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Wandering along the Moebius strip: Radical reflexivity in the archaeology of educational research

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educational research, discourse analysis, history of the human sciences, philosophy of the human sciences

ABSTRACT

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Writing qualitative research texts often involves the acknowledgement of the researcher being imbued in the systems of meaning that he or she is studying. This provides a background for incitement to reflexivity, i.e. how one's own life history and broader cultural context is etched in epistemological and ontological assumptions about the object. This article studies the reflexive style of writing in Michel Foucault's archaeology of the human sciences, which constantly problematises its own assumptions about studying discourses. His style is described with the analogy of a Moebius strip, highlighting the way the 'outside' history of the human sciences turns into the 'inside' conditions of possibility for analysing discursive formations in the history of educational research.

Introduction

It is quite common in qualitative research methodologies to position the researcher as inseparable from her research object; to highlight that her own being is in many ways immersed in, affected by and affecting the systems of meaning he or she is studying. The researcher is not, in other words, a detached observer surveying the object at a distance. In gender studies, for instance, the researcher may be

expected to reflect on his or her own 'standpoint', i.e. on how his or her own conceptions of gender (acquired by his or her scholarship as well as his or her cultural background) affect the way he or she formulates the research topic. This entails the possibility for the reader to critically assess the broader horizons in which the aims, objects and significance of the study are being framed.

One plane among others where this reflexivity is exercised are Foucauldian analyses of scientific discourses. Instead of focusing on quiddities ('What is the Foucauldian definition of discursive formation?') and methodological questions ('How to do Foucauldian discourse analysis?'), I argue that Foucauldian archaeology can be seen as a style of writing in which the epistemological foundations of research are problematised and destabilised. In this article, I engage with the analogue of reflexivity as a movement in the Moebius strip, a topological plane where the outside and the inside flow seamlessly into one another. Using my own research in the history of educational research as a case example, I describe how the object of study (the 'outside') surreptitiously turns into my own methodological frameworks of doing discursive analysis in educational research – which in turn affects the way in which data is organised and is assumed to have informative value. I seek to point out that when taken to its conclusion, this movement amounts to a radical reflexivity¹ that destabilises the methodological constants of Foucauldian discourse analysis itself.

First, I describe the problematique of reflexivity in qualitative educational research and then argue that in Foucault's early works, one can find a reflexive form of writing about the history of the human sciences as discursive formations. I will then bring these points to bear in a description of my own writing on the history of educational research.

Reflexivity in Qualitative Research

For decades now, reflexivity has been a stable notion in qualitative methodologies within the social sciences and educational research. This term refers to conventions and norms in texts on qualitative methodology that examine how the observing and interpreting subject is 'positioned' vis-à-vis his or her object of study and how the context affects his or her interpretation and knowledge thereby constructed (Pillow, 2003). This means that the universalised knowing subject, gazing as if from nowhere, is repudiated as an unsubstantiated epistemological fiction.

¹ I use this concept with a meaning similar to Caputo's (2001) term radical hermeneutics.

Therefore, it is not uncommon to find textbooks on qualitative methodology highlighting that identity, life history and broader cultural contexts constitute a 'standpoint'² that delimits the way in which order and meaning are extracted from data (see, e.g. Jones, Torres and Arminio, 2013: 40–41; Marshall, Grossman, 2014; Merriam, Tisdell, 2015, 147–149; Scheurich, 2002).

When supervising theses in education, where such ideas of reflexivity are to be adopted, I have observed a potential pitfall in the process of academic writing. The challenge of reflexivity may sometimes be compartmentalised into a separate subchapter in a research report, and the problematisation of the way in which one's own 'standpoint' is involved in, e.g. data interpretation may be left unaddressed (see also Pillow, 2003; Sriprakash, Mukhopadhyay, 2015). In extreme cases, this may assume an almost mechanical form of going through the motions of qualitative research writing by, e.g. briefly mentioning that one is writing as a white, middle class heterosexual female, and after mentioning these qualifications the theme of methodological reflexivity is left at that. Therefore, it may be difficult to discern just how this 'standpoint' is reflected in the way one acquires data, identifies discourses and how these can or should be destabilised or interrupted in the research process report. In the case of such compartmentalisation, the researcher may inadvertently let on that she is transparent to herself, knowing exactly how her conceptions about gender, for instance, affect her analysis. This implicitly presupposes just that which many qualitative methodologies seek to deconstruct: the detached observer who is neutrally monitoring his or her own relationship with the systems of meaning that he or she is inhabiting and analysing.

Recent discussions in so-called post-qualitative methodology have re-galvanised the question of the relationship with the researcher and her object and tackled the challenge of respecting the irreducible complexity and obscurity of the entanglement between the researcher and his or her object in terms of academic writing style. This is discernible in the dialogical and deconstructive ways of writing that are currently being experimented with and highlight the always unfinished and unstable nature of interpreting qualitative data (see, e.g. Freeman et al., 2007; Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013). Eva Bendix Petersen (2015), for example, has inserted different voices or alter egos into her writing, challenging and destabilising her own arguments and pointing to the margins and shadows left outside her interpretations. This writing style has the effect of destabilising notions of the research subject that speaks with a singular 'voice' or inhabits a nodal 'standpoint'

² This is a concept used especially in feminist qualitative methodology. The most prominent arguments in standpoint theories are covered in Harding (2004; see also, e.g. Henwood, Pidgeon, 1995; Lather, 1991; Olesen 2011).

from which thoughts, observations and interpretations emanate. Moreover, it also constantly challenges epistemological assumptions, noting that evidence and data are not just 'given' but constructed, always renegotiable interpretations.³

Foucauldian style of archaeology

Michel Foucault (1924–1984), French historian and philosopher, has since his untimely death, assumed the position of a classic in the field of human sciences. In particular, his works on the genealogy of power, as analysed in *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*, are frequently used in studying the forms and functions of power in modern society.

