

**Abstract**

This paper presents an overview of the methodological approach taken in a recently completed Foucauldian discourse analysis of physiotherapy practice. In keeping with other approaches common to postmodern research this paper resists the temptation to define a proper or 'correct' interpretation of Foucault's methodological oeuvre; preferring instead to apply a range of Foucauldian propositions to examples drawn directly from the thesis. In the paper I elucidate on the blended archaeological and genealogical approach I took and unpack some of the key imperatives, principles and rules I grappled with in completing the thesis.

**Key Words** Foucault, methodology, archaeology, genealogy, physiotherapy

## Putting Foucault to work: An approach to the practical application of Foucault's methodological imperatives

*DAVID A. NICHOLLS*

**Introduction**

Over the last 30 years, 'Foucauldian' discourse analysis has become a well respected and much used philosophical, theoretical and methodological approach across a wide range of disciplines including architecture, communication theory, cultural studies, gender studies, health care, management studies, philosophy, and the social sciences.<sup>1-5</sup> Derek Hook wrote of a 'veritable explosion of discursive analytic work',<sup>6</sup> while Michael Arribas-Ayllon and Valerie Walkerdine recently spoke of the emergence of Foucauldian discourse analysis as an 'expansive and diffuse field' within qualitative research.<sup>7</sup> (Like many scholars who have been

influenced by Foucault's ideas, I am uncomfortable with the notion of 'Foucauldian' discourse analysis since this runs counter to one of Foucault's founding principles. It is used here only out of a desire to avoid an otherwise cumbersome grammatical sentence structure).

Amidst the excitement that Foucault's iconoclastic approach has generated a 'proliferation of the various models of the process of discourse analysis' have emerged,<sup>6</sup> resulting in a diverse array of methods, approaches and study designs which draw from Foucault's own methodological injunction that we should always 'slip away' from closed, predefined methodological and intellectual work.<sup>8</sup> Foucault himself vehemently resisted any attempt to constrain the breadth and scope of his thinking with convenient labels or ready references to pre-existing norms and methodological conventions, arguing that to do so undercut the analytic possibilities of his approach.<sup>9</sup>

Postmodern and poststructural approaches to research are typically sceptical of the rational certainty and logical tidiness

of empiricism, the authorial dominance of hermeneutics, and the saturating absolutism of historiography. Foucault, for his part, criticized a number of other theoretical approaches for ignoring the material implications of knowledge and power.<sup>6</sup> In undertaking a form of discourse analysis informed by Foucault's ideas one must try, therefore, to avoid 'the trap of formalizing an approach that clearly eschews formalization', and recognise 'that there are no set rules or procedures for conducting Foucauldian-inspired analyses of discourse'.<sup>7</sup> Rather than seeing this as an 'ad hoc, fragmentary and incomplete' approach,<sup>10</sup> or as a form of shoddy science,<sup>11</sup> postmodern scholars – like all qualitative researchers – are encouraged to develop an approach that retains a coherent connection between the texts and the theoretical presuppositions underlying the study. At times this point has been missed by researchers deploying a postmodern approach who use the umbrella of Foucault's methodological pluralism as an excuse for poor scholarship, a 'vague epistemological position', or a 'non-specific mode of analysis'.<sup>12</sup>

Foucauldian approaches to discourse are now well established in a wide variety of fields and a number of texts have explored ways in which researchers might utilise Foucault's 'toolbox' of tactics, strategies and approaches.<sup>6-8, 13-16</sup> Many of these texts offer their own interpretations of Foucault's methodological deliberations and serve a vital function in attempting to clarify a Foucauldian approach for students, supervisors, examiners, readers and writers alike. However, as Derek Hook observed above, some secondary texts tend to treat Foucault as a 'diagnostician' of culture and society, rather than as someone offering 'a powerful means of enabling forms of critique and resistance'.<sup>6</sup> Distinguishing between those sources that offer a more didactic reading of Foucault's methodological principles and those that emphasise the power inherent in Foucault's ability to initiate action and bring about real change, therefore, becomes an important task for the student of Foucault's ideas.

For my part, the methodological approach I sought needed to interrogate the disciplinary technologies and governmental strategies at play in the discursive construction of physiotherapy practice. My thesis examined the surface of emergence of three distinct historical moments in the development of physiotherapy practice in England and New Zealand. The first concentrated on the emergence of the Society of Trained Masseuses (STM) in England at the end of the nineteenth century and the Society's pursuit of legitimacy a more detailed account of this can be found at.<sup>17</sup> The second concerned the migration of the technologies of discipline deployed by the STM to New Zealand, and the

emergence of an orthodox physiotherapy profession within the welfare reforms of the mid-twentieth century. A third focused on new 'bleeding edge' practices in New Zealand that appeared to be resisting the discourses of legitimacy and orthodoxy that had guided physiotherapy practice for more than a century.

