*Methods of Analysis*
**Discursive Analysis**
Stephen Petrina (2016/2019)

Discourse is not life: its time is not your time. (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 211)

Discursive analysis is typically associated with Foucault, whose methods (archaeology and genealogy) distinguished it from discourse analysis. He eventually introduced a similarly productive method of what might be called non-discursive analysis or analysis of non-discursive things. Foucault (1969/1972) acknowledges that discursive refers to what is "spoken or written" ("articulation of speech" and "gesture of writing") (pp. 27, 28). Non-discursive refers to non-verbal artifice, desires, gestures, practices, or signs along with events and institutions (pp. 69, 157-165). Animals and inanimate (non-sentient) beings and things are non-discursive in a symbolic sense and their means of communication are non-discursive as well. Foucault's focus is not on speaking and writing inasmuch as on "discursive formations" or "the general enunciative system that governs a group of verbal performances" (p. 107).

Foucault (1969/1972) begins *The Archaeology of Knowledge* with a section that reads like a natural history of discursive deposits. He describes historical time in ways earth scientists talk of geological time— discursive formations are analogous to rock formations. A "unit of discourse" is mappable like a unit of rock; statements in discursive formations are like particles or fossils in sediments (pp. 80, 153). Statements may be dispersed across "various sedimentary strata" somewhat like fossilized bones dispersed in the earth's crust (p. 4). Statements move and remix within and through dynamic discursive formations and may surface somewhat like strata of rock uplifted and mixed with others in various formations and outcrops. Formations are discontinuous, unpredictable in appearance, and vulnerable to sudden events. Therein, discursive analysis is analogous to "archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context" (p. 7). Surely, Foucault posits, there must be laws, principles, regularities, or rules that govern, move, or regulate statements like there are forces that regulate sedimentations and movement of artifacts, fossils, and rocks across space and time.

Discursive analysis is "centred on a description of the statement in its specificity" or "strictly speaking, groups of statements" (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 128). That is, Foucault elaborates,

> groups of verbal performances that are not linked to one another at the sentence level by grammatical (syntactical or semantic) links; which are not linked to one another at the proposition level by logical links (links of formal coherence or conceptual connexion); and which are not linked either at the formulation level by psychological [or authorial] links (either the identity of the forms of consciousness, the constancy of the mentalities, or the repetition of a project). (p. 115)

Statements "may sometimes be sentences, sometimes propositions; but they are sometimes made up of fragments of sentences, series or tables of signs, a set of propositions or equivalent formulations" (p. 106). A key question for discursive analysis is "what is this specific existence

that emerges from what is said and nowhere else" (p. 28)? The challenge is maintaining the uniqueness of "statements in themselves" while identifying rules of their formation (p. 112).

For example, the statement, "The golden mountain is in California," is *not* found "in a geography book, nor in a travel book, but in a novel, or in some fictional context" (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 90). The statement is linked "to a 'referential' that is made up not of 'things', 'facts', 'realities', or 'beings', but of laws of possibility, rules of existence for the objects that are named, designated, or described within it, and for the relations that are affirmed or denied in it" (p. 91). Discursive analysis focuses on the "enunciative level" of formation "in contrast to its grammatical and logical levels" (p. 91). Foucault (1969/1972) stresses, "I would like to show with precise examples that in analysing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice" (p. 49). "Of course," he continues, "discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things.... It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe" (p. 49). Discursive analysis attempts "to reveal discursive practices in their complexity and density; to show that to speak is to do something— something other than to express what one thinks" (p. 209).

Foucault (1969/1972) suggests how one might do a non-discursive analysis or analysis of non-discursive things, such as an artwork, design object, or technological artifact. Analysis of non-discursives would begin by asking whether concepts such as space and contour were

> named, enunciated, and conceptualized in a discursive practice; and whether the knowledge that this discursive practice gives rise to was not embodied perhaps in theories and speculations, in forms of teaching and codes of practice, but also in processes, techniques, and even in the very gesture of [whoever created it]. (pp. 193-194)

Non-discursive analysis would *not* try to show that the thing "is a certain way of 'meaning' or 'saying' that is peculiar in that it dispenses with words." Rather, it would try to show that discursive practice is "embodied in techniques and effects." Hence, an artifact is *not* "a pure vision that must then be transcribed into the materiality of space; nor is it a naked gesture whose silent and eternally empty meanings must be freed from subsequent interpretations" (p. 194). One would similarly analyze the following statements:

> One of the things we hit upon was the quality of a host. That is, the role of the architect, or the designer, is that of a very good, thoughtful host, all of whose energy goes into trying to anticipate the needs of his [her or their] guests— those who enter the building and use the objects in it. We decided that this was an essential ingredient in the design of a building or a useful object.