In educational research, Foucauldian approaches have gained prominence, especially in educational policy studies in the form of analyses of governmentality. While assuming the position of a classic, Foucauldian ideas seem to have been somewhat 'normalised'. Bernadette Baker (2007a) argues that while Foucault's works are impossible to neglect in discussions of power and governance in education, certain concepts like discourse, power/knowledge episteme, governmentality and methodological approaches like archaeology and genealogy are sometimes rigidified, i.e. assumed to have solid, unproblematic meanings. Now, this may not be an issue when introducing Foucault's work to students new to his work. To be sure, there is an expanding genre of useful introductions to Foucault's thought in education, where his ideas and concepts are made easily approachable. However, it becomes highly problematic if the 'Foucauldian approach' becomes a monolith that inhibits the generation of novel approaches to educational research. If Foucault's works are to be relevant in the future, they must be kept from solidifying too much into methodological checklists and rigid concepts (see also Baker & Heyning, 2004).

Foucault's own writing is slippery enough to resist easy reification into methodological recipes of, e.g. discourse analysis. Especially in his texts on the history of the human sciences, one is hard pressed to find a 'method' regarding how Foucault studies scientific discourses. To be sure, he wrote a methodological tome, the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L'archéologie du savoir* 1969) to limn the traces of his archaeological approach in his earlier books. In this book, he defines discursive formations as distinct groups of statements that share common functions as to their objects, subject positions, fields of emergence and structures of argumenta-

³ Petersen (2016) suggests the use of the term 'capta' – the captured or picked up – instead of 'data', the received, highlighting the active role of the researcher in constructing evidence.

tion (Foucault, 2002: 130–131). Discursive formations operate as the historically changing conditions of possibility for knowledge in the human sciences, that is, they enable scientific statements to have a truth value (ibid). However, the *Archaeology of Knowledge* is notoriously reluctant about revealing any simple ‘method’ of studying discursive formations. The book is rather a catalogue of ideas and heuristical devices (cf. Heikkinen, Simola, 1999),⁴ and then there is the famous vexed denial in the very introduction to the book:

Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write. (Foucault, 2002, 19; cf. Foucault, 2006: xxxviii)

Not that this has kept philosophers of science from trying to ferret out a system or method from what he is writing – witness the ever expanding genre of primers on Foucauldian approaches.⁵

Yet, one can also seek to draw inspiration from a *style* rather than a *method* of archaeology. By the term style, I wish to draw attention to a way of writing and organising research text in Foucault’s archaeological works – in this case, to pose questions about the history of the human sciences and then to use historical writing as a means to problematise the very questions that fired the investigation to begin with. This reflexivity, then, is a way of intensifying epistemological paradoxes that, for other researchers, might seem like obstacles or dead ends (Baker 2007b; 2008). While there is a plethora of influential accounts of how Foucault’s approach has deeply problematised many existing approaches to the history and philosophy of the human sciences (see e.g. Canguilhem, 2006; Hacking, 2002; Veyne, 1997.), Foucault’s radically reflexive style has been a somewhat marginal topic in methodological discussions of educational research.

In the hermeneutic tradition of the philosophy of the human sciences, it is quite common to describe the research process as a hermeneutic circle in which the researcher’s expectations (or the horizon of meaning) delimit how data is interpreted while, at the same time, data can mold or disrupt these expectations.⁶ While Foucault (2003) himself stringently dissociates his archaeology of discursive for-

⁴ In his inaugural lecture, the *Order of Discourse* (1981) Foucault defines different, more straightforward outlines for identifying discourses.

⁵ This does not mean that there are no serious and in-depth critical assessments of Foucault’s methodology. For high quality commentaries and criticisms of Foucault’s archaeology of the human sciences, see, e.g. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1981), Gutting (1989), Han (2002) and Kusch (1991).

⁶ In the philosophy of human sciences, a hermeneutic circle was made known especially by Hans-Georg Gadamer (see Debesay, Nåden, & Slettebø, 2008).

mations from the hermeneutic tradition, John Caputo has characterised Foucault's approach to the history of the human sciences as 'radical hermeneutics' whereby the epistemic and ontological fundamentals of historical research are problematised through historical investigation itself (Caputo 2001). Instead of a hermeneutic circle, one might think of an *ouroboros*, a mythic beast that constantly eats away its own tail.

