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TRAPPED IN OUR OWN DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS: TOWARD AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

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This article introduces Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* as a way of addressing what Wayne Wiegand has termed "tunnel vision and blind spots" in the discipline of Library and Information Science (LIS). Invoking Foucault's *Archaeology* in the context of Wiegand's problematic provides a framework in which to understand (1) how the discursive formation of LIS is itself a problem to be analyzed beside others, (2) how the nature of the discursive formation hinders potentially fruitful research in LIS, and (3) how understanding Wiegand in terms of Foucault can help to generate a new self-reflexive and critical attitude among LIS scholars to their own discursive formation and the discursive formations of others.

Introduction

In his article "Tunnel Vision and Blind Spots: What the Past Tells Us about the Present" [1], Wayne Wiegand makes a number of bold and important observations about the nature of library scholarship at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Wiegand notes: "At the end of the twentieth century the ubiquitous library . . . remains one of the most understudied of American institutions. Currently we lack a solid body of scholarship that critically analyzes the multiple roles that libraries of all types have played and are playing in their host communities" [1, p. 2]. He argues that "at present, this body of scholarship is too

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small, too light, too marginalized within librarianship, and too easily ignored" [1, p. 3], and he arrives at the following conclusion: "One gets the impression of a profession trapped in its own discursive formations, where members speak mostly to each other and where connections between power and knowledge that affect issues of race, class, age, and gender, among others, are either invisible or ignored" [1, p. 24].

Wiegand's impression of library and information science (LIS) as a "profession trapped in its own discursive formations" is central to his claim that LIS scholarship is reluctant to embrace a diverse range of problems, concepts, and theories beyond the realm of the mainstream LIS literature. But why does Wiegand invoke the term "discursive formations" in this context? What does it mean? Where does it come from? Why is it useful? Will the invoking of this term help LIS scholars in a positive way? This article examines these questions from the point of view of contemporary communication studies and, in particular, the work of the late French philosopher Michel Foucault. It is argued that an appreciation of the nature of discursive formations can and will enable LIS scholarship to legitimately spread its interest to those areas that Wiegand cites above. But first the obvious question must be addressed: What exactly is a discursive formation?

Discursive Formations

The term "discursive formation" is taken from Michel Foucault's book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [2]. It is a concept that will be readily understood by librarians and information professionals, and that may be one reason why Wiegand chose to invoke this particular idea. Simply put, a discursive formation refers to the ways in which a collection of texts are organized with respect to each other. Consider a familiar image: a collection of books arranged on the shelves of an academic library. Picture in your mind the physical arrangement of the books. Looking at the titles, you might ask: Why are the books arranged this way and not another? An academic librarian will tell you that the books are arranged according to the proximity of their subject matters. In the Library of Congress classification scheme, books about philosophy are grouped under the letter B, language and literature under the letter P, science under the letter Q, and so on. When one understands this idea, as every reader of the *Library Quarterly* will, then one intuitively understands the idea of a discursive formation. To draw upon Foucault's words, "whenever, between objects, types of statement, con-

cepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order . . .), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*” [2, p. 38].

The first point to be made about discursive formation, then, is that it is an idea that is very familiar to LIS scholars and practitioners. A discursive formation is not some intangible philosophical idea accessible only to continental postmodern scholars. In Foucault’s use of the term, discursive formations are real, just like the arrangement of books on a library shelf or the sentences in this article you are reading right now. Discursive formations are entities to be seen, touched, and experienced because the objects that make them up, such as books, are material objects. It follows, then, that because discursive formations are material, they have material effects.

Again, imagine yourself standing in front of the library bookshelf. Just by looking at the titles on the spines, you can see how the books cluster together. You can see which books belong together and which do not. You can identify those books that seem to form the heart of the discursive formation and those books that reside on the margins. Moving along the shelves, you see those books that tend to bleed over into other classifications and that straddle multiple discursive formations. You can physically and sensually experience the domain of a discursive formation by literally following the books along the shelves, having your fingers trail along the spines as you scan the call numbers, feeling the depth and complexity of the collection by the number of the volumes and the variety of its titles, reaching those points that feel like state borders or national boundaries, those points where one subject ends and another begins, or those magical places where one subject has morphed into another, and you did not even notice. Such is the life of a discursive formation; the arrangement of real books on real library shelves giving rise to real experiences.

