Representation, Archeology and Genealogy: Three ‘Quadrilateral’ Tools for Inquiring into Nursing Phenomena with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

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Spatialized thinking figures prominently in Foucault’s approach to philosophy and history. We will clarify what this means by adopting a novel approach to inquiring into nursing phenomena with spatial figures. We begin with Foucault’s ‘Quadrilateral of Language’ to describe how language functioned in what the French called the Classic Age. Then we turn our attention to Foucault’s ‘anthropological quadrilateral’ to explain how the function of language was ruptured by the coming of the modern period. Finally, we create a ‘genealogical quadrilateral’ to explain the methodological importance of four of Foucault’s genealogical concepts: ‘diagnoses’, ‘problematization’, ‘relations of power’, ‘and the ‘dispositif’.

Although we use the phenomena of ‘wet-nursing’ in 18th Century France and ‘advanced nursing practice discourse’ in contemporary Canada to contextualize our analysis, the ‘quadrilaterals’ we explain can be used to inquire into nursing phenomenon from the Classic Age to the present day.

Foucault was an original and creative thinker who often astonished with the audacity and provocative nature of his thought. He wrote brilliantly about history and philosophy and brought a uniquely individual style to both his writing and his lectures. Picking up a copy of any one of Foucault’s published works, or reading any one of the transcripts of his many lectures, one is struck immediately by his liberal use of spatial metaphors. Flynn (2005a) notes two of the best known examples: Foucault’s analysis of Velasquez’s Las Meninas in the first chapter of ‘The Order of Things’ (Foucault, 1966/1994), and his depiction of the Panopticon in Discipline and Punish (Foucault, 1975/1977) to reveal the self-custodial nature of modern society. However, Foucault’s prolific use of more mundane spatial metaphors has received far less attention. A reading of Foucault and Lagrange’s (2006) ‘Psychiatric power’ reveals the extent of Foucault’s
use of spatial metaphors. For example, reading ‘Psychiatric power’ from the top of page 137 to
the end of the chapter (p. 139), the following spatial metaphors stand out in Foucault’s analysis
of the relationship between early psychiatry and the asylum: "surrounding", “degrees”, “base”,
“within”, “contain”, “spread”, “source”, “down”, “blockage”, “spheres”, “dead-end”,
“underside”, “around”, “site”, “narrow” (p. 137-139).

The ‘quadrilateral’ occupies an intermediate position between Foucault’s grand spatial
metaphors (his analysis of Velasquez’s ‘Las Meninas’ and his use of the ‘Panopticon’) and his
more mundane usage of such spatial metaphors as “blockages” and “dead-ends”. Defined
gеометрически, a ‘quadrilateral’ is a polygon with four sides and four corners. The
‘Quadrilateral of Language’, which Foucault (1966/1994) used to explain how language
functioned as representation in the Classic Age is, perhaps, the best known of his intermediate
spatial metaphors. In the next section we explain how language functioned before modernity, and
illustrate Foucault’s analysis by making visible how that the noun, ‘nurse’ is derived from the
practice of ‘wet-nursing’.

The ‘Quadrilateral of Language’ and Wet-Nursing at the Vaugirard

According to Foucault, language functioned as representation from around 1650 to
approximately 1800, and he used four theories of language; the theory of the proposition; the
theory of articulation; the theory of designation; and the theory of derivation to explain what he
meant by representation (Foucault, 1966/1994). Foucault conceptualized his four theories of
language; the proposition, articulation, designation, and derivation by positioning them at the
four corners of a quadrilateral. At the center of the ‘quadrilateral of language’ where the
diagonals crossed Foucault (1966/1994) placed the ‘Name’ to emphasize the central importance
of the ‘noun’ (or concept) in representation (Figure 1). According to Foucault (1966/1994)
nouns were used in the *Classic Age* to identify individual things, and in particular, abstract ideas. As such, the function of the ‘Name’ in representation was to denote a definite object of thought: a person, an animal, a plant, an inanimate object, a place, an idea, an ‘anything in particular’ (the specific thing in existence or abstract concept depicted by the noun). However, of particular relevance in this explanation is how the noun changes over time. For example, the noun 'nurse' commonly used today to refer to a person who cares for the sick is derived from the word ‘nurrice’, which in twelfth century French was used to denote a ‘foster-mother’, ‘wet-nurse’ or ‘nanny’ (Klein, 1971). The ‘nurrice’ or ‘wet-nurse’ was a disreputable and controversial figure in France before and throughout the eighteenth century (Senior, 1983).