Reflexive style in the *History of Madness and the Order of Things*

This reflexive movement can be discerned particularly well in Foucault's two major works on the archaeological period, *History of Madness (Folie et Dérison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, 1961)* and the *Order of Things (Les Mots et les Choses, 1966)*. In the first of these, Foucault studies the emergence of the scientific discourse of mental illness. His argumentation reveals a discursive split between reason and unreason, which operates as a condition of possibility for a positive discourse of mental illnesses. For psy-discourses (i.e. discourses with the prefix 'psy', such as psychiatry and psychology) to be the truth of human existence, they have to somehow insulate themselves from the domain of the disorderly and the non-discursive on which they surreptitiously stand – the domain which is then named madness. In other words, there is a decisive caesura between reason and unreason that makes psychological knowledge possible (Foucault, 2006: xxviii–xxxiii). In this relation, madness is silenced, or it is able to speak only in a distorted form through the censorship of scientific discourse, which observes, classifies and diagnoses its forms (ibid.: xxviii; Caputo, 2001: 18–19). This is the 'madness of reason', the un-scientific and non-rational ground on which the scientific discourse of mental illness stands (Foucault, 2006).

Caputo argues that these discursive strategies also resonate in the present; as psychology remains a tragically unreflective form of discourse, it cannot examine the non-scientific epistemic and ontological grounds of its own existence. Psychological discourses constantly mark out an external area as unscientific and unreasonable, without acknowledging how this secession itself constitutes its own positivity (Caputo, 2001).

Yet there is more to the Foucauldian critique of psy discourses. Foucault not only criticises psy discourses but also ends up problematising the very possibilities of writing a history of madness. Granted, in certain passages of the book, Foucault seems to endorse the possibility of a discourse that captures the authentic, pristine form of madness before it is mangled and distorted by psychological discourses

and institutions (Caputo, 2001: 25).⁷ However, he also acknowledges that in studying madness, historical writing enters 'an uncomfortable region', its own 'limit' (Foucault, 2006: xxvii, xxix–xxx). As an academic text, historical writing remains on the side of the reason-unreason binary. Historical knowledge, too, requires a similar founding gesture whereby it marks its own outside – an area of an indistinguishable 'murmur' (ibid. p. xxxxi) from which historical meaning and facts are then extracted. Because of this scission, it is impossible to capture any 'authentic' form of unreason untarnished by scientific discourse. It is only in this manner that the history of madness can begin to speak through discourse, by silencing that which is its outside object.

Therefore, Foucault's approach here does not open up to any 'qualitative' approach that would finally reveal the heretofore obscured, natural forms of madness. After all, that would only align Foucault with the psy discourses he is critically studying. It would also make his approach indistinguishable from some of the most naïve methodologies among qualitative research, which are oblivious to how the act of 'empowering' and 'giving voice' to what has been thus far silenced is also a discursive strategy that delimits how, what and when this voice can emerge (see also Baker, 1998; Scott, 1992).

In the *Order of Things* (2002), his breakthrough into French philosophical pantheon, Foucault studies the discourses that operate as the historical condition of possibility for the human sciences. The wide discursive stratum, the episteme, governing the modern human sciences is structured along the lines of 'Man' (sic) as a knowing subject and an object of knowledge. These condition the possibilities of representation in a circular fashion. The representations of Man as the knowing subject are founded in the context of Man as an object of representations, and vice versa. In the modern episteme, then, there is a reflexive movement towards trying to represent representation – to make Man transparent to himself and to gain a firm ground for empirical knowledge. However, to start with, this is impossible: were the contexts of representations to be represented in discourse, for instance, in revealing how representations of classical economics are governed by a culturally specific idea of a *homo economicus*, these critical discourses would themselves always be founded on a context outside of representation and so on and so forth (Foucault, 2002).

Moreover, the knowledge and objects of the human sciences are constituted in the modern episteme as thoroughly historical. For instance, the objects of the

⁷ This issue was also at stake, *inter alia*, in the famous dispute between Derrida and Foucault. See Custer, Deutscher and Haddad (2016).

social sciences (value systems, ideologies, social structures) are understood as historically changing. Yet, as the knowing subject (a researcher) is a part of society, his or her representations must also be indelibly etched in historically changing ideologies. As this circularity remains unacknowledged, knowledge in the human sciences is doomed to stick to the critical task of trying to reveal the firm conditions of objective knowledge about human existence.

This structure of Man as the subject and object of knowledge, Foucault sees, is about to unravel, and he positions himself as standing on shifting ground (Foucault, 2002: xxiv). At the end of the book, we find his famous declaration that Man is like a face drawn in the sand on the edge of the sea, soon to be effaced with the rising tide (*ibid.* p. 422). This results in a radically reflexive movement. Foucault sees himself closing in on that point where the contingency of his own writing upon that which he is studying starts to emerge. He approaches the historical emergence of structuralism and the discursive conditions of possibility for formulating the problems he himself addresses in his book. It is therefore not surprising that Foucault originally proposed ‘an archaeology of structuralism’ as a subtitle to his book. It might be called anti-history, or anti-science, in the sense that it uses the conventions of science to question the possibility of an objective description of human existence (cf. O’Farrell, 1989: 36–37).

This reflexivity can also be called a ‘limit attitude’ or a ‘transgressive’ movement (Foucault 1994a, 632; Foucault 1994b). While acknowledging that it is impossible to represent the conditions of possibility for the language Foucault himself uses to discuss, e.g. the history of madness, this ‘hollowed out void’ (Foucault, 2006: xxix) can be approached or encircled in a style of writing, using historical data that deliberately loosens and weakens the effect of historiographical discourse as a neutral, scientific representation that gives voice to madness (Foucault, 2006: xxxiv–xxxv). A limit attitude, therefore, does not mean a transgression of limits as moving from oppression to emancipation or from error to a deep truth about human existence. As Gert Biesta (2014: 74–75) notes, ‘there is nothing to learn about our true human existence because, if we follow Foucault, we have to give up the idea that there is one single true human existence’.