In my thesis, I was drawn to the period of Foucault's writing that spanned his move from the archaeological interest in the formation, correlation and transformation of discourses and statements (most notably, Foucault<sup>18,19,20</sup>), to his genealogical interest in the matrices of power that made discursive formations possible.<sup>21-23</sup> My focus was upon the range of disciplinary technologies deployed by physiotherapists and the governmental context in which physiotherapy practices came to operate. I was drawn to the critical histories of authors such as David Armstrong, Sarah Nettleton and Nikolas Rose,<sup>24-33</sup> and leant heavily on the methodological approaches deployed by these authors, supported by the writings of Derek Hook, John Ransom and Maria Tamboukou.<sup>6,8,13,34,35</sup> My allegiance with particular interpretations of Foucault's postmodern principles and methodological propositions lay in my desire to explore 'what counts as reasonable and qualified knowledge within a circumscribed socio-historical milieu...by detail[ing] the underlying forms/conditions/criteria of reasonable knowledge on the basis of which truthful statements can be made'.<sup>13</sup>

Taking my own doctoral thesis as a point of departure, this paper attempts to address some of the methodological issues that were raised by my thesis; not didactically, or through a prescription for how Foucauldian discourse analysis *ought* to be done, but by presenting the approach that served to address the theoretical questions I was posing of my data. My hope is that this offers some meaningful insights for others engaged in a similar endeavour without being overly prescriptive.

### **The role of objects, subjects, concepts and strategies in the construction of discourses**

Although it is in some ways a false distinction, Foucault's writings prior to *Discipline and Punish*,<sup>34</sup> are often referred to as 'archaeological' texts. In these texts – notably *Madness and Civilisation*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and *The Birth of the Clinic*,<sup>18-20</sup> Foucault mapped out a methodological framework that focused heavily on the historical conditions that had made it possible to think and act in particular ways. Foucault attempted to liberate the notion of discourse from the linguistic constraints of semiotics. He explored how it might be possible to escape the progressivism of historiography

whilst, at the same time freeing the author from the weight of responsibility s/he carried in hermeneutics. Foucault's bold re-reading of the role of statements and discourses in the construction of knowledge was achieved through a number of methodological imperatives, principles and rules that Foucault indicated only sporadically through his later writings.<sup>9, 35</sup> Before setting out these injunctions in more detail, however, we need to consider how Foucauldian scholars have developed the notion of 'text'.

Studies that utilise Foucault's archaeological principles frequently take as their starting point a diverse array of texts. These texts are not confined only to physical documents that bear what Derek Hook called the 'markings of textuality',<sup>13</sup> but include any utterance or form of expression that plays a role in forming or moderating what can be thought, said or done at any one time.<sup>19</sup> Texts are composed of statements, or 'those utterances...which make some form of truth-claim... and which are ratified by knowledge'.<sup>36</sup> The particular knowledge that passes as truth at any particular moment is the product of a discursive formation, which describes a variety of statements, subjects, objects, concepts and thematic choices.<sup>19</sup> Discursive formations define a discursive field, or the 'totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written)',<sup>19</sup> and a discursive field encompasses every form of practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks adapted from Foucault's definition of discourse, cited in.<sup>19</sup>

Statements form the basic unit of analysis in archaeological enquiry because they make objects, subject positions, concepts and strategies visible, and consequently they become amenable to analysis. At the same time, in exploring these statements, we learn something about the ways in which they are made visible in the first place: the matrices of power relations that make certain forms of knowledge authoritative (and thereby acceptably expressed as statements), and others unacceptable. The rules that govern the visibility of statements and their subsequent effect on the formation, correlation and transformation of discourses, were set down by Foucault as 'rules' for understanding the interplay between statements and discourses and they, therefore, provided a useful vehicle through which I was able to approach the analysis of my particular texts.

### **The archaeological possibilities of objects, subjects, strategies and concepts**

The first archaeological rule pertains to the 'Rule of Discursive Formation', and concerns the way in which some discourses are formed by particular statements and

not others. Foucault encouraged scholars to explore the ways that certain objects, subjects, concepts and strategies make particular thoughts, actions and behaviours possible, and the way these relate to the construction of knowledge and the formation of texts. Taking each of these in order, Foucault explored the formation of discursive objects that embodied statements that legitimately bore the markings of particular discursive constructions. Foucault explored the surface of emergence of these objects, the authorities that gave weight to these discursive constructions (what Foucault called the 'authorities of delimitation'), and the ways in which the objects are classified, organised, divided and regrouped (or 'grids of specification').<sup>19</sup> One object that features prominently in my own analysis of the discursive construction of physiotherapy practice was the treatment bed. Throughout physiotherapy's history, treatment beds have been the site of tension for those who wished to legitimise touch. For physiotherapists, the treatment bed (or couch/plinth/table) bears certain 'statements' about its purpose as a way of expressing particular discourses of legitimacy and orthodoxy. These tensions are played out, knowingly or unknowingly, whenever physiotherapists interact with clients, and by exposing the role of the object of which the discourse speaks to critical scrutiny, one may make more visible the ensembles of knowledge that frame our thinking in particular ways.