*Figure 1. Foucault’s quadrilateral of language*
The Theory of the Proposition

Foucault (1966/1994) explained that the reason language exists at all is by virtue of the proposition and the implicit presence of the verb ‘to be’. Without these components, language could not be anything but a collection of signs. Thus, if there is to be a proposition, there must be a verb. Foucault, (1966/1994) states that “the verb is the indispensable condition for all discourse and wherever it does not exist, at least by implication, it is not possible to say that there is language” (p. 93).

Whether explicit or implicit, the verb ‘to be’ provides language with relations of “identity or difference” (Foucault, 1966/1994, p.119), without which we could not speak. For example, the proposition, ‘The French government opened the Vaugirard Hospital in 1780 to find a cure for congenital syphilis’ (Sherwood, 2010) brings out the difference between what the French government did (opened a hospital) and a purpose (to find a cure for syphilis).

Foucault (1966/1994) describes the proposition as the “most general and the most elementary” (p. 92) form of language. He goes on to explain that when words stand alone, there is no discourse, because what we encounter are only the elements of discourse. The words ‘hospital’ and ‘syphilis’ for example, both mean something, but they lack significance when used alone. ‘Significance’ can be conveyed only by combining the elements of language in meaningful ways (Foucault, 1966/1994). For example, a cure for syphilis could only be predicated on the opening of the Vaugirard Hospital when the elements of language that made up subject and predicate were combined in a proposition. For Foucault (1966/1994) all such expressions are “pure and empty” (p. 115) until they are articulated.

The Theory of Articulation
In Foucault’s (1966/1994) in-depth consideration of the origins of language and tells us “in the beginning Man emitted only simple cries, but these did not begin to be language until they contained – if only within their monosyllable – a relation that was of the order of a *proposition*” (p. 92). Therefore, what raises a word above a mere sound is the “*proposition* concealed within it” (Foucault, 1994, p.92). Here Foucault wants us to understand a *proposition* as a representation of a subjective perception; a perception that remains a thought until it is expressed in words, that is, until it is articulated. *Articulation* is the most superficial and most apparent form of language. However, the significance of a *proposition* depends completely on the complex relations of meaning through which language functions to represent thoughts and their content. Moreover, the meaning of a thought (its *designation*) depends as much on its context as its content.

**The Theory of Designation**

Foucault (1966/1994) argues that ‘Man’ has the capacity to communicate his needs and his feelings through gesture, facial expression, and simple inarticulate cries or sounds. The cry of a baby, for example, is a universal sign of hunger. However, cries and simple gestures have no capacity to speak. Therefore, language comes into being only when it detaches itself from the sign that signals its function as representation (Foucault, 1966/1994). For example, the word ‘*hunger*’, as used in English to denote the desire that comes from the need for food, is sometimes used independently of the condition it names. For someone to say ‘h-u-n-g-e-r’ spells hunger’ is not to say that anyone in particular is hungry. Another important element in the application of the theory of *designation* and its ‘*language of action*’ is what Foucault (1966/1994) calls “the theory of roots” (p104.)

**Designation and the ‘theory of roots’**
Roots are the rudimentary sounds and the pre-linguistic gestures from which language evolved (Foucault, 1966/1994). Over time their use becomes conventional and constitutes a “treasury of vocables” (Foucault, 1994, p. 107); that is, words in a wide variety of forms that continue to evolve over time. The language of action in Classic Age France functioned within this ‘treasury of vocables’ to represent the opening of the Vaugirard as both a step towards a cure for syphilis and as a solution to the immorality of the ‘wet-nurse’ (Sherwood, 2010).