The Moebius Strip

As a way of tying together the threads of the previous sections on Foucauldian archaeology, I suggest that Foucault’s style may inspire an approach to writing about discourse analysis that could be described with the analogy of a Moebius

strip. This is a topological plane with only one surface. It can be easily constructed by taking a strip of paper, twisting the other end 180 degrees and then pasting the ends of the strip together. Following this, you can take a pen and draw a line lengthwise. As you continue drawing this line, you notice that the pen ends up on the reverse side of the starting point without even raising it from the paper. Here, I liken this movement to the style of doing the history of the human sciences where the analysis of discourses past leads the researcher towards questioning his or her own present and the 'standpoints' from which he or she is writing.

This movement leads to *aporias* whereby the researcher no longer has a solid epistemological ground on which to stand. While this might look like a failure, I argue that this might also be read as an opening for new kinds of critical thought. Caputo (2001) argues that acknowledging this tension and feeding on it constitutes a 'night of truth', a concept borrowed from mysticism. When we arrive at this point in research, we lose all positive descriptions of our objects as well as ourselves as subjects. Baker (2008), also taking her point of departure from *History of Madness* and mysticism, calls this an 'apophatic' style of writing: it affirms *and* then negates its own claims.

The use of phrases borrowed from mysticism to characterise Foucauldian archaeology might seem a bit farfetched at first. Yet when reading Foucault's own writing in *History of Madness*, one cannot avoid the use of terms like 'void', 'nothingness', and 'absence' (Foucault, 2006: xxxi, xxxiii; Foucault, 1994a), which employ registers of negativity as the inverse side of positive discourses of mental illness. In this movement, a researcher is constantly 'speaking away' his or her object of study, avoiding saying anything final or positive about human existence and the discourses that seek to capture it (Baker, 2008). Madness, for example, is not an 'it' at all, but an index of the tension between the positive discourse about an object and the 'silence' that surrounds it.⁸

This also poses a double challenge to studying discourses in education. First, there is the Foucauldian call that is often used in critical educational research to 'always historicize!' (Peters, 2007: 51) and to study how scientific discourses delimit the manner in which educational phenomena, problems and aims can be thought about and acted on. Nevertheless, historicisation must also involve asking what this historicising does to us – how it governs us and our own truths, including the very conditions that give sense to the imperative to historicise (cf. Hacking, 2002: 4). For postmodern historian Keith Jenkins (2005: 12),

⁸ Foucault (2006: xxviii) writes: 'My intention was not to write a history of that language (of psychiatry), but rather draw up the archaeology of that silence.'

the historian is, inescapably, *always part of the picture of the historical past he or she paints*. And there is no need to worry about this radical subjectivity, nor about the collapse of the old subject–object distinction so central to western philosophy and culture. For surely we are now mature enough to recognize that what passes for ‘objectivity’ is only ever ‘subjects’, objectifying.

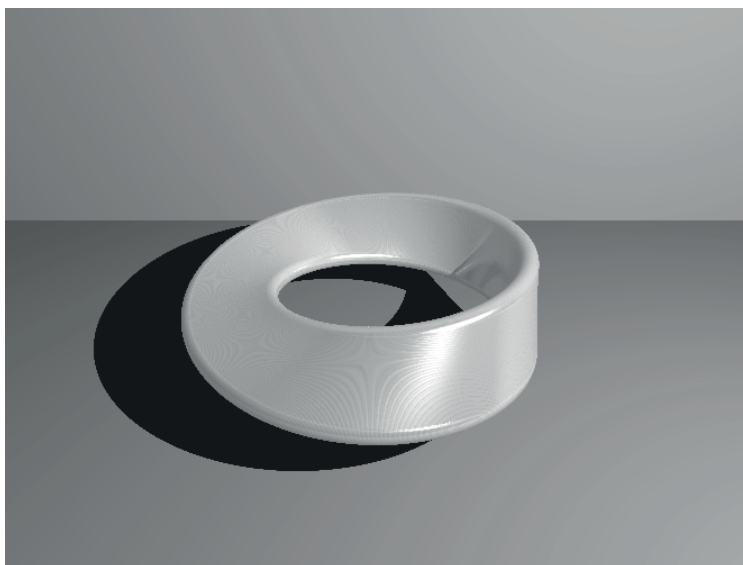


Fig. 1. Moebius strip (source: Wikimedia commons)

In the remaining sections of this article, I will try to provide an example of how this reflexivity may operate in the field of education, in particular, the history of educational research. As an example, I will use my own study of the history of educational research, in which I sought to destabilise the scission between the ‘old’ positivistic methodology and the contemporary qualitative methodology.

First as tragedy, then as farce: The history of Finnish educational research as a case example

In my monograph *Kasvatustieteen tiedontahto* (Engl. *Educational Research and the Will to Knowledge*, 2011), I sought to write a ‘critical history’ of Finnish educational research from 1880 to 1980. What sparked my interest in studying the history of the discipline was an oft-repeated concern over its a-historical nature. It seemed that Finnish educational research discourses rarely make explicit references to the history

of the discipline (Arola, 2012).⁹ The rare references to this history often have a rather sour flavour. In both the Finnish and wider international discourses of qualitative methodology, for example, educational research until the 1980s was often dubbed as 'positivistic'. This is a vague and highly pejorative term that refers to the hegemony of statistical methods and naturalistic ontologies in the field (Saari, 2016).¹⁰ For instance, it is often stated that in the 1960s and 1970s, most Finnish journal articles and theses in Finnish educational research employed factor analysis, and almost no space was given to alternative methodological approaches (Kivirauma, 1998). Naturalistic ontologies are said to have been present in the narrow 'behaviouristic' theories of learning and development widely applied in Finland at the same time.