Using Foucault’s concepts, one is now in a position to understand Wiegand’s central metaphor of LIS scholarship as a “profession trapped in its own discursive formation.” Again imagine yourself standing in front of the books in that section of the library labeled LIS. A profession trapped in its own discursive formation is one that will use the books in this one section, and no other. It will not consider browsing in sections such as “Language,” “Philosophy,” or “Critical Theory.” Subjects such as “race, class, age, and gender” [1, p. 24] are not considered, not because they are not important or interesting, but rather because they are not part of this subject section and, as such, do not appear as “objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices” [2, p. 38] within this discursive formation. Wiegand’s frustra-

tion resides in his impression that LIS scholars are not prepared to venture from their own section of the library.

Foucault's concept of the discursive formation is valuable to LIS because it gives LIS scholars a vocabulary and a conceptual framework with which to articulate and consider the problem Wiegand has identified. Foucault was a scholar whose primary activities were to identify discursive formations as traps to speaking and thinking and to articulate ways in which scholars might escape from these traps. Foucault proposed his "archaeology of knowledge" as a means for doing these. The purpose of Foucault's archaeology was to raise the *discursive formation itself as a legitimate object of inquiry*. Foucault writes, "We must . . . question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar . . . These divisions—whether our own, or those contemporary with the discourse under discussion—are always themselves reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types; they, in turn, are facts of discourse that deserve to be analyzed beside others" [2, p. 22].

Again, Foucault's ideas should be readily understood by the LIS scholar and practitioner. Consider the choices made by a cataloger when allocating books to a subject heading, a call number, and a particular place on the library shelf. How does the cataloger do this task? What is the nature of the preexisting subjects (discursive formations) to which a new book can be assigned a place? What are the rules by which a book is assigned to Philosophy and not to History or Language? When we ask questions like these, we are raising the same kinds of questions that Foucault explores in his archaeology: What are these divisions or groupings that have become so familiar? Foucault wants to address these principles of classification and treat them as "facts of discourse that deserve to be analyzed beside others" [2, p. 22]. Foucault does not raise questions about the contents of any particular book on the shelf. Instead he asks: Why is it arranged this way? Why is it placed alongside these other books, and not others? Why does the text belong in "Philosophy" and not "Art?" Ultimately, Foucault wishes to address questions such as the following: Why do we have these divisions of knowledge—Science, Art, Philosophy, and so on? Where did these divisions come from? What are the grounds for their legitimacy? How might they be challenged and transgressed? In many respects, Michel Foucault would have made a wonderful LIS student and scholar.

Invoking Foucault's archaeology in the context of Wiegand's problematic provides a framework in which to understand how (a) the discursive formation of LIS is itself a problem to be analyzed beside others, (b) the nature of the discursive formation hinders potentially fruitful research in LIS, and (c) understanding Wiegand in terms of Foucault

can help to generate a new self-reflexive and critical attitude among LIS scholars to their own discursive formation and the discursive formations of others. In fostering this attitude, the following section describes in more detail the relationship of discursive formations and the generation of scholarly knowledge. How do discursive formations constrain LIS scholarship in the manner Wiegand suggests? How can Foucault give us the conceptual tools to transgress these constraints?

The Textual Violence of Discursive Formations

At its foundation, library scholarship, like all scholarship, consists of people talking to each other. Scholars talk about their subjects through the proposition of hypotheses, the appropriate use of evidence, and the drawing of conclusions. This talk is presented to scholarly communities through presentations at academic conferences [3], the conversations in the hotel bar afterward, and the writing of articles that are peer reviewed and published in academic journals. But in all this talk, how is it known that what is being talked about is library scholarship and not something else? The context of the talk is informative. It is presented at meetings of the "Library Research Seminar." It is published in the *Library Quarterly*. This talk is articulated in familiar places and to familiar audiences and cites a canon of familiar authors and articles. It develops and uses a specialized vocabulary that differentiates its users from those in fields such as sociology, psychology, or philosophy. It is the discourse of a particular intellectual community and is institutionalized through specific professional associations, journals, and conferences. Taken together, this talk in these contexts forms an easily recognizable discursive formation. We would know quite easily if we had switched from the LIS discursive formation to, say, the discursive formation that forms psychology, sociology, or philosophy, with their own "objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices" [2, p. 38].

