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Citation for final published version:

Hardy, Cynthia and Thomas, Robyn 2015. Discourse in a material world. Journal of Management Studies 52 (5) , pp. 680-696. 10.1111/joms.12113

Publishers page: https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12113

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Discourse in a Material World

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Journal of Management Studies

Point-Counter Point

Final Version September 2014

Abstract

We challenge recent assertions that discourse studies cannot *de facto* address materiality. We demonstrate how a Foucauldian theorization of discourse provides a way to analyse the co-constitutive nature of discursive and material processes, as well as explore the power relations implicated in these relationships. To illustrate our argument, we identify exemplary studies that have effectively combined a study of discourse and different aspects of materiality – bodies, objects, spaces and practices. In doing so, we demonstrate how power relations are brought to bear through the interplay of discourse and materiality, and explain how future research on discourse can attend to the material aspects of our realities, rather than simply focusing on language.

Keywords: discourse, Foucault, materiality, power.

Introduction

A common criticism of discursive approaches in management research is that they neglect the material (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Iedema, 2007; Reed, 1998, 2000, 2010; Thompson, 2004; Thompson & Harley, 2010), suggesting that the "descent into discourse" has resulted in "the loss of a sense of 'material reality'" (Conrad, 2004, p. 428). Hardy and Grant (2012) have disputed such allegations, pointing out that the study of the material is nothing new to discourse scholars, who have long demonstrated in a range of studies that organizational entities are comprised of both material and ideational elements (Ashcraft, Kuhn & Cooren, 2009). In this article, we develop this point further by demonstrating how a discursive approach is eminently suited to the study of materiality. In fact, we show that discursive approaches have much to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between discourse and materiality, by recognizing that the two are "inextricably entwined", even if they are "by no means isomorphic or reducible to each other" (Mumby, 2011, p. 4). One way to examine how discourse and materiality are entwined is to engage more directly with Foucault's theorization of discourse, which emphasises "the materiality of language at every dimension" (Young, 2001, p. 399).

In this essay, we challenge allegations that discourse studies cannot *de facto* address materiality. We revisit the work of Foucault in order to show how his conceptualization of discourse offers a way to engage with both language and materiality; and further, argue that combining the two – and showing how each is implicated in the other – is important for critical researchers wishing to explore the operation of power. We also identify discourse studies that have incorporated and developed the study of materiality, suggesting how we can build on this work, as well as alerting researchers to the limitations of focusing only on linguistic elements of discourse. We contribute to contemporary debates about discourse (e.g., Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011; Hardy & Grant, 2012; Mumby, 2011; Thompson &

Harley, 2010; Putnam & Nicotera, 2010), as well as to recent attempts to revitalize the study of materiality in management studies (Ashcraft, Kuhn & Cooren, 2009; Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013).

Foucault, Discourse and Materiality

Foucault has been a major influence on research into discourse in management, accounting for the strong social constructionist approach adopted in much of the work on discourse. According to this Foucault (1972, p. 54), discourses "systematically form the objects of which they speak." They do not simply describe the world; they *constitute* it by bringing phenomena into being through the way in which they categorize and make sense of them (Hardy & Phillips, 2004); and by laying down "conditions of possibility" that define "who and what is 'normal', standard and acceptable" (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas & Davies. 2004, p. 544). Foucault thus takes a fundamentally radical approach to discourse that is anti-humanist (i.e., there is no founding subject behind discourse), anti-reductionist (i.e., there is no underlying or originating cause of a discourse), and anti-essentialist (i.e., there is no core or cohesive essence to a discourse). In making these distinctions, Foucault challenges the idea of trying to discover "the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse" and, instead, argues we should examine "the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse" (Foucault: 1972, p. 52-53).

Foucault's conceptualization of discourse does not preclude materiality. He argues that discourses are not only realized in "the textuality of representation and knowledge, but in the regulating principles and actions of institutions, in forms of everyday practice, in actual material arrangements such as that of architectural structure" (Hook, 2007, p.179). Indeed, materiality lies at the core of Foucault's work, with discourses forming and functioning at the interface of the linguistic and material worlds (Barad, 2003; Dale, 2005; Hardy & Thomas, 2013; Kelly, 2009; Mills, 2003; Nealon, 2008). In addition, he argues that it is through

discourse that we gain access to a discursive and material world: "our knowledge of the world, our estimation of truth, and our speaking capacity (the scope of things that can reasonably be said) is governed by certain discursive formations" (Hook, 2007, p.125). Finally, in linking discourse to materiality, Foucault (1980) also emphasizes its relation to power: "nothing is more material, physical, corporeal than the exercise of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 57).