Foucault also spoke of the formation of subject positions. Here, again, his concern was to explore the ways in which discourses privilege certain subject positions whilst marginalising others. In the study of physiotherapy practice, for example, one of the major analytic focal points was the formation of particular physiotherapy subjectivities: who is speaking; whose authority carries legitimacy; who is allowed to provide commentary on particular objects? Physiotherapists may occupy different subject positions that place them in differing relations to particular objects. For example, they may be orthodox health workers, conducting established biomedical assessment and treatment practices; or they may adopt new subject positions at the margins of orthodox practice. These positions enable objects like the clinic environment, the tools of measurement and assessment, or even patients/clients, to be approached differently.

Foucault also considered the formation of concepts and strategies. Concepts and strategies group statements around particular notions of practice which, in turn, situate people in relation to the objects that these statements construct. Legitimate practice is one such concept that demands that the early practice of masseuses complied with a set

of social norms. These social norms largely defined the subject positions and objects that could be deployed by the masseuses if they were to align themselves successfully with the discourse of legitimacy. To govern the conduct of a diverse set of registered practitioners required a range of disciplinary strategies (examination and registration, rules of professional conduct, etc.). Taken together subjects, objects, concepts and strategies form a set of guiding principles that focus on what can be said, or thought, and what cannot. They provide the student with a brief guide to the functionalities of knowledge; the places where knowledge can be seen to be operating and the ways in which, at a rudimentary level at least, ensembles of knowledge can be apprehended.

### The relational qualities of discursive formations

Foucault's second archaeological rule, or the 'Rule of Discursive Correlation', focuses upon the fluid inter-relationship between discursive formations. This rule concerns the way discourses intersect, abut, compete, overlap, dominate, marginalise or negate one another.<sup>13</sup> Foucault argued that these interactions between discourses needed to be explored at a microscopic level (between subjects, objects, strategies and concepts), and at a macroscopic level (between discursive formations, competing knowledges and power effects), and so this rule encourages us to focus on the relational qualities of discursive formations.

In studying physiotherapy practice the correlations between discursive formations played an important role because they provided a means for interpreting the changing context in which physiotherapists operate without recourse to historical progressivism. In other words, by exploring the correlations between discourses of legitimacy and orthodoxy across two distinct historical moments (the emergence of legitimate massage practice in England in the late nineteenth century, and the creation of an orthodox physiotherapy profession in New Zealand 50 years later), it was possible to analyse the changing context in which physiotherapists' actions operated.

### The transformation of discourses

The 'Rule of Discursive Transformation' encourages us to explore how discourses shift and change over time. Where are shifts occurring? What changes are happening 'internal' to the discourse? What effect are these changes having on the relationships with other discursive formations? Importantly, our task becomes one of mapping the transformations in these discourses over time and exploring the changing contexts in which they operate. Physiotherapist's relationship with a

discourse of orthodoxy appears to have mutated considerably since the middle of the twentieth century. At the height of the welfarist reforms taking place in New Zealand between 1938 and 1950 it was vital that physiotherapists were seen as an orthodox provider of physical rehabilitation services. As neo-liberal economic imperatives have gradually swept away welfarism, so physiotherapy's relationship with orthodoxy has shifted and we are now seeing the emergence of practices that openly resist the self-same discourses that were once considered vital.

Foucault did not consider that discourses could be 'defined' – since this might reinforce the view that they were monolithic entities warranting description – instead, he argued that their relationships, tactics, operations, oppositions, etc. should be 'mapped' across a broad terrain of events.<sup>37</sup> It becomes necessary, then, in my own study, to map an array of discursive formations, rules, knowledges, structures and systems, some of which were immensely stable over time and others that were entirely transitory. Importantly, Foucault argued that our task was to disturb that which was previously considered immobile; fragment what was thought unified; and show the heterogeneity of what had been considered consistent adapted from.<sup>38</sup> Keeping faith with Foucault's methodological intentions, I attempted to make visible the various statements that cohere around the discourses of critical importance to my particular focus, and in so doing, explore the relations of power that made these statements visible in the first place.

### The archive

Foucault called the rules that govern the formation, correlation and transformation of discourses an 'archive'. This is a very different interpretation of the term to that found in historiographic research, since Foucault utilised his understanding of the term as the basis for genealogical inquiry by exploring systems of 'domination, subjugation, the relationships of force'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, an exploration of the archive focuses on the relations of power that provide the conditions of possibility for thought. Foucault's shift from concentrating on the conditions that make thought historically possible, to a concern for the ways in which such notions as (bio)power, discipline, knowledge and governmentality define particular subjectivities exemplifies, for many, the shift from Foucault's archaeological approach to a more genealogical interest that can be found in his later writings; particularly the three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and the lectures that he gave at the Collège de France until his untimely death.<sup>21,22,40-45</sup> The distinction between these

two approaches is, however, somewhat artificial, as Maria Tamboukou argues:

Genealogy was often promoted by Foucault as a kind of successor to archaeology. Despite this, genealogy maintains many of the essential ingredients of archaeology, including, paradoxically, the examination of bodies of statements in the archive. However, Foucault added to it a new concern with the analysis of power, a concern which manifests itself in the 'history of the present'.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing on Foucault's own writings, archaeological approaches may be seen as a 'methodology [for the] analysis of local discursivities',<sup>40</sup> whereas genealogy refers to 'the tactics whereby, on the basis of the descriptions of these local discursivities, the subjected knowledges which were thus released would be brought into play'.<sup>40</sup>

According to Tamboukou, genealogical analysis reflects upon 'the nature and development of modern power', and works on the assumption that 'truth cannot be separated from the procedures of its production'.<sup>8</sup> Genealogical analyses, therefore, target three specific foci;

First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, it is possible, in undertaking a discourse analysis informed by Foucault's thinking, to blend, for instance, a concern for the role of knowledge in the construction of particular subjectivities, with an analysis of the ways in which our conduct is governed, and an exploration of the ethical conduct that allows us to govern ourselves. To blend archaeological and genealogical inquiry this way demands that we understand more of Foucault's approach to genealogy.

### Defining Foucault's genealogical injunctions

In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault<sup>35</sup> articulated four methodological 'injunctions' that may help us to address the nature of genealogical inquiry. These injunctions were concerned with regulating one's analysis so that one is placed in the best position to view the conditions that delimit discourses and bring about their circulation.<sup>42</sup> First, genealogical inquiry encourages us to attend to the historical context in which one's study is situated.<sup>6</sup> Here the researcher takes on the role of 'cartographer',<sup>43</sup> mapping the study across a broad socio-political terrain – in my case

across three critical moments in the history of physiotherapy practice. Secondly, the researcher is encouraged to explore the social, historical and political conditions under which statements come to count as true or false.<sup>6</sup> How, for instance, do discourses of legitimacy, orthodoxy and resistance come to be valued? Consequently discourses need to be explored not only as the effect of particular forms of knowledge, but also in their own right as the things that knowledge contests. Thirdly, the researcher should consider the materiality and conditions of possibility inherent within discursive formations.<sup>6</sup> This is a critical point because this focuses the researcher's attention on the critical role played by actions and practices in defining the various subjectivities under scrutiny. Finally, one must move in and out of the text using the extra-discursive to 'drive the analysis of the discursive'.<sup>13</sup> By 'extra-discursive' I believe Hook is referring to the material practices and actions that result from the formation, correlation and transformation of discourses, rather than suggesting that there is anything necessarily 'beyond' discourse. Foucault himself, used the notion of a *dispositif* to express this point; a *dispositif* is a system of relations that can be established between heterogeneous elements, discursive and non-discursive practices; 'the said as well as the unsaid'.<sup>39</sup>

These methodological injunctions are sufficient as a first step in guiding the development of genealogical analysis, but they are only preliminary injunctions to delineate genealogical inquiry from archaeological. Foucault's approach to genealogical inquiry gains critical weight, however, when questions of power, knowledge, discourse and subjectivity are approached through a set of 'systems' that Foucault identified as mediating the role of power in the construction of knowledge and truth.<sup>29</sup> The first systems Foucault identified he called the 'systems of exclusion', which explore those approaches that seek to constrain what can be thought or practiced through relations of power.<sup>6</sup>

### Foucault's internal, external and philosophical systems of exclusion

Systems of exclusion function to define what can be thought, known or said at a particular time.<sup>19</sup> Foucault identified three main forms of exclusion; internal, external and philosophical. Internal systems of exclusion concern our belief that we are the instigators of new knowledge, rather than the *effect* of the recirculation of older, primary discursive constructions (particularly those pertaining to religious, scientific or juridical matrices of power). This belief in our originality has led to us overstating the importance of the author of this newfound knowledge.<sup>19</sup> (By author, Foucault is referring to

the author of a particular statement, discourse or text rather than the author of this research document, *per se*). Foucault actively pursued an alternative view of the author function by reversing the nature of the question: rather than asking what discursive formations the author imbues, he asked how is the author formed and transformed as a consequence of the actions of the discourse?<sup>19</sup> Exploring these systems of exclusion allowed me to focus on the recirculation of approaches towards massage that were colonised by the early founders of the 'legitimate' massage profession. In essence, it became clear that the early founders of the profession had not 'invented' new approaches or benefitted from new ideas, only that they had been able to corral a set of suitable techniques and operations that had been circulating, in some cases, for more than a century. Through their tactical operations, they were able to utilise these forms of knowledge to define themselves as a legitimate solution to the 'massage scandals' that had initially prompted their actions.