It is incidental that this was uttered by Charles Eames (1972, p. 14) in commentary on practice with his wife, Ray Eames. More telling is what is coincidental, "an obscure set of anonymous rules" and regularities that configure or move statements on design, hospitality, needs, and useful objects into normalized formation (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 210). The challenge, says Foucault, is not to "exclude the problem of the subject [or author, designer, etc.], but to define the positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse" (p. 231).

1. What is a Discursive Formation?
   a. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1972, p. 41): Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation.
        i. (p. 130): discursive formation is the general enunciative system that governs a group of verbal performances — a system that is not alone in governing it, since it also obeys, and in accordance with its other dimensions, logical, linguistic, and psychological systems. What has been called 'discursive formation' divides up the general plane of things said at the specific level of statements. The four directions in which it is analysed (formation of objects, formation of the subjective positions, formation of concepts, formation of strategic choices) correspond to the four domains in which the enunciative function operates. And if the discursive formations are free in relation to the great rhetorical unities of the text or the book, if they are not governed by the rigour of a deductive architecture, if they are not identified with the oeuvre of an author, it is because they bring into play the enunciative level, together with the regularities that characterize it, and not the grammatical level of sentences, or the logical level of propositions, or the psychological level of formulation.
        ii. (p. 42): The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division.
            1. Formation of Objects
            2. Formation of Enunciative Modalities
            3. Formation of Concepts
            4. Formation of Strategies
   b. *Herodote* Editors (in Foucault, 1975, p. 63): the hypothesis you put forward in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*— that a discursive formation is defined neither in terms of a particular object, nor a style, nor a play of permanent concepts, nor by the persistence of a thematic, but must be grasped in the form of a system of regular dispersion of statements.
2. What is Discursive Analysis?
   a. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1972, pp. 133-134): Generally speaking, the analysis of discourse operates between the twin poles of totality and plethora. One shows how the different texts with which one is dealing refer to one another, organize themselves into a single figure, converge with institutions and practices, and carry meanings that may be common to a whole period. Each element considered is taken as the expression of the totality to which it belongs and whose limits it exceeds.... But this primary and ultimate meaning springs up through the manifest formulations, it hides beneath what appears, and secretly duplicates it, because each discourse contains the power to say something other than what it actually says, and thus to embrace a plurality of meanings: a plethora of the 'signified' in relation to a single 'signifier'. From this point of view, discourse is both plenitude and endless wealth....
   b. The analysis of statements and discursive formations opens up a quite contrary direction: it wishes to determine the principle according to which only the 'signifying' groups that were enunciated could appear. It sets out to establish a law of rarity.... However, we are not linking these 'exclusions' to a repression; we do not presuppose that beneath manifest statements something remains hidden and subjacent. We are analysing statements, not as

being in the place of other statements that have fallen below the line of possible emergence, but as being always in their own place. They are put back into a space that is entirely deployed and involves no reduplication. There is no sub-text. And therefore no plethora....

  c. (pp. 135-136): To interpret is a way of reacting to enunciative poverty, and to compensate for it by a multiplication of meaning; a way of speaking on the basis of that poverty, and yet despite it. But to analyse a discursive formation is to seek the law of that poverty, it is to weigh it up, and to determine its specific form. In one sense, therefore, it is to weigh the 'value' of statements. A value that is not defined by their truth, that is not gauged by the presence of a secret content; but which characterizes their place, their capacity for circulation and exchange, their possibility of trans-formation, not only in the economy of discourse, but, more generally, in the administration of scarce resources. In this sense, discourse ceases to be what it is for the exegetic attitude: an inexhaustible treasure from which one can always draw new, and always unpredictable riches; a providence that has always spoken in advance, and which enables one to hear, when one knows how to listen, retrospective oracles.