In sum, while Foucault acknowledges the strategic and analytical importance of epistemologically distinguishing the discursive from the non-discursive, he emphasizes both "the discursive effects of the material, and the material effects of the discursive" (Hook, 2007, p.126). By adopting such a 'material' reading of Foucault, discourse scholars are in a position to analyse discursive *and* material processes, and to examine how they are co-constitutive (Dale, 2005; Mumby, 2011), rather than assigning primacy and exclusivity to either one or the other. In addition, combining an understanding of the meanings of texts with an appreciation of the material relations of power in which these meanings are woven allows us to explore and critique power relations (Dale, 2005; Hook, 2007).

To illustrate our argument, we examine four aspects of materiality: bodies, objects, spaces and practices.[1] In each of following sections, we draw on Foucauldian insights, as well as existing empirical studies to explore these relationships. We do not aim to provide a comprehensive review of the literature (for broader reviews, please see Ashcraft et al., 2009; Fairhurst & Putnam, forthcoming), rather, we have drawn attention to particular studies that are illustrative of our argument.

Bodies

Concern over the body, as an object of knowledge and a target of power, is an

[1] This framework has been adapted from Ashcraft et al. (2009); also see Fairhurst and Putnam (forthcoming). While, we deal with each aspect separately, as we make clear below, we acknowledge that they are inextricably interlinked with each other and with discourse, and separating them in this way is for analytical purposes only

enduring theme in Foucault's work. However, it is in his genealogical texts (Foucault, 1977; 1978) where his most significant contribution takes place.[2] In *Discipline and Punishment* (1977), Foucault documents the emergence of a new 'political anatomy' (Foucault, 1977, p.138) of the body during the 18th and 19th centuries, where new technologies of discipline worked to produce "docile" bodies. For Foucault, the body is a radically contingent entity, "a *variable form* marked by differing institutions of historical and political force" (Hook, 2007, p.156) and an important location for the workings of various technologies and practices of power. In the *History of Sexuality, Volume* 1, Foucault's genealogical analysis shows how the body is constituted at the nexus of complex relations of discourse and regimes of power such that "the deployment of power is directly connected to the body – to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures" (Foucault, 1978, p.152).

Foucault's theorising collapses the Cartesian dualism of mind/body; the body is not merely a vessel for subjectivity, it is the very *condition* of subjectivity:

> [T]he individual is the result of procedures which pin political power on the body. It is because the body has been 'subjectified,' that is to say, that the subject function has been fixed on it, because it has been psychologized and normalized, it is because of all of this that something like the individual appeared, about which one can speak, hold discourses, and attempt to found sciences (Foucault, 2006, p. 56).

Foucault's theorising on the body emphasises the multifarious and complex intermingling of discourse and materiality. He acknowledges a physical body as the "the locus of physiological processes and metabolisms" (Foucault, 1977, p.25), but his concern is with a body that is constituted by the workings of disciplinary power on this physiological body,

[2] Foucault developed his genealogical analysis to explain how "material, multiple and corporeal" (Gutting, 2005: 47) events, often small and occurring independently of one another, can lead to the constitution of new discourses, identities and institutions and the emergence of radically new systems of thought.

which create a sense of an interiority that in turn operates as an instrument for the exercise of power on the body. Thus, for Foucault, the body is both corporeal and social (Dale, 2005).