By contrast, external systems of exclusion include all overt attempts to prohibit certain ways of thinking, through the suppression of ideas and ways of speaking. These include the binary differentiations between what is considered reasoned and what is unreasoned or madness; and the differentiation between what might be considered truthful and what is seen as false.<sup>19</sup> These systems function as effective mechanisms of differentiation that enable us to normalise certain ways of thinking, speaking and being, whilst marginalising others. What comes to count as practically truthful, just as what comes to count as practically reasonable within a political or social system, is less about pure knowledge or truth and more about the function of truth as a constantly mutating, fluid expression of an array of power effects.<sup>19</sup> Often, this leads the researcher to explore the places where acts of resistance appear as ruptures or eruptions. In my own study, the emergence of a new private clinic in Auckland, New Zealand, heralded an attempt to break free from the constraints of conventional physiotherapy practice. It was the emergence of this clinic that prompted me to ask 'what is the clinic resisting?'

From here, I began to realise that there were established forms of practice that had been so quotidian that I had never before considered investigating them. Ruptures of this sort can, therefore, lead to the unpacking of a great deal of established thinking and reasoning around practices that we had previously taken for granted.

Foucault emphasised that the analysis of these systems represents an unrelenting scepticism towards the 'material conditions of possibility...the multiple institutional supports

and various social structures and practices underlying the production of truth'.<sup>44</sup> Jessop's own methodological injunction argued that;

The study of power should begin from below, in the heterogeneous and dispersed micro-physics of power, explore specific forms of its exercise in different institutional sites, and consider how, if at all, these were linked to produce broader and more persistent societal configurations. One should study power where it is exercised over individuals rather than legitimated at the centre; explore the actual practices of subjugation rather than the intentions that guide attempts at domination; and recognize that power circulates through networks rather than being applied at particular points.<sup>44</sup>

The third system Foucault called the philosophical systems of exclusion.<sup>19</sup> These concern the ways in which power effects are effectively concealed behind idealised notions of truth or universal logos. Foucault was concerned with how these various forms of exclusion collude to create an idealised notion of truth within Western society. In doing so these systems effectively conceal the power effects of discourse which comes to 'occupy only the smallest possible space between thought and speech'.<sup>8</sup> Power effects become invisible behind an array of rules, rituals, systems and procedures that then project truth as taken-for-granted or commonplace, implying that truth is stable and immutable.<sup>6</sup> The effect is to obscure from view the operations of power. In my case, I came to realise that physiotherapists were strongly positioned by biomechanical discourses that constrained their ability to critically evaluate cultural, economic, political, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of health and illness. Biomechanics acted as a natural lens through which physiotherapists learnt to view their patients, concealing the matrices of power that were necessary to maintain the abstract purity of this approach. Foucault's interest was therefore directed towards destabilising the taken-for-grantedness of such truth claims; exposing the matrices of power effects at the material level where discursive and extra-discursive practices appear to present a uniform, uncontested face.<sup>19</sup>

These systems of exclusion have important implications because they focus on the conditions that constrain how statements construct particular subjectivities. By exposing these systems to scrutiny they are problematised, and it becomes easier to see how they make legitimated thought and action possible. They also allow us to explore the kinds of knowledge that are valorised and those that are marginalised, as well as scrutinising the ways in which people have sought to colonise particular modes of speaking about their thoughts and actions in order to adopt or privilege

certain subject positions. They also allow us to expose the power effects that were previously concealed beneath the mass of technical operations, disciplinary technologies and material practices.

### **Foucault's methodological 'principles' and genealogical inquiry**

The second set of principles designed by Foucault to ensure that relations of power, knowledge, discourse and subjectivity could be approached genealogically, were called 'rules' by Foucault, but rather than think of these in the normative sense, I applied these more as a set of guiding principles. They particularly concern the relationship between discourse and power and guide the researcher to analyse the material conditions of possibility, and the power effects that govern the operation of discourses in the construction of particular subjectivities. Each of these 'cautionary prescriptions' will be considered separately, beginning with the 'Rule of Immanence'.

The Rule of Immanence reminds us that power operates as a microscopic/local network that enmeshes people rather than being exercised *over* them.<sup>13</sup> The focus for analytic enquiry should, therefore, be the local centres of operation of power; the places where objects are defined, subject positions negotiated and concepts and strategies are exercised.<sup>22</sup> The focus falls on local texts, local statements and local practices; the examination papers handed out to students; the photograph that shows how massage ought to be practiced; the promotional pamphlet; or today's patient assessment.

The second methodological principal Foucault called the Rule of Continual Variation. This rule emphasises the importance of resisting the tendency to analyse power and knowledge as static entities.<sup>13</sup> Foucault's assertion was that power/knowledge and the subjectivities that ensued can never be seen as static.<sup>22</sup> This suggestion plays a vital role in shifting our thinking away from power and knowledge as something people have or don't have, to a consideration for the matrices of knowledge/power that define certain subjectivities. In my own work I explored the matrices of power effects governing physiotherapy conduct not as a monolith but as a practice, or more accurately, as an 'event'.