The Theory of Derivation

Foucault’s (1966/1994) theory of derivation represents “the continuous movement of words from their source of origin” (p. 115). That is, at some point “the name became attached to a single element of the thing, and became applicable to all the other individual things that later contained that element” (Foucault, 1994, p.113). Therefore, what was meant by the noun ‘wet nurse’ in twelfth century France took on a new meaning as physicians at the Vaugirard gave mercury to ‘wet-nurses’ and used their breastmilk to treat infants with congenital syphilis. ‘Wet-nurses’ with syphilis were purposely recruited to the hospital for this purpose (Sherwood, 2010). When the ‘treatment’ failed and the Vaugirard was closed, due to high infant mortality, physicians helped families to recruit healthy ‘wet-nurses’ to ‘treat’ congenital syphilis in the home. The unsuspecting wet-nurses were given mercury under the ruse that the babies needed to be cured of ‘heating of the blood’ (Sherwood, 2010). Foucault (1994) implies that such derivation is responsible for the “slipping that occurs on the surface of representation…” (p. 115). For Foucault, slippage occurs as words are used in ways far removed from what they were originally intended to designate. Thus, Foucault’s theory of derivation describes the various extensions in the uses of a word, that is, the rolling out and unfolding of meanings that expand and contract in usage over time.
The three great figures

*Derivation* begins when ‘a name’ that is attached to ‘a something’ is applied differently over time and is used to refer to everything and anything the ‘name’ (word) comes to denote and connote. *Derivation* can therefore be recognized in the three great figures of rhetoric: *synecdoche, metonymy and catachresis* (Foucault, 1966/1994). For example, the rhetoric that convinced the French government to open the Vaugirard had two persuasive elements: the humoral theory of healing that legitimized the belief that mercury cures syphilis by expelling debilitating humors; and the employment of impoverished women to reduce prostitution while improving the survival of babies with congenital syphilis (Sherwood, 2010). Hence, it was possible for the name ‘Vaugirard’ to function at first as a symbol of medical progress, and later as a synonym for death as soaring infant mortality forced its closure (*synecdoche*). At the time, ‘ignorant; ‘impoverished’, ‘inferior’, ‘immoral’, and ‘mercenary syphilitic’, were all connotations of ‘wet-nurse’ (*metonymy*). Life at the Vaugirard for the wet-nurses was deplorable (Sherwood, 2010) and many ‘went over the wall’ after being ‘led up the garden path’ by the prospect of improving their lives (*catachresis* or mixed metaphor).

For Foucault (1994) it is by:

…the nervure laid down by these figures that those languages paralleled with a symbolic form of writing will be able to evolve. They become endowed, little by little, with poetic powers; their primary nominations become the starting points for long metaphors; these metaphors become progressively more complicated, and are soon so far from their points of origin that it is difficult to recall them (p. 111).
The Diagonals of the ‘Quadrilateral of Language’

After explaining each of his four theories of language, Foucault (1966/1994) also considered their relationships in pairs; first, the *proposition* and *articulation*; then *designation* and *derivation*. He explains that when articulated, a *proposition* serves to oppose as well as to link the subject and the object. The statement ‘*Wet-nurses at the ‘Vaugirard’ breastfed other women’s babies to survive abject poverty*’ links *wet-nurses* at the ‘Vaugirard’, its subject, with a predicate that describes what *wet-nurses* did and why, while at the same time invoking the elements: ‘*breastfeeding*’, ‘*women*’, ‘*babies*’, ‘*survival*’, and ‘*poverty*’ that can be combined with other terms such as ‘*syphilis*’, ‘*congenital syphilis*’, ‘*mercury*’, ‘*cure*’, ‘*mortality*’, ‘*survival*’, and ‘*milk*’ in numerous ways to form new *propositions*.

Foucault (1966/1994) goes on to explain that *designation* is void of meaning without *derivation*. That is, as words are used (articulated) they designate the particular, all the while implying the general. For example, to say, ‘*the wet-nurses of the Vaugirard were exploited*’ is to refer to women with a definite function in a specific place at a particular time, while alluding to every connotation of ‘*wet-nurse*’, ‘*Vaugirard*’ and ‘*exploitation*’. *Derivation* is thus the process that describes how the meaning of words evolves and changes, very often abruptly, over time.