Insights from Foucault's work can be applied to the analysis of the working body, which has been "moulded and directed, disciplined, punished or rewarded to meet the demands and rigours of work" (Hancock & Tyler, 2000, p.85). This is evident since the early experiments of F. W. Taylor and Scientific Management's time and motion studies, through to the close monitoring of bodily movements on just-in-time manufacturing systems (Delbridge, Turnbull & Wilkinson, 1992). Together with the investment by paternalistic management in controlling workers' health, well-being, moral and sober behaviour (Anthony, 1977), such endeavours highlight the efforts managers have made in seeking to control workers' bodies to maintain the productive subject (McGillivray, 2005). And yet, despite this, the body has been something of a neglected topic within management studies (Hassard, Holliday & Willmott, 2000; Ashcraft et al., 2009). As Wolkowitz (2002, p. 498) comments, there has been a tendency to assume a disembodied worker in much of the analysis of work organizations, such that "where the body is, work is not."

Foucault's analysis of the body has, however, received considerable attention in feminist studies (Sawicki, 1991; McNay, 1992; Bordo, 1993; Bartky, 1988), and from researchers interested in writing the gendered body into organization and management studies. This research has explored the ways in which working women's bodies are disciplined through gendered professional and managerial discourses (Brewis & Sinclair, 2000; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Kondo, 1990; Trethewey, 2001). Studies on discourse, gendered identities and power have drawn attention to the inscription of gender on to the professional body in ways that both constrain and enable the formation of subjectivity. Emphasising an embodied nature of subjectivity, studies have shown how professional discourses promote an ideal that valorises the male body and masculinity, rendering women

as ‘The Other’: “reproductive not productive, unruly and generally threatening to the ‘rational order’ of the ‘masculine’ organization” (Godfrey, Lilley & Brewis, 2012, p. 544-545). Women are thus compelled to engage in transformations of the flesh, to discipline, constrain and render less “excessive” their problematic feminine bodily appearance, functions and demeanour through, for example, dieting, exercise, cosmetics, clothing, and cosmetic surgery (Acker, 1990; Ashcraft, 2008; Holmer-Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Trethewey, 1999). Trethewey (1999) describes how women professionals engage in “body work” in order to control their bodies at work: keeping fit, not displaying too much sexuality, and showing the “right” emotions. In her study on professional women, Trethewey (1999) demonstrates how organizational and societal discourses feed into professional women’s understandings of their embodied selves with material consequences. Professional women are compelled to conform to rules of behaviour and appropriate professional images, demonstrating how “notions of professionalism are thus intimately and inextricably connected to a particular type of embodied and constructed femininity” (Trethewey, 1999, p. 452).

While the majority of Foucauldian studies of workers’ bodies have focused on the gendered disciplinary practices in relation to women’s bodies, some studies have explored material and discursive body-work in achieving masculine work identities (Godfrey at al., 2012; Pullen & Simpson, 2009; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Based on a reading of the film *Jarhead*, a fictional account of a US marine, Godrey et al. (2012) illustrate the myriad of practices that render the body governable, creating a disciplined, standardised and substitutable military unit of labour. Through the “disciplinary architecture” (Foucault, 2007a) of the barracks and the use of material artefacts such as furniture and uniforms, bodies are divided and partitioned into visible, standardised units. Daily, routinized military practices, such as drill, rifle cleaning, and the presentation of sleeping areas, codify and direct the minutiae of daily life. During the final ceremony of “passing out” the body becomes fully

incorporated into the "military machine" – a "docile, uniform, military body" (Godrey et al., 2012, p. 552). The military machine crafts an inherently masculine body, one that is distinct from and pitched against an inferior, othered female body. From the design of the uniforms through to the brutal physical regime and language usage, gendered discourses work to normalise a highly masculine subject. Finally, the authors note how increased technological emphases in military practice reorders material-discursive relations as the once valued physical prowess of brute masculinity increasingly gives way to technological mastery. This cyborgian solder is thus the imbrication of technology and physiology.

In sum, studies drawing on Foucauldian understandings of the body have provided detailed analysis of interrelated discursive and material practices to show how body, space, objects and practices come together in organizations to produce certain kinds of subjects. Moreover, these studies illustrate how the body is the site of local, intimate and intricate power relations, which are enacted and contested through intersections of the discursive and the material.

Spaces

Foucault's work is replete with concerns about space. As he stated, it is "arbitrary to try to dissociate … the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand" (Foucault, 1984, p. 246). Rather than seeing space "as a white page on which the actions of groups and institutions are inscribed", he views it as a form of social ordering with political effects (Hook, 2007, p.179). Space is thus both a means to organize actions and an outcome of those actions (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004).