In wider critiques of the epistemological foundations of educational research, positivism is labelled as decontextualised from the complex reality of education and, therefore, a reductionist and even 'naive' form of empiricism (see e.g. Kincheloe, Tobin, 2009; Scott, 1996). When applied to educational practice, this results in a 'culture of positivism' (Giroux, 1979; 2007) whereby teaching assumes a rather mechanistic view. Just as educational research is modelled on the natural sciences (e.g. medical or engineering sciences), teaching in positivist discourses is easily compared to the professions of an engineer or a doctor (see e.g. Carr, Kemmis, 1986: 56–57, 60–72; see also Lagemann, 2000; Taubman, 2009).

Thus, having constructed the opponent, it is easy to introduce qualitative methods as a welcome antidote – as an array of 'holistic' approaches to gathering and analysing data that are better able to account for the 'experiences' and individual 'meaning-making' of those examined through interviews or observation.¹¹ The qualitative turn took place in Finland in the late 1980s (Ahonen, 1998). When applied to teaching practice, qualitative studies of education cultivated an understanding of the multiple cultural and ideological frameworks of education and autonomous deliberation and action.¹² This turn to a qualitative methodology played

⁹ Similar concerns have also been expressed in US educational research (see, e.g. Lagemann, 2000).

¹⁰ The term positivism has assumed a plethora of meanings in the history of social sciences and philosophy. In his study on the history of positivism, Peter Halfpenny (1982) found altogether twelve distinct definitions for positivism.

¹¹ These binaries are not typical of educational research only, but can also be discerned in wider discourses of social research (Oakley, 2000).

¹² Although the point cannot be sufficiently rehearsed within the confines of this article, these critiques were not only presented in discourses that labeled themselves as decidedly 'qualitative'. Various theoretical and research traditions as different as Anglo-American curriculum studies (Autio, 2006) and German critical-constructive Didaktik (Klafki, 1998) to critical pedagogy (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009) and action research (Kemmis, Carr, 1986) have made arguments that converge around the critique of a mechanistic, seemingly value-free vision of empirical knowledge and its application

a significant role in opening the way to many post-approaches (post-structuralism, post-humanism) that questioned taken-for-granted epistemological and ontological truths of educational research. It is in this space that different discourse analytic methodologies could also gain a significant position in Finnish educational research (see Heikkinen, Huttunen, Niglas, Tynjälä, 2006).

While there certainly is credibility to these critiques of positivism, they also entail the risk of blinding methodological discussion in the present to its antecedents in the past, and the epistemic strategies – especially ways of championing the role of empirical knowledge in governing education – may be unwittingly repeated *vis-à-vis* positivism. A study of the discourses of Finnish educational research in the allegedly positivistic era revealed a more nuanced history than just a decisive break between quantitative and qualitative research paradigms.

It is true that empirical discourses of education emerged in the early twentieth century and gained traction after World War II. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Finnish educational research tradition highlighted quantitative research methods more so than most other countries in Europe. Yet the arguments for such empirical methods were at a more general level, surprisingly similar to some of the later qualitative categories that had supposedly shed the positivist straitjacket. First of all, there was a decisive scission with the pedagogy of the past and those of the present and future. The old forms of pedagogy allegedly consisted of ‘speculation’ and ‘metaphysics’, which was to be replaced with ‘systematic observation’ and ‘factual knowledge. The discourses of the early twentieth century’s empirical educational research insisted that a radically new kind of pedagogical knowledge – the kind based on systematic observation and measurement instead of rational thinking by the philosopher’s writing desk – could reveal the multifaceted reality of schools and child development that the previous approaches, based on tradition or speculative knowledge, could not. Whereas the preceding pedagogy allegedly imposed norms and standards from outside and above, the new science of education enabled teachers to know their pupils’ natural strengths and limitations and to adjust teaching to the ‘inner laws’ of psychological and physical development. (Saari 2016, pp. 121–124.) This caesura between the past and the present could only be declared, and its feasibility assessed from within the discourse that had already set the conditions for objective knowledge.

of educational practice that narrows the language and thought of education, reduces the inherent complexity of educational phenomena and puts practice into a Procrustean bed of predetermined methods of instruction. These have to be replaced by interpretive, historically, politically and culturally sensitive ways of empirical knowledge and its application to teaching.

Describing the past of a discipline is open to different kinds of narrative ordering, those that accentuate ruptures, revolutions or tensions as well as those highlighting stability and continuity. What I found myself engaged with were two contrasting ways of writing the history of educational research. The first, more firmly established narrative was that of the failure of positivism to capture the complex reality of education and an ensuing emancipating break towards qualitative approaches. The other story that I myself contributing to was a history of repeated secession and forgetting. This tradition, time and again, tried to break ties with the past, which was characterised by false epistemological assumptions and estrangement from the 'reality' of education.