The boundaries that distinguish discursive formations are not abstract ideas. They identify limits and provoke responses when it is believed that those limits have been reached. For example, consider the idea of a "philosophy of LIS." What would this philosophy be? Does LIS consider philosophy to be a legitimate topic for discussion in its discursive formation? Or is it a term that rightly belongs somewhere else. Wiegand's claim is that a "philosophy of LIS" is one domain that appears beyond the pale in LIS speech. This belief is articulated quite forcefully by Jim Zwadlo, who writes: "Is there a philosophy of library and information science? The thesis presented here is that there is not, and we do not need one. That is, we do not need, nor do we have, one

single philosophy, to either fill a philosophical vacuum, or to replace an existing philosophy" [4, p. 103]. Discussions of philosophy or philosophers in the company of LIS scholars and practitioners may often lead to rolling eyes and the question, What does all this discussion have to do with us?

Indeed, there are few rewards for those prepared to make such an interdisciplinary move. For example, John Budd is an LIS scholar with an extraordinary background in continental philosophy, particularly phenomenology, hermeneutics, and semiotics [5–9]. Recently I was honored to stand in his office at the University of Missouri at Columbia and was amazed at his collection of philosophical and postmodern works. We had a conversation where I asked him if any of the LIS students were interested in exploring these ideas in their own work. John shook his head sadly and explained how he "slipped this stuff in" when he was able. Our conversation brought to mind the famous insight of Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein who wrote that, "the boundary of my language is the boundary of my world" [10, p. 37] and also that, "of what we cannot speak we must be silent" [10, p. 49]. Clearly, John Budd is working at the limits of what the LIS discourse will allow and LIS students will accept as appropriate and relevant.

Communication scholar John Shotter characterized such experiences as being indicative of a kind of "textual violence." Working too close to the boundaries of a particular discursive formation can produce feelings of trepidation and anxiety. Shotter writes, "Is there a kind of violence at work in intellectual debates and discussions: in the university colloquium, seminar, or classroom; in academic texts? Is there something implicit in our very *ways of relating ourselves to each other* in academic life in present times that makes us fear each other? Is there something in our current circumstances that makes us (or at least some of us) anxious about owning certain of our own words, or taking a stand? Speaking from my own experience, I think there is" [11, pp. 17–18].

Shotter remarks that this feeling of fear leads to scholars "saying what we know will be acceptable, rewarded; it is an anxiety that tends, differentially, to silence us; we tend to speak and write of some things but not others, in certain styles, but not in others" [11, p. 18]. The fear leads to a retreat into the safe haven of the disciplinary discourse where the limits are defined, the rewards are tangible, and the punishments for transgression are always lurking in the background.

Wayne Wiegand is acutely aware of these limits. He sees much beyond the boundary that can make a significant contribution to the discourse of LIS. Wiegand notes that "absent from the discourse driving [LIS], however, are the kinds of questions critical theorists such as Mi-

chel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, and Jurgen Habermas" would "ask about connections between power and knowledge, which all agree is never totally objective and never disinterested" [1, p. 23]. There is indeed much to be gained from LIS scholars assimilating the ideas of Foucault, Gramsci, and Habermas into their work. But the threat of Shotter's textual violence is always at hand to keep such incursions in check. There are tangible risks in leaving the familiar domain of the discursive formation and bringing back into it discourse that is strange, unfamiliar, disquieting, and unsettling. There is, first and foremost, the fear of rejection; the fear of expending valuable time and effort on a project that no one in the field will be prepared to appreciate. For example, one of the anonymous reviewers of the first draft of this article remarked: "I really cannot see that Foucault's approach is helpful. At best I find it obscure, at worst, nonsense." So how is it possible to breach the discursive formation in such a way that Foucault's potential contributions will not be dismissed as being "nonsense?"

One answer would be to attempt a translation of the terms of one discursive formation (contemporary European philosophy) into another (contemporary LIS scholarship). Or, as *Library Quarterly* editor John Richardson Jr. said in his decision letter concerning this article, to perform a "rhetorical revision to make it more engaging to the non-specialist." The analogy of the books on the library shelves introduced at the beginning of this article was added as a direct response to Richardson's request. Hopefully, Foucault's idea of the discursive formation will seem less foreign and more meaningful to the LIS discourse because of the inclusion of this analogy.

But there is a problem with translating the discourse of one realm into the discourse of another. To continue with the library shelf metaphor, the consequences are that we end up either with (a) another LIS book that does not leave the confines of the familiar discursive formation or (b) a book that is considered misshelved and irrelevant. Foucault expresses this dilemma as follows: "If you wish to place your discourse at the level at which we place ourselves, you know very well that it will enter our game, and, in turn, extend the very dimension that it is trying to free itself from. Either it does not reach us, or we claim it" [2, p. 205]. The whole point of Foucault's work is not to express the strange in familiar language. In fact, it is the very opposite. What both Foucault and Wiegand want to do is make strange that which is familiar. Foucault characterizes his goal as being "to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions on the basis of this reproblematicization" [12, p. 265]. The whole point of introducing Foucauldian discourse, such as the discursive formation,

into the LIS discourse is to make its practitioners and scholars aware of the limits of their discursive domain.