> Places and times are invested with particular meanings; they interplay with the discursive and material conditions in which we are situated. Organisations and working selves are constituted in particular places and spaces and, themselves,

> contribute to the construction of those places and spaces (Halford & Leonard, 2006, p. 11).

In this way, we can view organizations as a specific combination of the presences – and absences – of particular humans, objects and elements of the natural world (Kuhn, 2006).

The meanings and physical materiality of space are continually being negotiated in ways that regulate members, albeit imperfectly (Dale, 2005; Hook, 2007). Probably the most compelling example of the political effects of space is Foucault's (1977) discussion of Bentham's panopticon, showing how the architectural design works to produce a specific type of person: "a worker under supervision who has inculcated an ethos of being seen to be at work" (Kornberger & Clegg, 2004, p. 1103). Foucault extended his concern with space to prisons more generally: "In the world of prisons, as in the world of dogs ('lying down' and 'upright'), the vertical is not one of the dimensions of space, it is the dimension of power" (Foucault, 2007b, p. 170); and also asylums and clinics (Hardy, 2011). Architecture, workplace layouts and working environments of all kinds play a role in establishing and maintaining relations of power, although there are always possibilities for resistance (Ainsworth, Grant & Iedema, 2009; Dale, 2005; Taylor & Spicer, 2007).

Foucault (1997, pp. 352–353) accordingly advocates "the study, analysis, description and 'reading', as it is the fashion to call it nowadays, of those different spaces, those other places, in a kind of both mythical and real contestation of the space in which we live" as a way of showing how power is transformed into material practice. In this way, the spatial – with all its material inscriptions – is amenable to critical and discursive analysis.

> [S]pace, through the particular mode of constructions it enables, its various significances and characteristic practices, is likewise a dimension of political activity amenable to critical analysis … Quite clearly then, the discursive by no means precludes the spatial: the identities, materiality and practical

functionality of places (Hook, 2007, p. 179).

The importance of the materiality of space and its links to discourse and power can be seen in the following re-reading of a study of two US hospitals trying to reduce the hours worked by surgical residents (doctors completing their five-year on-the-job training following medical school). Kellogg (2009) attributes the outcomes – one hospital implemented changes to reduce hours, the other did not –to the presence or absence of what she refers to as "relational spaces." Her theoretical framework is drawn from institutional theory and is not intended to be Foucauldian. Nonetheless, her detailed ethnographic study can be reinterpreted with Foucauldian sensibilities to show how power-resistance relations are embedded in spaces that fuse bodies, objects, and practices (Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

In implementing the change, both hospitals added more residents to the "night float" – the group of residents responsible for patient care during the night shift – and changed work practices by requiring first year residents (interns) coming off the day shift to sign off routine work to seniors (second, third, and fourth year residents) and chiefs (fifth year residents) coming on to the night shift. The new practices violated existing conventions that precluded handing off routine work to senior colleagues and which required interns to finish up routine work regardless of how late it kept them in the hospital. Reformers at both hospitals built support for the change through conversations that took place in various hospital spaces, for example, as they ate lunch in the cafeteria and gathered to talk in hospital hallways and resident lounges – telling stories of defying defenders of the status quo and creating new arguments about patient care to justify the change. These reformers relied heavily on the particular space afforded by afternoon rounds, which were held every evening in both hospitals to review the patient care carried out by the interns on a particular surgical service (e.g., cardiac surgery, vascular surgery, and orthopaedic surgery).

In the hospital where the changes were implemented, afternoon rounds were held in

various places – such as conference rooms or isolated areas of patient floors – that had been informally staked out by the chief resident of the particular service. All residents working on the service (interns, seniors, and chiefs of day and night shifts) were present and there was considerable interaction among senior and junior residents. When all members of the team were reformers, individuals – even first year interns – felt comfortable in suggesting solutions to expedite the sign-off. Proposed innovations could be discussed and negotiated by all team members, facilitating their implementation and improvisation by those concerned. At the hospital that failed to implement the changes, afternoon rounds took place in the residents' lounge. This space made it difficult for reformers to isolate themselves from defenders because other residents used the computers in the lounge: even if all the team members were reformers, other residents using the lounge might be defenders. It was hard to talk of defiance when defenders might overhear. In addition, only the chief resident and the interns attended these afternoon rounds – other members from the team were not present. So even if potential solutions were identified in these spaces, other reformers on the service were not present to discuss them, making it difficult to contribute all perspectives to a problem, to negotiate solutions with one another, or to experiment with new practices.