This is reminiscent of Foucault's notion of 'repression hypotheses' (Foucault, 1980), discernible in many discourses of the human sciences. Discourses of sexuality, for example, often insist that through scientific research, sexuality has finally been liberated from centuries of repression. Whereas in the nineteenth century sexuality was allegedly smothered – it could not be freely talked about or otherwise expressed – scientific research by Freud, Reich and Kinsey, among many others, has pointed to the wide, natural variety of sexuality and paved the way for its 'free' expression. Problematising this narrative, Foucault pointed out that, actually, there was a veritable explosion of discourses about sexuality in the nineteenth century. It assumed the guise of a final truth of our own sexuality, which could then aid us in adjusting our own being to it, indicating healthy forms of desiring and locating dangerous sexual pathologies that threaten the social order and individual well-being. (Ibid.) In hindsight, it is easy to argue that these early forms of governing sexuality were highly repressive, but this begs the question: on what terms can our present scientific discourses of sexuality assume an air of ultimate liberation? Might they in the future be subjected to same kind of criticism? This repression hypothesis whereby scientific discourse renounces the past was not typical of the discourse of sexuality alone. Similarly, psychiatry has, since the age of moral treatment in the nineteenth century, changed through repeated revolutions or turns in which the old theories and forms of treatment are deemed unscientific and inhumane. (Foucault, 2006: 456–461; cf. Miller, 1986.)

In Finnish educational research, I noticed a similar repetitive discourse in which past forms of research were stringently condemned as epistemologically and morally outdated, and the empirical gaze was, time and again, trained towards the true reality of education, which enables human-centred and efficient education. This repetition is rarely noticed, however, because past discourses of educational research, which would make this repetition discernible, are by default fenced out as illegitimate reference points of contemporary research. It seems that education

as a discipline must remember to forget to keep up its legitimacy (Saari, 2016). Perhaps paying attention to this repetition would not be conducive to upholstering the epistemic status of educational research. Maybe it would even amount to pointing out a constant failure of the discipline in attaining some of its declared aims. Here, it might all too clearly underline Marx's (1852) famous dictum that history repeats itself first as tragedy, then as farce. As failure is repeated, it assumes a comical form, threatening the solemn, awe-inspiring character of objective science.

Antinomies of Data

What enabled this kind of archaeology of the discipline to be written was the analysis of educational research as discursive formations that have a thoroughly historical nature, and which are not critically analysed vis-à-vis an external reality that they should adequately represent, or universal ethical norms that they are supposed to serve. However, I felt that as a researcher, I could not pretend to be a disinterested spectator of the comedy played out in the discipline. It was here that historical writing was starting to fold back on itself.

It is not at all a given that a historian of science is separate from those discursive constellations, the formation of which he or she is examining. This led me to question my own ways of organising documents into discourses and arguing about their status as testimonies of the past of educational research. As in the past of educational research, there are discourses that organise what can and cannot be enunciated, which must be the case with my own writing.

Foucault, among other scholars during the twentieth century, has accentuated that the notion of historical evidence is wrapped around discourses of data collection and ways of linking 'events' together to form a narrative. There is nothing 'natural' about them – they are tied to other philosophical and political discourses that are themselves historically contingent (Foucault, 2003; White, 1978). Therefore, a historian of the human sciences can suddenly find him- or herself having wandered along the Moebius strip: what was first an 'outside' object of analysis has surreptitiously turned into an 'inside', into a pressing question of the history of one's own truths about the nature of scientific knowledge.

Postmodern theories of historical knowledge have claimed that historical discourses have often dealt with historical documents that supposedly represent historical 'reality' – events, experiences, ideologies – from the same era. In this, the fabricated nature of data and its givenness are often obscured (Jenkins, 2005). Michel de Certeau (1986, p. 203) writes,

(Historiographical) discourse gives itself credibility in the name of the 'reality' it is supposed to represent but this authorized appearance of the 'real' serves precisely to camouflage the very practice which in fact determines it. Representation thus disguises the praxis that organizes it.

Indeed, this history of historical 'fact' is itself indelibly etched in the history of Western academic historiography, which in the nineteenth century began to distance itself from allegedly 'speculative' and 'philosophical' forms of history. Although a more detailed account must be presented elsewhere, a candid case in point here is Leopold von Ranke's (1795–1886) famous demand to account for 'Wie es eigentlich gewesen ist' in historiography, as well as Theodor Mommsen's (1817–1903) distinction between first- and second-hand sources in historical data. These worked as incitements to gather 'authentic' data and to mute object witnesses from the era of the studied events. This heralded the age of historical archives in which documents, by virtue of their testimony of 'what actually happened', would break the spell of myths and fables. This new 'truth' about history – those rules that govern the production of knowledge about the past – functioned as a way to condemn preceding 'unscientific' history as unreliable testimonies about historical events. (Toulmin, Goodfield, 1965: 235–236; cf. Foucault 2002: 7–8.) Thus, there was also a necessary outside in historiographical discourses, something erroneous relegated to the past.

Archaeology and the French History and Philosophy of Science

This was not, however, the end of breaks in the history of historical knowledge. Where did these postmodern critiques of historical evidence themselves emerge? What discursive conditions of possibility do they have? This is where the history of the human sciences and its epistemological discourses started to catch up with the critical researcher's own conceptions of 'discourse'. While writing my book on the history of educational research, I was trying to ferret out some methodological landmarks from Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, which had for some time become a classic in discourse analysis methodology. Yet, finding a 'method' from this book proved near impossible, so I sought another approach and tried to contextualise the book in the French debates over the history and philosophy of science.