Foucault (1966/1994) emphasizes the importance of the diagonal relationships in his ‘*Quadrilateral of Language*’, which oppose the *proposition* and *designation*. For Foucault, words have the power to combine and break down *propositions* while functioning as substitutes for what they represent. For example, the *proposition*, ‘*The milk of a wet-nurse taking mercury cures congenital syphilis*’ combines terms in a way that can be broken down, recombined with elements in other *propositions*, and judged for truth or falsity. We turn our attention next to Foucault’s anthropological quadrilateral.
Foucault’s ‘Anthropological Quadrilateral’

Foucault (1966/1994) explains that the functions of language shifted abruptly around the beginning of the nineteenth century. For him, the philosophy of Kant (1724-1804) implied a mutation in language from representation to an anonymous archaeological system. According to Foucault (1966/1994) this shift radically changed possibilities for knowledge. In the Classic Age language was self-referential in that the names (nouns) attached by convention to objects, stood in for them in the contents of thought. There was no requirement that the names should resemble the objects they represented. Neither was it necessary for the objects represented to actually exist. For example, physicians used the term, ‘heated blood’ as a convenient and deliberately misleading fiction.

Knowledge depended on the representational function of language in the Classic Age, whereas after the publication of Kant’s ‘Critique of pure reason’ (Kant, Guyer, & Wood, 1781/1998) even the possibility of knowledge depended on the transcendental functions of an epistemologically active subject. Accordingly, representation gave way to evolution and history as the explanation for why "a people thinks and acts in a particular way" (Switala, 1997, p. 167). Foucault’s (1966/1994) purpose in describing this shift was to rethink the relationship between language and being by equating both with human history. What this means is that the displacement of the ‘Quadrilateral of Language’ freed language from its union with representation, thereby allowing it to function more autonomously.

Foucault (1966/1994) deployed, an anthropological quadrilateral to explain the four radically new functions that were ushered in with the Modern Age: (Figure 2). At the corners of his anthropological quadrilateral he placed the empirico-transcendental subject, the cogito and the unthought, the ever-elusive origin, and the analytic of finitude. At the center of this
quadrilateral, Foucault (1966/1994) replaced the ‘Name’ of the ‘Quadrilateral of Language’ with ‘Man’ (sic).

_Figure 2. Foucault’s anthropological quadrilateral_

Foucault (1966/1994) describes ‘Man’ as a strange _empirico-transcendental doublet_ such that the possibilities for _his_ empirical knowledge are governed by evolution, history and language in ways that cannot be brought to consciousness because they are beyond the limits of human experience. Therefore, ‘Man’ is both the _source_ of all language, action, and knowledge, but remains forever cut-off from his origins because all that preceded him is irretrievably inaccessible (_analytic of finitude_). For example, the evolution of the mammalian nervous system, on which all empirical knowledge depends, is irrecoverable in experience, but can be described from the perspective of the biological sciences. Only by bringing _him_ within the scope of the
empiricism of the human sciences is it possible to have knowledge of ‘Man’, but such knowledge is radically incomplete because it is artificially torn away from the subjectivity that made it possible (ever-elusive origin). Although ‘Man’ seeks self-knowledge (the cogito and the unthought), his thoughts are governed by the epistemological possibilities of the historically contingent episteme that limits them. Therefore, Foucault (1966/1994) asks, how ‘Man’ can:

…be the subject of language that for thousands of years has been formed without him, a language whose organization escapes him, whose meaning sleeps an almost invincible sleep in the words he momentarily activates by means of discourse, and within which he is obliged, from the very outset, to lodge his speech and thought as though they were doing no more than animate, for a brief period, one segment of that web of innumerable possibilities? The human subject seeks self-knowledge, but such knowledge can only elude him. In the act of speaking, the subject participates in a discourse that he does not create, but how he does this is forever beyond his understanding (p. 323).

The anthropological quadrilateral is the foundation of Foucault's archaeological studies. In these studies, Foucault (1961/2006, 1963/1975, 1966/1994, 1969/1972) shows how certain statements emerge to marginalize others according to historically conditioned rules. Such rules constitute the anonymous ensemble of relations that maintain and transform a system through which language rather than the subject speaks. For Foucault (1966/1994), each anonymous ensemble of relations constitutes an archive that functions through the rules that produce concepts, operations, and objects in a particular style. Rules of formation, transformation, and correlation determine what concepts can be used, how the meaning of concepts can change, and how one archive differs from other archives.
For example, the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) (2008) defines advanced nursing practice as:

…an advanced level of clinical nursing practice that maximizes the use of graduate educational preparation, in-depth nursing knowledge and expertise in meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations. It involves analyzing and synthesizing knowledge; understanding, interpreting and applying nursing theory and research; and developing and advancing nursing knowledge and the profession as a whole (p. 10).