In re-reading this study from a Foucauldian perspective, we can see how, rather than "being" relational, spaces are "made" relational through the way particular bodies, objects, practices and talk are co-located and, depending upon the particular configuration of the co-location, opportunities for managers and employees to exercise power and resistance differ. Thus we can see how power-resistance relations arise from the way in which both the discursive and the material are organized in space.

Objects

Foucault avoids the assumption that objects are imbued with essentialist characteristics. Rather, his concern is with the discursive regimes where objects are formed

and become targets for intervention.

> It is not so much the case then that a field of knowledge arranges itself around an essential object of analysis that poses a 'challenge of understanding'; it is rather the case that the objects in question are constituted by the relevant bodies of knowledge as components of their own conditions of possibility (Hook, 2007, p. 148).

Accordingly, in this section, we focus on the "the common material object, a non-living individual that occupies space and time, and is capable of interacting with human beings" (Harré, 2002, p. 23). We argue that material objects and discourses are intertwined, with the former acquiring its identity through the discourses in which it is situated.

> Objects are part of the practical order, which does not mean that they pre-exist as objects in some way that is revealed by the discourse. Rather, it means that some concepts are discursively attached to particular parts of an ambiguous material world; a world that has an ontological status and a physical existence apart from our experience of them (Hardy & Phillips, 1999, p. 3).

It is inappropriate, therefore, to think of discourse "about" pre-existing objects; rather, discourse *enables* us to talk about what may appear to be naturally existing entities by fixing their meaning (Chia, 2000).

The objects that we think we see are thus abstractions that are made real as a result of the processes through which particular meanings are attributed (Maguire & Hardy, 2013); they emerge from processes that bring them into being, rather than reveal them (Bakken & Hernes, 2006).

> [T]he object is explained by what went into its making, and not the other way round (that the object explains its making). The object we assume to observe is a reaction, a result of an assemblage of practices; only the process of

> objectifying and reifying these practices has led to what we think of as objects (Carter, Clegg & Kornberger, 2008, p. 92).

Discourse thus gives sense to the material world through the way it differentiates, names, labels, classifies and categorizes, and thereby produces, recognizable objects (Chia, 2000).

One arena where the relationship between objects and discourse has received attention is in the case of information communication technologies (ICT). In their Foucauldian analysis, Knights and Murray (1994) see ICT as a set of human and nonhuman artefacts, processes and practices directed toward modifying or transforming natural and social phenomena in pursuit of human purposes (see Willcocks, 2006). This includes computers and hardware, as well as technological knowledge and technological workers, as instrumentation, practices, power relations, knowledge and behaviours come together (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011).

Organizations can be made more durable – and managers more powerful – by interweaving new organizational arrangements and relations into material forms, such as information technology, architecture, and other material objects (Doolin, 2003; Kornberger & Clegg, 2004). Bloomfield and Hayes explain the role of objects in implementing modernization in local government in the UK:

> [Modernization] projects were developed in specific locales, becoming manifest in the use of various techniques and technologies in the form of plans, process maps, decision trees, customer service scripts and IT systems. These heterogeneous materials … constituted something of the practical means by which it [modernization] was enacted, shaping the form and content of the work of local government staff with power thereby exercised on an ongoing basis.

Doolin (1998; 2003) shows how a new information system in a hospital, which linked

individual patient clinical activity to its associated costs, served to place clinicians under greater scrutiny, pressurizing them to conform to "normal" work practices. This object strengthened management control by increasing the visibility of the financial implications of clinical decisions and engendering greater self-control in clinicians as norms associated with the discourse of efficiency were internalized.