The problem, of course, is that people do not like to have their familiar mental habits disturbed. And this situation leads to the response of: Why are you introducing Foucault? What makes Foucault so right? Why are you using Foucault to criticize us? On what grounds can Foucault's or Wiegand's critique of us be considered valid? As Foucault himself noted, anticipating these kinds of responses, "What then is the title of *your* discourse? Where does it come from and from where does it derive its right to speak? How could it be legitimated?" [2, p. 205]. Because such legitimation cannot be found in the LIS discursive formation, other pseudolegitimations arise in the form of conspiracy theories. Why do these people provoke us with their talk of power, class, gender, and discourse? Perhaps the people introducing these new concepts have an hidden agenda themselves that we should be aware of. For example, Jim Zwadlo writes: "Perhaps Budd and Radford see this confusion in LIS as a power vacuum, and therefore as an opportunity to take power. They propose new philosophies that would justify the seizure of power, although it seems doubtful that the library has the kind of power that is seizable" [4, p. 118].

Again, these are not abstract issues with no consequences. Such responses frame the nature of the talk within LIS scholarship. They define which talk is considered acceptable and which is not. They provide the criteria by which one evaluates which talk is scholarly and which is merely naive. They provide the basis of John Budd's decision to introduce hermeneutics and phenomenology to a class of future librarians. They provide the guidelines against which this paper on Foucault will be considered acceptable for publication or not in a journal like the *Library Quarterly*. They form the basis of Wayne Wiegand's impression of a profession trapped in its own discursive formations.

Where is Foucault Coming From?

The distrust expressed by Zwadlo and the anonymous referee of this article is indicative of the realization that Foucault's analysis of discursive formations itself requires a discursive formation in which to articulate that analysis. After all, Foucault's books are allocated their own appropriate place on the library shelves along with every other book. For example, Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* is classified under the Library of Congress classification system as AZ101: A indicates that this work is considered a "General Work," AZ indicates a "General Work in the History of Scholarship and Learning/the Humanities," and AZ101

indicates "Philosophy/Theory." Why should any privilege be afforded to AZ101 when we are talking about Z: "Bibliography, Library Science, Information Sources (General)"?

What Foucault needs is a way to talk about discursive formations that does not itself fall prey to their constraints. He needs to produce a book that does not fit any category the library can devise. The achievement of this goal would require a manner of speaking that somehow falls outside of any discursive formation. This task is essentially paradoxical, reminiscent of the philosophy of Wittgenstein who remarks: "I used to believe that language gave us a picture of the world. But it can't give us a picture of how it does that. That would be like trying to see yourself seeing something. How language does that is beyond all expression" [13, p. 118]. Foucault faces the same predicament as Wittgenstein, to describe the workings of a discursive formation through some means other than the creation of another discursive formation.

The paradoxical nature of Foucault's project is perhaps the main reason why Foucault's work is so fascinating and yet has the reputation of being so difficult and frustrating. Foucault deliberately seeks to slip around those discursive formations that we use to organize and make sense of our worlds. For example, Jerrold Siegel remarks that Foucault's work is noted for its "remarkable discontinuities—sharp changes of orientation and vocabulary that he took pleasure in throwing like sand in the face of anyone who tried to fix his features" [14, p. 273]. Similarly, Richard Bernstein writes that, "as any close reader of Foucault knows, his writings are filled with surprises and novel twists. It is almost as if Foucault started each project afresh, bracketing what he had written previously, constantly experimenting with new lines of inquiry. This approach is one reason why reading Foucault is so provocative, disconcerting and frustrating. For just when we think we have grasped what Foucault is saying and showing, he seems to dart off in new directions (and even seems to delight in frustrating attempts to classify and fix what he is doing)" [15, p. 211].