An implicit rule of formation is used in the above definition in that advanced nursing practice is founded on graduate education. Hidden rules of transformation underpin the assertion that it is educational preparation that transforms regular practice into advanced practice. Embedded rules of correlation link advanced practice to particular cognitive processes, distinctive knowledge, and the conception of nursing as a profession. More obviously, the nature of advanced nursing practice is clarified with reference to acts of subjectivity; functioning as a cognitively active epistemological subject, the advanced practice nurse: ‘analyzes’, ‘synthesizes’, ‘understands; and ‘interprets’ knowledge to ‘meet health needs’.

For Foucault (1969/1972) the statement "[Advanced practice nurses use] in-depth nursing knowledge and expertise in meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations" (CNA, 2008, p. 10) cannot be understood as a proposition or speech act of any kind because it is not an expression of a thought or a communication from an individual subject’s agency. Rather, it is a function of language that only makes sense according to the rules governing the relevant discursive field (Foucault, 1972). Foucault’s radical claim here is that an individual subject is never the source of a statement. Rather, the speaker is a blank
space in an anonymous system of language that can be filled by anyone who follows its rules, and further, only makes sense to others who rely on the same rules for the same or similar purposes.

Therefore, participating in nursing discourse of any kind is a matter of speaking from an acceptable place governed by the same rules as other speakers in the shared discursive field. Accordingly, no author or speaker is the originator of what is authentic or true about a nursing phenomenon. Indeed, anyone can make use of a discourse by following its “rules, methods of communication, styles of expression, techniques of oversight, and practices of legitimation without questioning who happened to invent them or whether they remain valid and useful” (Foucault, 1972, p. 222). Consequently, currency in nursing discourse depends not on its expression of existing truths, but on its capacity to proliferate and disseminate fresh concepts, new propositions, and additional formulations of legitimacy. For Foucault (1969/1972) all such statements are best conceived of as “systems of control in the production of knowledge” (p. 224). Therefore, “the truth” about advanced nursing practice cannot be a question of correspondence with some objective reality. Consequently, the “truth” about a nursing phenomenon is, not a matter of a representation; rather it is a matter of compliance with relevant discursive practices. Once language has been freed from the function of representation, it can function only as an autonomous system in which participation, but not individual agency, is possible.

This conclusion has far reaching and unsettling implications. Foucault (1966/1994) claims that the idea that a statement emerges in a system of language rules at a particular time, leads logically to the demise of ‘Man’ as the epicenter of knowledge and discourse. ‘Man’, therefore, as an explanatory concept drops out of consideration since language in itself is neither “transcendental nor anthropological” (Foucault, 1972, p.113) because statements in a discursive
field function together according to anonymous rules of formation, not as a central functioning of ‘Man’ as the epistemological basis of all knowledge. Consequently, the anthropological quadrilateral collapses and it becomes necessary to rethink the relationship between discourse and freedom. Otherwise, the human subject remains a place holder in the use of language without prospects for freedom and independent action. Foucault (1975/1979, 1976/1978) was able to avoid this pessimistic conclusion by invoking the figure of the genealogical subject.

For Foucault, genealogy is a ‘history of the present’ in which the aim is not to search out the origin for what we know and understand today, but to examine the contingency of how the past defines practices in the present and possibilities for the future (Garland, 2014). In other words, Foucault uses genealogical analysis to shift the basis for human knowledge and action from the transcendental subjectivity of Kant to historically contingent possibilities for understanding and being.

Toward a Foucauldian ‘Genealogical Quadrilateral’