Leclercq-Vandelannoitte (2011) shows how objects are imbued with power-knowledge effects in her study of a construction company. In this company, the site foremen were responsible for filling in weekly reports for their managers about the building materials purchased for their particular site. Managers needed reliable, up-to-date information on the costs of each site in order to allow for rapid readjustments in the event that expenses increased. A project was introduced to equip site foremen with tablet computers, directly connected to the company's information system, so that they could enter site data directly into the system. The initiative was couched in a discourse of empowering the foreman. However, it led to new obligations and constraints that were both subtle and coercive as managers were able to monitor their foremen through the information system and without having to come on-site every day. The site foremen, for the most part, resisted entering the information correctly, with significant consequences. Managers had to return on-site to carry out more direct supervision, accountants had to verify the reports, and the union successfully negotiated for foremen to be compensated for the "additional" workload and responsibilities involved in entering the information (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011).

The category of the object is not, then, "a static, discrete and ahistorical form of existence, one which is easily detachable from a given time, place and social context" (Hook, 2007, p. 153). Material, aesthetic and technological artefacts are not essential entities with fixed meanings. Their meanings are variable and ambiguous, emerging from power-resistance relations among different organizational members (Harré, 2002; Tsoukas & Chia,

2002). Moreover, objects serve to inscribe bodies, produce identities, and implicate subjects in a recursive relationship between objects and individuals (Dale, 2005; Rasche & Chia, 2009; Halford & Leonard, 2006).

Practices

Practices are routinized ways "in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (Reckwitz, 2002: 250). They emerge at the nexus of "doings" and "sayings" (Rasche & Chia, 2009) as power is embodied in certain ways of thinking, speaking and behaving (e.g., Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian & Samuel, 1998; Knights, 1992; McKinlay & Pezeta, 2010; Townley, 1993)

> [Power] is not something held but something practiced ... speaking the truth is the stake and outcome of a series of practices and statements, rather than the secret to be revealed (or not) by them (Nealon, 1984, p. 20).

Accordingly, a focus on practices alerts us to "what it is that is done, how it is done, and how it is possible that it be done" (Messner, Clegg & Kornberger, 2009, p. 70).

Linguistic and material divisions collapse into each other through practice. So, for example, a diagnosis of a patient as having an illness or a judgement that an individual is a criminal is not merely a discursive utterance but emerges from an array of practices that allow the diagnosis or judgement to be made in the first place. It is followed by other material practices such as procedures, treatments, examinations, and bodily confinement. To fixate on the discursive at the expense of the material grants too great a weight to language without recognizing the material arrangements in which power is enmeshed and extended (Hook, 2007). Some practices may appear more discursive or linguistic in nature and others material or physical; however, the two are inextricably fused, as shown in the following re-reading of Maguire and Hardy's (2009) study of how new patterns in discursive practices (i.e., the production, distribution and consumption of texts) help to account for the radical decline in

the use of DDT – the top selling pesticide in the US – between 1962 and 1972.

The study shows that, during this period, more scientific texts were produced which, collectively and over time, challenged existing "facts" about DDT's safety for the human health and the environment. These texts were written by biologists or zoologists whose research investigated the safety of DDT, rather than entomologists or agricultural scientists whose earlier texts on the efficacy of DDT had dominated scientific journals in the past. Producing these scientific texts required material practices – universities had to hire scientists educated in these new disciplines, build their labs, and support their research. Governments had to fund their studies. The scientists had to conduct their experiments, using the available scientific equipment to measure changes in the physiology of birds, mammals and fish. They then had to write up their results and send their papers to journals. Editorial decisions had to be made, as a result of which some papers were published in print. For these texts then to have an impact on the discourse concerning DDT, they had to be distributed and consumed: by being read by other scientists; by being submitted in evidence at regulatory hearings on DDT; by being noticed by journalists who used them to write media articles which were then published in newspapers (which had to be dispatched to newsagents and purchased by members of the public); and by being incorporated into textbooks, distributed to university bookshops; and sold to – and read by – the next generation of students studying science. It was only through this fusion of discursive and material practices that new subject positions and new bodies of knowledge could be constructed and the discourse about DDT changed.