Foucault's archaeological project of the human sciences is a part of the French 'historical epistemology' of Cavailles, Bachelard and Canguilhem, which emerged from the perceived problems of French positivist philosophy of science. The press-

ing question was how to write history of science if there was no simple progress in the sciences, and no single method, but a series of upheavals and discontinuities? Moreover, how can the sciences then serve as the standard for objective knowledge, which was the stance of the ‘positivist’ philosophy of science? Peña-Guzman writes of the vexing questions in the early twentieth century history and philosophy of science:

In this new situation, philosophy is ‘pulled down’ from the lofty heights of its idealist self-understanding (where it exists as a catholic theory of all possible knowledge) and into the trenches of social life (where it can only exist as one discipline among many). And in this new world—which is our world — the surest sign that an entire age of philosophy has come to pass is the fact that philosophy’s most pressing concerns have shifted; that the problems that once served as its core points of reference have given way to a new set of problems that more accurately reflect its new social and historical conditions of actuality (Peña-Guzmán, 2016: 175).

In relation to this shift, the early twentieth century French epistemology of, e.g. Bachelard and Canguilhem abandoned the *a priori* theory of knowledge. In other words, they gave up the search for defining the universal characteristics of the knowing subject as a normative foundation of objective experience and scientific reasoning. This is not to say that there are no normative principles at all – only that they are historically changing. Subjective experience in, e.g. psychiatric observation is not just anything; it is governed by rules (ibid., p. 177).

From this, it follows that the locus of knowledge is not sought in the rational subject and his or her lived experience but, rather, on anonymous historical formations, concepts and theories, those that Foucault would later call the *historical a priori* (ibid., p. 177).¹³ This fermentation around the history of science opened up an intellectual space where the Foucauldian concept of discourse would eventually emerge, and its significance in problematising previous epistemological assumptions governing the history of ideas and the sciences could be identified.

For me, this was the key to flush out the methodological gist of Foucault’s analysis of the history of scientific research as discourses. In *Archeology of Knowledge*, one can find a stern dismissal of the history of the ideas of the early twentieth century. Foucault situates his work on the other side of a radical break in the history

¹³ See, e.g. Georges Canguilhem’s *On the Normal and the Pathological* (1978). Outside of the French epistemology circle, the anonymous practices governing the formation of scientific objects, concepts and arguments can be found in Ludwik Fleck’s classic *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (2012). Thomas S. Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, another famous work on the historical nature of scientific reasoning, was founded on Fleck’s ideas and those similar to French epistemologists (Hacking, 2002).

of historical research that seeks to get rid of the many epistemic givens of studying the past (Foucault, 2002: 4–6). According to Foucault, many new currents in French history converge around the problem of the historical ‘document’:

(...) ever since a discipline such as history has existed, documents have been used, questioned, and have given rise to questions; scholars have asked not only what these documents meant, but also whether they were telling the truth, and by what right they could claim to be doing so, whether they were sincere or deliberately misleading, well informed or ignorant, authentic or tampered with. (Foucault, 2002: 6–7)

Foucault claims that historical documents (books, letters or even buildings) were, until now, understood as traces that did not have a positive existence in themselves. Instead, they pointed to something more substantial in the past from which they emanated, and which should be interpreted or deciphered from the document (ibid.: 7–8). This was the foundation for writing the ‘total history’ of ‘civilizations’ and ‘*Zeitgeist*’ and for deciphering forms of rationality and progress in the history of ideas and the sciences. If, however, the documents are treated in their positivity as ‘monuments’, without adding anything to them and tracing them back to something that is no longer there, then a whole new form of historical writing will appear, and new ways of ordering historical data will be made possible (ibid.: 10–12). These new currents for treating data, partially intersecting with structuralist ideas, are the foundation for Foucault’s understanding of discourses (ibid.: 23–33). He insists that discourses must be reconstructed by allowing regularities between statements to appear without reducing them to an organising meaning, intention, interest or other referent. Instead, discourses are organised by functions (of subject positions, objects, modes of commentary and argumentation) rather than meanings (ibid.: 33, 119).

The Night of Truth

While situating the analysis of discourses in the context of French philosophy and the history of science was a way to better understand the ideas presented in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, I began to have doubts about whether an archaeological approach to the history of positivist educational research was epistemologically viable. What if an archaeology of educational research discourses was, *mutatis mutandis*, only a variation of a theme repeated in a previous history of understanding data and evidence in the human sciences? What if the very insistence on a break with the past history of ideas was itself only an ingenuous discursive strategy di-

recting attention away from this repetition? After all, Foucault's characterisations of identifying 'monuments' seemed to betray an insistence on that which is immediately given (i.e. the positive) in experience, without recourse to anything more substantial behind it. Was this not a variation of the 'myth of the given', so often identified in critiques of positivism? While this emerged to me as a vague doubt at first, it soon found support in significant critiques of Foucault's work.