If language expresses what can be said about nursing phenomena, and ‘what can be said’ is determined by the historical contingencies that govern possibilities for knowledge, the individual advocate for nursing is no more than a surrogate through which the rules of a linguistic system speak. Fortunately, we do not need to be so pessimistic. Foucault (1987, cited Switala, 1997) explained that human subjectivity was not completely erased by the collapse of the anthropological quadrilateral; “only the human subject as the origin and foundation of ‘Knowledge, or Liberty and History’” (p. 117). This is what Switala (1997) means when she reminds us of the survival of the genealogical subject despite the collapse of the anthropological quadrilateral.
Foucault’s *genealogical subject* functions by classifying discourses, by grouping them together in distinctive discursive fields, by bringing to light how particular authors, such as Kant, maintained continuity with other authors such as Descartes, while breaking from the epistemological assumptions of the *Classic Age*. In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979), for example, and in Volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, (Foucault, 1978), Foucault epitomizes his conception of the *genealogical subject* by examining how particular discursive and non-discursive practices functioned (Switala, 1997). Whereas, modern ‘*Man* ‘occupied the center of the *anthropological quadrilateral*, the *transdiscursive* author “plays a (literally) marginal role in the functioning of discourse” (Switala, 1997, 172). Consequently, Foucault’s *genealogical* approach can be used to analyze nursing phenomena if authors/speakers position themselves at the boundary, rather than within the discourses they critique.

By *nursing phenomena*, we mean occurrences, events, processes, and contested concerns significant for nurses. Examples include: child abuse (Bell, 2011); mentorship in nursing (Fulton, 2015); birthing (Newnham, 2011); chronic illness (Rose, 2002) recovery in mental health practice (Walsh & Stevenson, 2008); and nursing observations in psychiatry (Stevenson & Cutliffe, 2006). We suggest suitable phenomena for *genealogical* analysis include: the corporatization of universities; accreditation of healthcare organizations, universities and colleges; end-of-life care; family friendly care; patient centered care; health promotion and health maintenance; nursing diagnoses; nursing skill mix and workloads; patient safety; regulation of research ethics; reproductive health and technologies; social media; sexual health and the commodification of pleasure; regulatory approval of new drugs; health status of First Nation and Aboriginal peoples’; and the health status of refugees and internally displaced peoples. Such topics provoke *genealogical* inquiry because they are contested in competing
discourses, affect human relationships and condition ethics of human conduct. More specifically, they invite analysis because they involve the imposition of power; provoke questions about strategies of control and discipline, and stimulate resistance and opposition as well as conformity. For example, the corporatization of universities has imposed rigorous controls on faculty recruitment, selection, workloads, requirements for promotion and tenure, and protected time for research, which has privileged research over scholarship, encouraged competition rather than collegiality, and rewarded individual success over team performance (Springer & Clinton, 2016).

In The Order of Things, Foucault (1966/1994) insisted that at any one time there is only one episteme, one particular set of deep assumptions and implicit rules governing knowledge. However, in subsequent writings he announced that his analyses of biology, economics, and grammar (language) were better understood as regional studies; thereby allowing for more than one episteme to contest for dominance (Flynn, 2005b). Only on the assumption of multiple competing discourses can Foucault position the genealogist in spaces between discursive fields. (Figure 3).

We offer our Foucault inspired ‘genealogical quadrilateral’ provisionally and tentatively as a spatial metaphor for approaching genealogical inquiry. The four facets in the figure: diagnosis, problematization, relations of power, and the ‘dispositif’ are essential to any genealogical inquiry in the tradition of Foucauldian scholarship irrespective of its focus.
Figure 3. Schematic representation of Foucauldian genealogical inquiry

Diagnosis and Problematization

We encourage students and scholars to follow Foucault’s lead by denying that there is any one thing, or set of practices, that constitutes a particular nursing phenomenon. We emphasize the importance of looking into the past for specific aspects of nursing that are contested today. For example, how has it happened that experience in an extended practice role forced by local circumstances in isolated communities is not regarded as sufficient preparation for an advanced practice role in Canada today? What is the horizon of intellectual possibilities that positions a graduate education in nursing as the primary characteristic of advanced practice? We suggest that archeological and genealogical analyses of nursing phenomena are required to identify and describe the relationships between the contemporary and the historical factors to which a particular phenomenon of concern to nurse scholars is a response.
Problematization of a nursing phenomenon starts in the present and investigates the sequence of events that brought it to what it is today. We stress the importance of inquiring into events in the context of the possibilities for understanding that were available at the time and are available now. Inquiry involves attention to the discursive and non-discursive practices that control phenomena, and the possibilities they offer for change. For example, when analyzing advanced nursing practice discourse, it is important to focus on the actual practices of nurses in advanced roles as well as the specific strategies and tactics used to manipulate and control advanced practice nurses, and to differentiate advanced nursing practice from regular practice.