The focus for the third rule – the Rule of Double Conditioning, is upon the relationship between local material practices and the more 'global' questions to which they connect. Foucauldian approaches commonly emphasise 'ascending' analyses of power rather than the downward flow of power from above.<sup>13</sup> Thus, analyses often begin with local material practices, but seek to connect these practices with broader

governmental concerns. In my case, the focus has been upon three historical moments wherein the local practices of the clinician were seen in the context of three political rationales: the birth of physiotherapy at the height of classical liberalism; the pursuit of orthodoxy during periods of welfare reform; and the emergence of new practices as a response to neo-liberalism.

Finally, the Rule of Tactical Polyvalence of discourse encourages the researcher to consider the possibility that discourses may occupy a number of different positions for practitioners that extend beyond the simple binaries of enabling and constraining, dominating and dominated.<sup>19, 34</sup> Instead, Foucault argues that 'a multiplicity of discursive elements [can] come into play in various strategies'.<sup>22</sup> Here, I explored how certain discourses were in a competing or contradictory relationship with other discourses, resulting in a range of subjectivities being made available to physiotherapy practitioners. The *range* of subjectivities made available then becomes the focus for further analytic inquiry as it reveals something of the matrix of power effects operating to govern the emergent discourses (returning us again to the archive).

### **Principles of reversibility, discontinuity and specificity**

Having offered an overview of some of the genealogical rules that Foucault articulated as part of his methodological priorities, I now turn to three important methodological principals for analysing the relationship between matrices of power, ensembles of knowledge, and the creation of discursive formations. These are the principals of reversibility, discontinuity and specificity.

Foucault's principal of reversibility encourages us to change the way we view the relationship between discourses and power. Foucault argued that we should look for the 'numberless beginnings' of a particular event,<sup>8</sup> rather than consider that our present originated from one primary source. Here, power is not the result of this process, but rather the force that defines how discourses operate; 'our present is not theorised as the result of a meaningful development, but rather as an episode, a result of struggle and relations of force and domination' Foucault in.<sup>45</sup> In this way, 'physiotherapy' discourses may be seen as 'events' rather than a creative force from which we derive meaning. Critical histories of this sort, therefore, *reverse* the relationship between power and discourse seen in other theoretical approaches. In my own work, for example, I explored the material conditions of power associated with physiotherapists' pursuit of orthodox status. Orthodoxy becomes the goal, and I have attempted

to expose the political conditions of possibility that give orthodoxy meaning for physiotherapists. This act of reversal exposes the machinery of power to scrutiny, and reveals, for example, what is concealed in historical accounts of physiotherapy practice.

Foucault's principal of discontinuity asserts that discourses should not be seen as trans-historical, unified or homogeneous.<sup>13</sup> Instead the work of the discourse analyst should be directed towards an awareness of the mobile, fragmentary and historically contingent nature of discourse. This approach troubles the idea that discourses possess any particular linearity or causality. It also encourages us to focus on discourses *in series* rather than in a linear, progressive form. The principal of discontinuity encourages us to take a broad, 'horizontal' view of text generation and analysis, rather than applying a more hermeneutic approach to the excavation of a deep, but relatively narrow field of enquiry. Hook argues that these hermeneutic forms of analysis risk reinforcing 'exactly those forms of power that were initially being critiqued in the first place'.<sup>13</sup> Foucauldian discourse analysts seek to 'map discourse, to trace its outline and its relations of force across a variety of discursive forms and objects'.<sup>13</sup> Or as Tamboukou describes it;

Instead of going deep, looking for origins and hidden meanings, the analyst is working on the surface, constructing 'a polygon or rather a polyhedron'<sup>45</sup> of various minor processes that surround the emergence of the event'.<sup>8</sup>

For me, this principal features in the breadth of data sampled to obtain a broad appreciation for the actions taken by masseuses and physiotherapists in establishing their subjectivities. The emphasis was upon mapping power effects and discursive constructions rather than upon physiotherapists as the author or sole arbiters of truth.

The third principal is the principal of specificity, which reinforces the importance of not placing too much emphasis upon the linguistic and representational power of language when conducting discourse analysis.<sup>19</sup> Derek Hook argues that Foucault's work gains a 'unique epistemological strength'<sup>6</sup> when one considers the importance placed upon *the discursive effects* of the material, and *the material effects* of the discursive.<sup>46</sup> In undertaking a Foucauldian discourse analysis, we should place a great deal more emphasis upon the physical and material circumstances of discourse rather than a purely linguistic interpretation. Hook goes as far as to say here that these *extra*-discursive elements should be the main driving force for our discourse analysis, and in this way, we are less likely to slip into a narrow, linguistic analysis of

our subject.<sup>13</sup>

Collectively, these methodological imperatives, principles and rules represent some of the key injunctions governing Foucauldian approaches towards archaeological and genealogical analysis. I will now bring these together to review four principles that heavily influenced my own approach to Foucauldian discourse analysis.

## Four methodological propositions

Foucault's methodological intentions are contained within a wide variety of texts, and are interwoven with the particular theoretical questions he was addressing at the time. Isolating these so that they may be drawn out and applied to other contexts can be a challenging enterprise. That being said, there has been a large body of work conducted in recent years to supplement Foucault's original intentions, some of which has shed useful light on to the ways other researchers have used Foucault's ideas in their own work. I close this paper now by offering a succinct summary of the principles that I have found to be instructive in conducting my own approaches to text generation and analysis.

