has shifted the social phenomenon of gender-based violence into the fields of visibility, even though the question of sayability and unsayability, the visual silence and visual noise on the different elements of discourse remains unanswered.

Jäger and Maier (2009: 56) argue that “[d]iscourses do not exist independently, they are elements of dispositives”. In addition, Bührmann and Schneider (2008) argue that the outreaching and relatively indeterminate entirety of discourse as a practice-agency relation according to Foucault can be addressed by the dispositive.

However, visual discourse on the issue of violence against women, what is said and what remains unsaid, or silenced, is not examined in its dispositive and discursive dimensions,<sup>4</sup> nor does there exist a dispositive theory of violence against women as such, nor one including its structural and symbolic dimensions manifest in the entangled apparatuses, particularly in visual culture.

Consequently, critical dispositive or discourse analysis as a theoretical approach and empirical method serving the comprehension of the nature of social power, domination and resistance applies for the analyses of social representation as to the women’s anti-violence initiatives and the role of their social actors:

Indeed, we argue that in order to relate discourse and society, and hence discourse and the reproduction of dominance and inequality, we need to examine in detail the role of social representation in the minds of social actors. (Dijk, 2001: 302)

Accordingly, with this approach we can formulate ideas on how visual discourse, the women’s anti-violence movement as a social actor and the media as a

sphere of transpositions and standardisations contribute to or break with the reproduction of symbolic and discursive violence, which was the concern envisaged by this research approach.

## Concluding comments

At the beginning of my paper, I described the societal problem of gender-based violence in its complex dimensions, and the importance of awareness-raising and the media, and therefore visual culture as well, for its prevention and eradication. Moreover, a literature review shows that although gender-based violence as an issue of public interest has increased its prominence in mainstream deployments, the subject continues to be represented in an insufficient and deficient mode, reconstructing stereotypes, effecting re-victimisation and obscuring the social roots and complexity of dimension rather than clarifying real contexts and the systemic nature of the phenomenon itself. Thus, I presumed the women's movement to be a crucial player of anti-violence discourse in order to produce and deliver different forms of media representation and discourse, bringing into visibility an imagery capable of breaking with clichés, stereotypes and circulating myths on the subject matter. Finally, I pointed out the research gap concerning the systemic problem of violence against women in contexts of media and visual culture as understudied and undertheorised. Therefore, in order to obtain clarification on the (audio)visual discourse on violence against women, I searched for an appropriate research approach to enable the identification of the elements involved, and to discuss the interrelations, modifications and shifts in context of power and domination versus resistance and breakage.

Thus, recognizing the multi-faceted direct, structural and symbolic dimensions of gender-based violence and applying a feminist and dispositive perspective based on Foucault's *dispositif*, I proposed (1) to think of gender-based violence as intersecting apparatuses, as a dispositive power arrangement with the underlying strategic imperative of maintaining male power (dominance) as the apparatus' matrix. In addition, I introduced (2) media and visual culture functioning as the matrix for the transposition of meaning. In order to explore the interlinkage of violence against women and visual culture, I assumed the media as an apparatus for transposing – deforming or transforming – presumed meanings (Mersch, 2004), as the symbolic and essential sphere of gender ritualisations (Sauer and Knoll, 2006), and defined the media's deployments and screens as reflecting surfaces of intersecting gendered apparatuses. Considering visual culture as intersections – as an entanglement – of apparatuses, of dispositive arrangements operating in the field of power, then the mapping of visuals on the subject of violence against women anticipates the ensemble of the social apparatuses.

With the discussion in the sections above, I showed that by drawing on the dispositive perspective we can develop an approach that applies for focusing on the social modality of the image site and addressing the different fields of power with its social actors and representations at the same time. As violence against women and visual culture constitute complex social apparatuses, the dispositive perspective enables these complexities to be coped with and facilitates insights about the changes and continuities of discourse strands over time. Thus, this approach allows the identification of the sayabilities and visibilities, the unsayabilities and invisibilities as implications for policy and future research. Moreover, returning to the research gap, I want to emphasize the need to continue with further research using a dispositive perspective in order to develop a common theory on violence against women, including communication issues

As media and visual culture, in such multi-facetted ways, exercise symbolic power and violence, we require the development and application of suitable innovative research strategies to target possibilities of social change. Thus, further research applying the dispositive perspective to discourses of the different players can unveil the entanglements in order to develop strategies to bring in new and transitory forms of visibilities and sayabilities, proceeding towards a new symbolic order, transposing social accounts for complex comprehensions.

Discourse theories like those of Michel Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe, and cultural discourse research are closely related to questions of knowledge production, circulation and transformation: "They are related to questions of symbolic structuring of meaning and the generation of symbolic orders including their material groundings and effects" (Keller, 2005: 3). The apparatus, the *dispositif*, can be an appropriate instrument for the feminist purpose of grasping the phenomenon of gender-based violence in its dispositive arrangements in the different en-gendered arenas. It can be applied for the derivation of a useful methodological approach, in a genealogical way as well as for an extension to critically examine visual culture and its variety of media channels as entangled discourses in the Foucauldian sense.

Moreover, as a theoretical and methodological approach to examine the structural, discursive and symbolic dimensions of gender-based violence, it is of central importance to find discursive elements and strands capable of pointing to future visions and social meanings beyond violence; i.e. to provide social knowledge, meaning transfer and awareness-raising focusing on primary prevention of this widespread social problem. ●



## Notes

- I1** Correspondence address: Birgit Wolf. Department of Communication. Universität Wien | University of Vienna. Währinger Straße 29. E-1090, Wien, Austria, EU.
- I2** Across the 28 EU Member States we find an estimated 13 million women (31 %) having experienced physical violence – by either a partner or a non-partner – in the last 12 months; one in three women (33 %) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since she was 15 years old and one in five women (22 %) who are or have been in a relationship with a man since the age of 15 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014: 7, 15, 21).
- I3** Council of Europe (2011: 8): “violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women; [...] “domestic violence” shall mean all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners [...] “gender-based violence against women” shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.
- I4** In my Ph.D. dissertation therefore I developed this research approach for the topic of gender violence based upon a theoretical background consisting of feminist and dispositive perspectives, in particular of the Foucauldian apparatus/ *dispositif*. The objective of the dissertation was to clarify representations and awareness-raising activities in the context of gender-based violence, more precisely the imagery produced by the anti-violence movement in two countries, Austria and Spain, and at the European Union level. (For more details, see Wolf, 2013a, 2018).

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