Hardy and Thomas (2013) show, in their study of strategy making in a telecommunications company, how the power effects of a discourse have to be "intensified" through the enactment of practices that are both discursive (e.g., packaging actions as a "strategy" in written communication; reiterating the need for cutbacks in annual reports; advertising the number of times the company is "first" in developing a new technology;

applications for patents) and material (e.g., people losing their jobs; factories being sold; and work practices being modified; new technologies being invented). In this study, the market discourse was intensified as multiple actors engaged in practices that helped to normalize and diffuse it to the extent that a well-defined strategy object was produced i.e., a clearly delineated strategy emphasizing cutbacks, whose meaning was stabilized and valued, was widely articulated. Strategy subjects were also produced – individuals who not only identified with the strategy object, but who were competent and confident enough to engage in practices that intensified its power effects further. In contrast, when an alternative, professional R&D discourse was "de-intensified" because of a diminishment in discursive and material practices, a different kind of strategy subject was produced: engineering employees became "cost-conscious" subjects in a company dominated by a market discourse and, as such, were far more vulnerable than "professionals" in a company with a highly valued R&D-oriented engineering discourse.

In sum, we can see that in issues such as institutional, organizational and strategic change, discursive practices cannot be pried apart from the material practices that envelope and interpolate them. It is this fusion of the discursive *and* the material that generates the power effects of discourse and allows for change to occur (or, alternatively, prevents it from happening). It is through practice that bodies, spaces and objects acquire meanings and become "visible"; and it is through practice that material movement occurs as bodies, spaces and objects are constantly being rearranged.

Discussion and Conclusions

The lack of attention to materiality is one of the loudest criticisms aimed at management researchers who have taken a discourse analytic approach in their work. This critique coalesces around allegations that studies of discourse theory deny truth and reality, resulting in intellectual defeatism, political nihilism, and a failure to mount a satisfactory

agenda for change. Discourse analysts are accused of arguing "everything that is real (or even important) is discursive" (Thompson & Harley, 2012, p. 1364) and that "there is nothing outside discourse than more discourse" (Reed, 2000, p. 525). Such work supposedly "reduces" the study of organizations to the study of discourse and produces a "one-sided" style of thinking (Fairclough, 2005, p. 916, 918). Discourse researchers are allegedly uninterested in "practices, meanings, relations, [and] materiality beyond and beneath discourse" (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011, p. 1125). They are reproached for having substituted positivistic determinism with a "deterministic discoursism" of a linguistic kind (Conrad, 2004, p. 428) – a "backdoor" determinism that is unable to distinguish between "open doors" and "brick walls" (Reed, 2000, p. 526). We challenge these allegations. As we have shown in this essay, studies of discourse can attend to materiality by drawing on the work of Foucault, which "is well able to take material elements into account, not for what they are but for the events they create in the field of possibilities" (Bardon & Josserand, 2001, p. 7). Moreover, as this essay also makes clear, many researchers have carried out studies combining discourse and materiality – the discursive analysis of management and organizations is already starting to embed itself in a material world.

The opportunity exists to build on such research with a view to shedding further light on the relationship between discourse and materiality, as well as the implications for how power operates. It appears, however, that this opportunity may be at risk – somewhat ironically – because of the mounting interest among management researchers in Fairclough's (1992; 1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework. Fairclough, who has been a major influence on organizational discourse studies, declared an affinity with Foucault in his early work and based his three-dimensional CDA framework on his conceptualization of discourse. The framework has proved popular, offering discourse scholars both a template for empirical work and space for agency, while being consistent with Foucauldian ideas (Hardy & Phillips,

2004). It inspired many studies that examined various aspects of discourse through the systematic analysis of texts[3]. In the past, these studies have contributed to the growing development of discourse studies, as well as a greater appreciation of the role of discourse and power in management contexts.