### First proposition: Utilise a plurality of texts

'Genealogy...requires patience and a knowledge of detail, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material.'<sup>47</sup>

In undertaking historical enquiry, Foucault argued that one should look to 'map' the terrain upon which knowledge was formulated; explore its contours, and locate its many ruptures, fissures, formations and transformations.<sup>44</sup> Foucault used geological metaphors to emphasise the importance of focusing, in the first instance, upon the 'surface effects' that brought about new knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Extending this metaphor, Foucault spoke of archaeological inquiry as a way of excavating beneath the surface of these emergent discourses.<sup>19</sup> In practical terms, this means using of a wide range of texts, spread over a broad horizon, made up of different textual materials, from a diversity of sources. It may be necessary, for instance, to draw on texts from different countries, ranging over many events, epistemes or historical moments, whilst including a wide range of texts (documents, interviews, observations and reflections, for example) to expose discourses to sufficient scrutiny.

### Second proposition: Focus upon local, material practices

Rather than seeking the effects of discourses, knowledge and power in grand theories or ideologies, Foucault argued that

one should locate and explore texts in the locations where oppression, forms of discipline, regulations and constraints, binaries of separation, claims of originality, and self-evident truths were present.<sup>9</sup> As well as employing a plurality of texts, therefore, it may be necessary to focus on the immanence and immediacy of events in the conduct of the practices one is scrutinising. The locations where particular knowledges are produced and the locations where power relations are enacted should also be a primary concern. The researcher should seek out places where material practices are inscribed, documented or stated, and focus on practices that seem obvious, or taken-for-granted, as much as those that loudly proclaim their presence.

### **Third proposition: Attend to the ruptures, fissures and tensions on the surface of discourses**

Foucault argued that rather than looking for continuities, which only reinforce our progressive image of history, we should explore the surface of emergence of new discursive forms by problematising tensions, emersions, fissures and ruptures in what might otherwise appear to be continuous discourses. Thus we should not look for a smooth, unruffled surface in excavating ensembles of knowledge and matrices of power, but rather we should look to explore how the practices we are interrogating reveal the contingency of local discursivities.

### **Fourth proposition: Drive the discourse analysis with extra-discursive elements**

Foucault's objections to linguistic, interpretative and historiographic analyses have been articulated repeatedly in recent years.<sup>6,13,48,49</sup> Derek Hook, in his analysis of Foucault's methodological approach, reinforced the importance of driving the generation and analysis of texts through their extra-discursive elements to avoid the mistake of placing too much emphasis upon textual relativism.<sup>6</sup> According to Hook, Foucault is partly to blame for this tendency to misinterpret his own methodological intentions,<sup>50</sup> since Foucault sought to collapse the boundaries between textual/material divisions, and between the discursive and extra-discursive; to complicate and problematise this artificial separation.<sup>6</sup> This has, however, led to some authors seeing every action, operation, technique or strategy only in linguistic terms. Hook re-draws this distinction and encourages us to 'substantiate critical textual assertions on the basis of materially-focused analyses, and vice versa'.<sup>6</sup>

### **Closing remarks**

My intention in setting out to write this paper was to

represent a process that was developed during the course of a doctoral thesis. I am acutely aware that, in defining some of these injunctions, I risk of being overly deterministic or oversimplifying the subtle nuances inherent in Foucault's approach to scholarship and critical inquiry. However, if a balance can be struck between the methodological pluralism that Foucault's philosophical frameworks demand, and the needs of researchers to be able to determine when they, and others, have been true to Foucault's methodological and theoretical intentions, then I would argue that there is something to be gained in being clearer about the way in which one might 'do' Foucauldian discourse analysis. I have attempted to do this in this essay by setting out the approach I took to my analysis of the discursive construction of physiotherapy practice. It represents only one of very many possible approaches that might be taken to Foucauldian discourse analysis.

### **References**

1. Potter J, Wetherell M. Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour. London: Sage; 1987.
2. Alvesson M, Kärreman D. Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations*. 2000;53(9):1125-49.
3. Petersen A, Bunton R. Foucault, Health and Medicine. London: Routledge; 1997.
4. Sawicki J. Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, power, and the body. New York: Routledge; 1991.
5. Yakhlef A. Towards a discursive approach to organisational knowledge formation. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*. 2002 2002/9;18(3):319-39.
6. Hook D. Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality, History - Foucault and Discourse Analysis. *Theory and Psychology*. 2001;11(4):521-47.
7. Arribas-Ayllon M, Walkerdine V. Foucauldian discourse analysis. In: Willig C, Stainton-Rogers C, editors. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. London: Sage; 2008. p. 92-108.
8. Tamboukou M. Writing Genealogies: an exploration of Foucault's strategies for doing research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. 1999;20(2):201-16.
9. Foucault M. *Questions of Method*: I&C; 1981.
10. Gutting G, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1994.