The purpose of entering into genealogical critique is to create a pause, a break, or, a rupture in discourses and practices to deflate hyperbole, question truth claims, challenge inconsistencies and open up possibilities for dialogue and change.

We would be remiss if we did not point out that there are different ways of understanding Foucault’s concept of problematization. The dominant view is that Foucault used ‘problematization’ to refer to how a particular problem such as madness came to require a response at a particular time, and how one or more of a number of possible responses became dominant. The minority view is that ‘problematization’ should be understood as both a noun and as a verb. The noun names the object of inquiry; the verb the analyst's act of critical inquiry (Koopman, 2013).

We follow Koopman (2013) in understanding ‘problematization’ as a focus for inquiry and as a method for bringing that focus of study under critical scrutiny. As Deacon (2000) writes:

Problematization refers both to the way in which specific historical practices give rise to or condition the emergence of objects of analysis, which themselves will be an amalgam
of experiences (such as madness or sexuality), discourses (such as psychiatry or sexology), practices (such as confinement or surveillance) and institutions (such as asylums or confessionals), as well as to the ways in which genealogy and genealogists are able to transform a “given” into a question and, in so doing, require the rethinking of politics, philosophy, and ethics (p. 140).

Frederiksen, Lomborg and Beedholm (2015) find the lack of an absolute definition of problematization useful and comment on its implications for nursing research in the context of Foucault’s statement about the three traditional philosophical questions that guided his work:

1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those "truth games" which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and objects?

2) What are the relationships we have to others through those strange strategies and power relationships?

And

3) What are the relationships between truth, power, and self?

I would like to finish with a question: What could be more classic than these questions and more systematic than the evolution through questions one, two, and three and back to the first? (Martin, 1988, p. 15).

Problematizing ‘wet-nursing’ in 18th Century France identifies humoral theory and the medical use of mercury as the science in which syphilis was understood at the time. The power relations involved in founding the Vaugirard were those of the Parisian authorities, physicians, mothers who refused to breastfeed according to the mores of the time, prostitutes, and other destitute women. The mothers of the infants with congenital syphilis complied with
breastfeeding mores by not breastfeeding, and the ‘wet-nurses’ at the Vaugirard resisted attempts to subjugate them through the imposition of mercury poisoning to treat their own syphilis and that of the affected infants. The problems to which opening the Vaugirard was a solution were population decline, high infant mortality, immorality, and the high prevalence of congenital syphilis.

In contrast, the midwives (advanced practice nurses) who encourage mothers to breastfeed today draw on the sciences of immunology, public health, nursing, nutrition, psychology, and physiology to guide their practice. The power relations involved are those of governments, health agencies, obstetricians, pediatricians, primary care physicians, midwives and nurses, non-governmental organizations, relatives and friends, manufacturers of infant formula, and the infant raring industry that extends from norms of motherhood in the popular press and self-help literature to celebrity branded designer products. Mothers are pressured to conform to knowledge that ‘breastfeeding is best’ and made to feel guilty if they choose not to breastfeed. Nurse practitioners (advanced practice nurses) and others involved in promoting lactation strive to remain up-to-date about the disadvantages of infant formula and the most effective ways of supporting mothers to breastfeed.

**Relations of Power**

A *genealogy* of a nursing phenomenon involves an examination of the dynamics of power relations, both the exercise of power over the bodies of patients, clients, families and communities, and the power exercised by nurses over themselves as they strive to comply with expectations they find conducive, or condition themselves for possibilities yet to be realized.

Foucault’s historical nominalism (Flynn, 2005b) commits those who follow in his footsteps to focus not on power as an abstract or overarching concept, but on specific concrete
relations of domination and control between and among individuals immediately present in a specified location, as well as to those not physically present who exercise domination and control from a distance, such as regulatory authorities, supervisors/executives, and collaborating/supervising physicians.

**Spatialized Thinking**

Foucault’s capacity to think spatially is clearly demonstrated in his descriptions of the ‘Quadrilateral of Language’, and the ‘anthropological quadrilateral’, and was always characteristic of his methods of analysis (Flynn, 2005a). Central to his genealogical inquiries were his detailed examination and comparison of events, ways of thinking, and conceptions of human subjectivity. Genealogical studies of nursing phenomena similarly require a careful analysis of the problems at different points in time that motivated changes in the conception of nursing and how they coalesced into what we call nursing practice today.