3. Archaeology and Genealogy

  a. Archaeology

    i. Archaeology bridges geological time with historical time just as paleontology bridges geology with biology.

    ii. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1972, p. 174): Archaeological analysis individualizes and describes discursive formations. That is, it must compare them, oppose them to one another in the simultaneity in which they are presented, distinguish them from those that do not belong to the same time-scale, relate them, on the basis of their specificity, to the non-discursive practices that surround them and serve as a general element for them.

      1. (pp. 179-180): Archaeology also reveals relations between discursive formations and non-discursive domains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes). These rapprochements are not intended to uncover great cultural continuities, nor to isolate mechanisms of causality. Before a set of enunciative facts, archaeology does not ask what could have motivated them (the search for contexts of formulation); nor does it seek to rediscover what is expressed in them (the task of hermeneutics); it tries to determine how the rules of formation that govern it— and which characterize the positivity to which it belongs— may be linked to non-discursive systems: it seeks to define specific forms of articulation.

    iii. Foucault used what he called "archaeology" to explore the strata of history wherein one would uncover the "conditions of acceptability of a system [discourse] and follow the breaking points which indicate its emergence." Changes, discourses, etc. are not realized or "analyzed as universals to which history, with its particular circumstances, would add a number of modifications" (Foucault, 1997, *The Politics of Truth*, p. 62). Foucault used archaeology and genealogy to explore relations between power, knowledge, and the body by uncovering layers of the past and to problematise power relations in the present by tracing power through the past (Sawocki, 1991).

  b. Genealogy

    i. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," (1977):

      1. Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times. (p. 139)

2. Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material. Its "cyclopean monuments" are constructed from "discreet and apparently insignificant truths and according to a rigorous method"; they cannot be the product of "large and well-meaning errors." In short, genealogy demands relentless erudition. (p 140)

3. Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the meta-historical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for "origins." (p. 140)

ii. *Society Must be Defended* (1976):

1. If you like, we can give the name "genealogy" to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics. That can, then, serve as a provisional definition of the genealogies I have been trying to trace with you over the last few years. You can see that this activity, which we can describe as genealogical, is certainly not a matter of contrasting the abstract unity of theory with the concrete multiplicity of the facts. (pp. 8-9)

iii. "On the Genealogy of Ethics" (1994, p. 263):

1. Three domains of genealogy are possible. 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.

iv. "What is Critique?" (1978):

1. What I understand by the procedure of eventualization, whilst historians cry out in grief, would be the following: first, one takes groups of elements where, in a totally empirical and temporary way, connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge can be identified. Mechanisms of different types of coercion, maybe also legislative elements, rules, material set-ups, authoritative phenomena, etc. One would also consider the contents of knowledge in terms of their diversity and heterogeneity, view them in the context of the effects of power they generate inasmuch as they are validated by their belonging to a system of knowledge. We are therefore not attempting to find out what is true or false, founded or unfounded, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive. What we are trying to find out is what are the links, what are the connections that can be identified between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge, what is the interplay of relay and support developed between them, such that a given element of knowledge takes on the effects of power in a given system where it is allocated to a true, probable, uncertain or false element, such that a procedure of coercion acquires the very form and justifications of a rational, calculated, technically efficient element, etc. (p. 59)

v. Genealogy, for Foucault, was "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the

field of events or runs in the empty sameness throughout the course of history" (Foucault, 1980, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 117).

      vi. Foucault studied discourses and power/knowledge. For example, he studied madness instead of specific people who were mad or controlled the mad, sexuality instead of specific manifestations of gender or sex.

c. Riddell (1979, p. 241): "Foucault's archeology… suspends the classical notion of the *arche* or origin." Foucault's "substitution of the metaphor "genealogy" for the metaphor "archeology," as noted by his editor and translator, is not necessarily a radical shift or turn in his thinking, even if his definition of "genealogy" (following Nietzsche) becomes a more forceful refusal of the beginning as origin.,,, literature becomes for him an instrumental and disruptive machine, a "madness" of language (as in his model, Holderlin)."

d. See also *The Order of Things*, Foucault (1966/1989)