11. Newton J. Historicisms new and old: 'Charles Dickens' meets marxism, feminism, and west coast Foucault. *Feminist Studies: Feminist Studies, Inc.*; 1990. p. 449.
12. Ballinger C, Cheek J. Discourse Analysis in Action: The Construction of Risk in a Community Day Hospital. In: Finlay L, Ballinger C, editors. *Qualitative Research for Allied Health Professionals: Challenging Choices*. Chichester: Wiley; 2006. p. 200-17.
13. Hook D. The 'Disorders of Discourse'. *Theoria*. 2001;June:41-70.
14. Willig C. *Applied Discourse Analysis*. Buckingham: Open University Press; 1999.
15. Powers P. *The Methodology of Discourse Analysis*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett; 2001.
16. Parker I. *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Individual and Social Psychology*. London: Routledge; 1992.
17. Nicholls DA, Cheek J. Physiotherapy and the shadow of prostitution: The Society of Trained Masseuses and the massage scandals of 1894. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2006;62(9):2336-48.
18. Foucault M. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Pantheon; 1965.
19. Foucault M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock; 1972.
20. Foucault M. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. London: Tavistock Publications; 1973.
21. Foucault M. Governmentality. *Ideology and Consciousness*. 1979;6:5-21.
22. Foucault M. *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*. London: Allen Lane; 1979.
23. Foucault M. *Society must be defended*. New York: Picador; 1997.
24. Armstrong D. *Political Anatomy of the Body: Medical Knowledge in Britain in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1983.
25. Armstrong D. Bodies of knowledge/knowledge of bodies. In: Jones C, Porter R, editors. *Reassessing Foucault: Power, medicine and the body*. London: Routledge; 1994. p. 17-27.
26. Armstrong D. The rise of surveillance medicine. *Sociology of Health and Illness*. 1995;17(3):393-404.
27. Armstrong D. *A New History of Identity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2002.
28. Rose N. Governing "advanced" liberal democracies. In: Barry A, Osborne T, Rose N, editors. *Foucault and political reason: Liberalism, neo-liberalism and rationalities of government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1996. p. 37-64.
29. Rose N. *Inventing our selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1997.
30. Rose N. *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1999.
31. Nettleton S. *Power, Pain and Dentistry*. Buckingham: Open University Press; 1992.
32. Nettleton S. Inventing mouths: Disciplinary power and dentistry. In: Jones C, Porter R, editors. *Reassessing Foucault: Power, medicine and the body*. London: Routledge; 1994. p. 73-90.
33. Nettleton S. Protecting a vulnerable margin: towards an analysis of how the mouth came to be separated from the body. In: Davey B, Gray A, Seale C, editors. *Health and Disease: A Reader*. Philadelphia: Open University Press; 2001. p. 37-43.
34. Foucault M. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Allen Lane; 1977.
35. Foucault M. The order of discourse. In: Young R, editor. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structural Reader*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; 1981.
36. Mills S. *Discourse*. London: Routledge; 1997.
37. Davidson AI. Archaeology, Genealogy and Ethics. In: Couzens Hoy D, editor. *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1986.
38. Megill A. *Prophets of extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; 1985.
39. Foucault M. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. London: Harvester Press; 1980.
40. Foucault M. On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress. In: Rabinow P, editor. *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin; 1984. p. 340-72.
41. Halperin DM. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1995.
42. Foucault M. The order of discourse. In: Shapiro M, editor. *Language and Politics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1984. p. 108-38.

43. Deleuze G. Foucault. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; 1992.
44. Jessop B. From micro-physics to governmentality: Foucault's work on statehood, state formation, statecraft and state power. *Political Geography*. 2006;26(1):34-40.
45. Burchell G, Gordon C, Miller P. The Foucault Effect. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf; 1991.
46. Foucault M. The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. London: Tavistock; 1970.
47. Foucault M. Nietzsche, Genealogy, History. In: Bouchard DF, editor. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 1977.
48. Flynn T. Foucault's mapping of history. In: Gutting G, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1994. p. 28-46.
49. Eldin, S. Mapping the present: Heidegger, Foucault and the project of a spatial history. London: Continuum; 2001.
50. Hook D. Analogues of Power: Reading Psychotherapy through the Sovereignty–Discipline–Government Complex Theory and Psychology. 2003;13(5):605-28.

#### *Acknowledgements*

*I would like to thank the reviewers who gave thoughtful comments on the first draft of this paper*

*David A. Nicholls, PhD, MA, GradDipPhys, NZSP  
Senior Lecturer, School of Physiotherapy,  
Auckland University of Technology,  
Akoranga Campus, A-11,  
90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote,  
Private Bag 92006,  
Auckland 1020, New Zealand.  
Telephone: 00 64 9 921 9999 x7064  
Fax: 00 64 9 921 9620  
Email: david.nicholls@aut.ac.nz*