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# FOUCAULT IN PSYCHOLOGY – COMMENT ON HOOK

## JONATHAN POTTER

Discourse and Rhetoric Group

Department of Social Sciences

Loughborough University       Email: J.A.Potter@lboro.ac.uk

Loughborough       Tel:     01509 223384

Leicestershire, LE11 3TU       Fax:     01509 223944

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Foucault has been a major figure in critical and discursive social psychology for more than twenty years, sometimes directly but often in more fragmentary, metaphorical or inspirational ways. The journal *Ideology and Consciousness* in the 1970s was an arena for the exploration of a range of post-structuralist thinking, including Foucault's work, distilled into Henriques et al. (1984); and Walkerdine has carried on development this line of thinking, more recently in engagement with Rose's (**) work on governmentality, which itself is a development of his Foucaultian thinking (Rose, 1989, 1996). Foucault was influential in Parker's work (e.g. Parker, 1989) and that of Wetherell and Potter (1992) as well as a range of other critical developments (see Hepburn, 2003, ch. 6 for an overview).

Hook's (200*) interesting and scholarly contribution to this body of work is partly notable for its different focus. Rather than concentrate on discourse and construction, or on subjectivity, or on power, he focuses on Foucault's genealogical method and broader genealogical approach to history. It is possible to speculate that this focus may have found less favour previously because of the tension between genealogy and more traditional Marxist approaches to historical change – Foucault has often been treated as offering a reformulated account of ideology that can be joined to rather different projects.

Hook's overview does us a service by laying out some of the things that might be involved in a genealogical analysis. Even so, it is hard to assess the viability of his extended Foucaultian analysis on the basis of the article. Hook promises that it will be an approach that will transcend what he treats as the major shortcomings of alternative approaches to discourse, namely its treatment of 'knowledge', 'materiality' and 'history'. In the space available it is only possibly to provide brief comments on each of these.

*Knowledge*. Whatever the possible virtues of focusing on discourse-as-knowledge, it risks reifying claims, versions and descriptions that may be variously contested, built up and

undermined.  That is, it has a potential for obscuring precisely what is contested.  The genealogical sweep of Foucaultian analysis highlights a certain kind of large scale contingency, but is not particularly attentive to the contested specifics of knowledge within, say, medicine, physics or race psychology that have been highlighted in discourse analytic work and in the sociology of scientific knowledge more broadly (Ashmore, 1989).

*Materiality*.  Asserting the importance of materiality is easier than following through the consequence of such assertions coherently and effectively.  One of the features of many assertions about 'materiality' is their inattentiveness to their own textual constructive processes (Edwards, et al., 1995).  It is hard to tell in this case, as we have no examples of 'the material' in analysis, indeed, no analysis at all.  Just assertions about what analysis must be.  Whose material will be the one treated as just there doing its reality enforcing job?

*History*.  The emphasis on history is easier to establish in the abstract, and easier where the aim is to produce historical analysis.  One way of treating Foucault, after all, is as a historian of knowledge.  There are two separate issues here.  Should *all* analysis be historical, as Hook claims?  And are non-historical analyses necessarily flawed?  It seems to me that this claim needs supporting by showing the failure of alternative analysis.  For example, is Edwards' (2003) analysis of the way people orient to, and manage, the issue of race in research interviews flawed, wrong, or even limited by its lack of historical analysis?  What would the history be of?  Interviews?  Race?  Racism?  Academic work?  Again, what is involved in emphasising history is complex and contested.  Edwards' article provides the analysis that it offers; it is not clear that it ought to be providing a different kind of analysis.

Hook has described in abstract terms what might be involved in a critical, genealogical form of discourse analysis developed from Foucault's work.  It promises to be something valuable and even exciting.  Currently its promise is not fleshed out with any analysis of historical, material, knowledge domains that would clarify the practical meaning

of a range of highly abstracted notions.  For example, what kind of thing is the 'dissipation of the object', which is nonetheless 'material'?  Only the loosest of mentions is made to actual studies that might be working in this way.  At the same time, the quite substantial critical claims about alternative discourse approaches are not substantiated with a single example from any of the potential traditions of discourse work that might appear in this journal. Foucault's own critique of alternative discourse work was published in 1971 (Hook cites a reprint), and was directed at a prior and rather different set of traditions to the mix of conversation analysis, discourse analysis, discursive psychology and critical discourse analysis found in contemporary qualitative psychology.  Nevertheless, Hook's project is an important one and worth pursuing.

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