Fairclough (2005) has, however, recently pulled back from this earlier position to eschew – emphatically – a strong social constructionist orientation. At the same time, management researchers are increasingly employing his framework. As we have mentioned elsewhere (see Hardy & Thomas, 2014), many of these researchers are helping to institutionalize a linguistic emphasis in discourse analysis by equating discourse with language. Discourse is defined as "a linguistically oriented way of making sense of a phenomenon or an issue" (Balogun et al., 2011, p. 768); a "connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue" (Laine & Vaara, 2007, p. 37); a "linguistically mediated construction of social reality" (Mantere & Vaara, 2008, p. 341); and "language and symbols" (Greckhamer, 2010, p. 871). In addition, although the CDA framework emphasizes context, which relates to Foucault's forms of practice (Hook, 2005), critics argue that researchers are unclear over what "context" constitutes (Leitch & Palmer, 2010) and give it only a cursory analysis (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). Finally, studies tend to examine the language *in* a text rather than the practices that surround the text and give rise to it; and there is far more interest in the meaning of a text than in its distribution and consumption (Hardy, 2004).

A linguistic re-reading of Fairclough's reading of Foucault does not, in and of itself, present a problem *unless* one is interested in power. However, for those who are interested in power, reading Foucault "through the spectre of a linguist's concern with textual artefacts"

[3] We are not suggesting that all discourse researchers focused on language at the expense of materiality. Some influential early work on discourse that drew on Foucault's approach to discourse did not take texts as the main analytical focus (e.g., Covaleski et al., 1998; Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998; Knights, 1992; Knight & Willmott, 1999; Townley, 1993).

overlooks his concern with the "non-linguistic analyses of statements, [and] more precisely, with developing a strategic model (a 'theory of practice', if one wishes) that could account for discourse, knowledge, truth, and relations of power simultaneously" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 241). In stripping discourse away from the "physical and material arrangements of force" (Hook, 2007, p. 118), critical researchers lose their ability to account for agency, analyze the influence of previous, sedimented constitutive processes, and interrogate power relations.

One way for discourse scholars to account for power relations is to engage with the full implications of how discourse is materialized in the production *and* distribution *and* consumption of texts. The production of texts is more than the language inside the text or even its apparent meaning; it includes questions concerning who produced those texts and how they did so. This requires studies to track patterns of textual authorship and analyze changes in patterns of meaning of time. It also means differentiating between types or genres of text – not all texts are created equal and some have more impact than others. Studies that focus on individual texts or even individual genres of text will be limited in how well they can identify the power effects of discourse, compared to studies that look at patterns within *bodies* of texts. Equally important is the need to explore what happens *after* the text is produced – how, where and by whom is it distributed and consumed? Examining whether and where meanings are "taken up" in other texts is a useful way to learn how and whether "mere talk" has material effects. Broadening textual analyses in this way places issues of agency, institutions and practices centre-stage.

A second way to explore the power effects of discourse is to move beyond the analysis of texts and investigate material phenomena such as bodies, spaces, objects and practices more closely from a strong social constructionist perspective (also see Ashcraft et al., 2009; Fairhurst & Putnam, forthcoming). Such studies may be facilitated by drawing on methods used in other literatures, such as socio-materiality (see Orlikowski & Scott, 2008),

visual methods (see Warren, 2009), and ethnographies (see Ybema et al., 2009), and adapting them to put materiality more firmly under a discursive lens. Such research would help us to explore how the material entities that we "see" (and study) can only be known through the power/knowledge relations – the discourses – of a particular socio-historical-political point in time. Each discursive formation has particular rules shaping what is identified to exist or not exist (Hardy, 2011). That multiple discourses exist, overlap and contradict at any point in time suggests that these material entities may mean different things to – and may be made to mean different things by – actors positioned in this discursive landscape; and, as the discursive landscape changes so too do the meanings of these material entities. We can learn more about how the material is organized according to a particular discursive understanding and through its practices: how the material comes into being as a result of, and is recursively fed back into, a particular discursive ordering (Hardy, 2011).

In conclusion, discourse brings to materiality – and materiality to discourse – an understanding of the role of power relations in the construction of our "realities", as well as how those realities might be challenged and reconstituted.

> [Foucault] demands that one does not reduce the analysis of discourse merely to the "markings of a textuality", but that one fixes it also in the *physicality* of its effects, in the *materiality* of its practices As such, critical readings, like interpretative exercises, will be insufficient, they will allow one to deny the materiality of discourse, to elide much of its force, and will hence result in the crippling of the political impact of our analyses (Hook, 2007, p.125).

By directing our energies towards the empirical analysis of the material effects of discourse and the discursive effects of materiality – researchers can, indeed, study discourse in a material world.

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