Richard Rorty, for example, is well known for his critique of the metaphor of the mind—as a reflective mirror of the outside world—being the foundation of many dominant epistemologies, including various forms of positivism (Rorty, 1980). Rorty claims that there is also a myth of the given operating in Foucault's archaeology. Foucault treats his discourses as identifiable without any epistemological or ethical framework of interpretation (Rorty, 1981). Moreover, Jürgen Habermas, who became known, among other works, for his study of the different tacit ideologies and interests operating behind different sciences (Habermas, 1978), has also discovered an ideology behind Foucault's seemingly neutral epistemological claims. For Habermas, Foucault's archaeology sought to demystify the history of science, strip it of its guises of rationality and progress: 'Under the *stoic* gaze of the archaeologist, history hardens into an iceberg covered with the crystalline forms of arbitrary formations of discourses' (Habermas, 1987: 253, emphasis original). Here, Habermas acknowledges Foucault's critique of science, but argues that unbeknownst to himself, Foucault subscribes to ideas of empiricism and the fact-value distinction that he should be challenging.¹⁴ Foucault seeks to position himself as a neutral observer, outside of what he is studying. For Habermas, this produces an unsolvable aporia whereby the archaeologist cannot acknowledge, describe and vindicate the conditions of possibility for his own research methods (ibid.: 277–279).

Just how does this differ from the empiricist foundations of positivism that focus on what is given in experience? How does it differ from the ethos that seeks to demystify and revolutionise our thinking through empirical knowledge, relegating our unfounded ideas to the past? It became painfully clear that I did not know what I was doing. In a sense, this was akin to a night of truth, a moment of de-subjectivation, where my position as an author of my own scientific writing began to dissipate. Where does the field of the Other – the anonymous discourses about history and historical evidence – end, and the thinking, observing, classifying and writing 'I' begin? It slowly dawned on me that archaeology was a discourse of discourse, formed in another space and time, that had passed through me unchecked.

¹⁴ In the *Order of Things* (2002), he described positivist empiricism as 'pre-critical naïveté that could not critically examine its own conditions of possibility.

In the process of writing my monograph, I discovered that I had compartmentalised 'methodology' as a distinct chapter in my manuscript, separated from the 'data' it was used to analyse and from the writing subject. Now, these insulating walls were beginning to crumble, and different sections started to bleed into one another. What I considered to be an outside object of study had now turned into the inside, a pressing question over my own framework of understanding and organising data into discourses. This forced me to change the way I wrote about the discourses of empiricism in educational research. It had to be repeatedly acknowledged as both an object and a subject in the process of writing.

So, does this movement amount to a failure? What the analogy of a Moebius strip can contribute is a way of avoiding some of these dichotomies of inside and outside. This means letting go of the notion of a single 'standpoint' to be identified, or an exhaustive 'positioning' of the writing subject vis-à-vis the object, for standpoint, as a word, seems to index an identifiable origin for stating claims and their conditions of emergence. In Foucauldian reflexivity, there is also a radical undecidability to epistemic claims regarding data. It is not vouching for the possibility of absolute accuracy in representing historical 'events,' 'experiences' or 'discursive formations' of the past.

Instead, the Moebius strip points towards a style of writing in the history of the human sciences that does not seek to compartmentalise the subject and object of research into different containers and to concern itself with firmly insulating one from the other. It openly admits that the history of scientific research is being criticised by using some of its own methods. This way, it amounts to an epistemological reflexivity and undecidability by both vindicating *and* destabilising the status and value of empirical data and the position of the subject (cf. Jenkins, 2005: 12)

In light of this reflexivity, we can also understand 'What is Enlightenment?' (Qu'est-ce-que les Lumières?), one of Foucault's last texts. Here, he aligns himself with the tradition of the Enlightenment while proposing a different attitude of criticism. This attitude does not only historicise and pluralise, but also presents history to the historian and the reader as a mirror to study and question one's own present-day experience. It also means valorising open questions about human existence over fixed answers. Therefore, continuing Enlightenment thought, 'this (...) tradition of critique poses a question: What is our own present? What is the realm of possible experience?' This is what Foucault calls 'an ontology of the present, the ontology of ourselves.' (Foucault, 1994c: 587.)

One should also recall that these tenets do not mean that 'anything goes', that one form of writing about the history of educational research is just as good as any other. This would miss the point, and it would endanger a fruitful discussion with

the community of educational researchers. There are still rules and hierarchies that delimit and organise different arguments about history according to their plausibility. What is relinquished are visions of an 'ultimate foundation' to knowledge, a 'definitive closure' to the truth about past events (Jenkins, 2005: 13–14).

Concluding Remarks: The Value of Not Knowing Who and Where We Are

A 'method' of gathering and analysing qualitative data can all too easily be seen as a tool or instrument, separated from the writing subject. Discourse analysis, for example, might be easily regarded as a vehicle that gets the researcher from point A to B, thereby having no effect on the manner in which the researcher is thinking or writing. Yet, many notable methodologists and philosophers of science have spoken against this kind of methodological fetishism that directs attention away from the style and innovativeness of thinking and writing (see, for example Feyereabend, 1988; Gadamer, 1979).

The history of scientific knowledge provides an enlightening case in point for studying what is at stake in the epistemological reflexivity of academic writing. Foucault's archaeological works of the 1960s have been somewhat marginal in the mainstream educational research on, e.g. governmentality. While not providing a clear-cut recipe for conducting critical discourse analysis, they provide insights into how research can reflexively focus on and destabilise the sometimes taken-for-granted epistemological dichotomies between outside and inside, object and subject.

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