**The ‘Dispositif’**

In our discussion of the analytic of finitude, we identified the factors that participate in the creation, development, expression and dissemination of nursing discourse. Along with his use of genealogy as a development of his earlier archaeological focus, Foucault introduced a new analytical device, the *dispositive* (or ‘*dispositif*’). Foucault (1980), gave a clear description of what a ‘*dispositif*’ is. In his own words:

> What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic *propositions*—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements
of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements (p. 194).

Consequently, a genealogical inquiry into a nursing phenomenon would recognize the multiple, diverse, interrelated, and separate discursive factors by which it is governed as well as the non-discursive contribution of structures and spaces of various kinds, and the unsaid as much as the said.

Concerns about the safety of and the barriers to advanced nursing practice (Kleinpell et al., 2014) call for genealogical analysis. We can ask why and how the problem to which the response from within the intellectual horizons available was advanced nursing practice raised to the level of concern and required a solution (problematization). We can ask about the events and their sequence that have resulted in the minimum requirement of a higher degree in nursing for advanced practice. We can examine the archive to uncover and describe the specific practices involved in physician support and resistance to the role of advanced practice nurses in specified locations at certain times, and their effects (historical nominalism). We can inquire into why medical schools in Canada are increasing their intakes, and why more physician assistants are being trained (Kleinpell et al., 2014). We can ask why now in the history of advanced nursing practice discourse, there are job demarcations that emphasize efficiency and improved outcomes (MacDonald-Renz & Bard, 2010) from a taken for granted perspective on the roles and contribution of physicians in isolation from potentially cheaper and more effective solutions to chronic health problems. We can describe the games of truth and the associated micro-political relations of power that contest role functions in particular locations (relations of power). We can map the relationships, interrelationships, separation, ordering and normalization of approaches to advanced nursing practice taken over time in different Canadian provinces. We can use
comparative analysis to enhance our descriptions by inquiring into the various discursive and non-discursive factors involved in resisting or otherwise advanced nursing practice (spatialized thinking).

Conclusion

Foucault’s ‘Quadrilateral of Language’ explains the background against which the function of language was ruptured with the coming of the Modern Age. His ‘anthropological quadrilateral’ raises awareness of why claims about nursing phenomena are not products of our own thinking, but mark only our participation in a discursive field in which anyone who follows the implicit rules can speak and write persuasively about nursing phenomenon. We are enthusiastic about genealogical analysis because it creates a space for human agency in discourse analysis. We have constructed a ‘genealogical quadrilateral’ to clarify the Foucauldian concepts that help us ask: How has it come about that the nursing phenomenon of interest is an issue in the delivery of healthcare today? Why and how are nursing phenomena valorized and at the same time resisted? What effort has been put into constructing, regulating, disseminating, and evaluating nursing phenomena? On what historically contingent conditions do nursing phenomena depend, and to what degree is their future open to transformation?

We conclude with, a caveat, two claims, a suggestion, and a challenge. We claim much can be gained from the fine grained analysis of nursing discourse by drawing on Foucault’s four theories of language subject to the distinctions between language that functioned historically as representation; language that functions relatively autonomously, and the language of critique that functions in the spaces between competing discourses. We stress that parsing statements for parts of speech and examining them for rhetorical devices does not constitute discourse analysis until the analyst scholar inquiries into how, why, and with what consequences they were
problematized. Such inquiries involve bringing out the relations between claims to truth, relationships with others, and engagement in practices of freedom. We claim Foucault’s ‘anthropological quadrilateral’ is as relevant today as it has ever been, as long as the death of ‘Man’ the subject is not overstated. We suggest the ‘genealogical quadrilateral’ Foucault inspired us to create can be applied to inquire into discursive and non-discursive practices relevant to nurses and nursing today. The three ‘quadrilaterals’ fulfill similar functions in that they create a methodological space, a conceptual distance between the discourse and practices of interest, and the spatial metaphors with which concepts can be organized to facilitate analysis. The challenge we leave readers with is that of creating more spatial figures from Foucault’s methodological concepts to promote understanding and application of the analytical tools of a master thinker.
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