What is the purpose of all this maneuvering on Foucault's part? What is the point of purposefully creating such confusion and frustration within his readership? For Foucault, the development of a theoretical account such as the archaeology is an act with implications and effects. It produces a discourse designed to impact prevailing discursive formations. It is this kind of effect that Wiegand is after: some way to impact the prevailing discursive formation that is LIS to make it bend and expand. In producing these effects, Foucault cannot claim to speak from or represent any tradition. There is no such thing as a "Foucauldian analysis" or a "Foucauldian position." Such a construct would represent something akin to a discursive formation in which

Foucault's remarks, ideas, and concepts can be nicely organized. Foucault's wish is to remain outside of the labels, outside of the discursive formations, which he, like Wiegand, sees as traps. Foucault writes in this often quoted passage: "I am no doubt not the only one who writes to have no face. Do not ask me 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" [2, p. 17]. According to Foucault, the archaeology is "trying to deploy a dispersion that is not related to absolute axes of reference; it is trying to operate a decentering that leaves no privilege to any center" [2, p. 205]. Ultimately, this decentering must also include the Foucauldian account. Radha Radhakrishnan captures this sentiment when he writes that "there is something constitutively contradictory about Foucault's location as a . . . thinker" [16, p. 62] and that "Foucault has quite thoroughly foregrounded the irrelevance and the untenability of his own theoretical authority" [16, p. 62]. But far from being a failing, Foucault's untenability as an authoritative theoretical discourse is his strength. In its idealized form, Foucault's archaeology is that place that is without preconceived categories overlaid with structures of power because it "rejects its identity, without previously stating: I am neither this nor that. It is not critical, most of the time; it is not a way of saying that everyone else is wrong. It is an attempt to define a particular site by the exteriority of its vicinity; rather than trying to reduce others to silence, by claiming what they say is worthless, I have tried to define this blank space from which I speak, and which is slowly taking shape in a discourse that I still feel to be so precarious and unsure" [2, p. 17].

Foucault's Concept of the Statement

How does Foucault's archaeology work? How does it set out to achieve the goals outlined in the previous section? Ultimately, Foucault will use the domain of history to "question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar" [2, p. 22]. But before Foucault's, and Wiegand's, use of history can be discussed, it is first necessary to consider the heart of Foucault's archaeology, his notion of the "statement" [17].

A statement is a material element in a discursive formation. It can be a word, a sentence, a paragraph, an article, or a whole book. For example, consider the sentence that is central to this entire article: "One gets the impression of a profession trapped in its own discursive formations" [1, p. 24]. What does this sentence mean? How do you know what it means? On a superficial level, you understand the sen-

tence to consist of words from the English language that follow a familiar grammatical structure. You understand what the words "impression" and "profession" mean in a crude, dictionary-like way. But that is not the way you "read" the sentence. The sentence is also part of a constellation of other sentences, other paragraphs, other words. You understand the sentence from its place within the text, from the context of the sentences that come before it and the sentences that will follow. These sentences are themselves contextualized by other sentences, and so on. To use Foucault's terms, one can consider the sentence "One gets the impression of a profession trapped in its own discursive formations" as a statement that has appeared and now resides in a constellation of other statements. What is important is not what the sentence *means*, but the fact that it has *appeared* in this article.

Consider another example. This article that you are reading right now is a statement. Forget about what this article is about or what it says. Forget about whether you understand it, agree with it, or consider it nonsense. Forget about whether the claims in this article can be considered to be true or false, accurate or inaccurate, brilliant or naive. In Foucault's terms, this article is a statement because it appears in the context of a particular discursive formation. In other words, it appears in this issue of the *Library Quarterly*, along with other kinds of statements, such as the other articles, book reviews, commentary, instructions to the authors, advertisements for other journals published by the University of Chicago Press, and so on. For Foucault, all of these statements are valuable and interesting because, together, they make up the discursive formation of this issue of the *Library Quarterly*. The important thing for Foucault is the fact that this article/statement has appeared in this setting, and not some other, and that it stands in a certain relationship to those other statements around it. Foucault is not interested in interpreting whether this article is accurate or not, or even whether or not it is true. Foucault's analysis of the statement constitutes a perspective for the description of the conditions in which texts *appear*.

Foucault is also interested in what the appearance of the statement *does*. For example, you, the reader, have read this article. Now what? What will happen as a result? Many things might happen. One possibility is that you will be inspired to use and cite this article in work you are doing. The appearance of this article in the *Library Quarterly* has the real potential to contribute to the appearance of another article, another statement. You may quote sections of it, you may critique the central thesis, you may be inspired to read more of Foucault's works. You may set this article as a required reading in your class syllabus. You may discuss it with your colleagues. This article/statement has the

potential to have a significant impact on the production and appearance of other material statements. It becomes an item in circulation that has an impact on the statements it comes into contact with. Foucault notes of his own statements that they have the potential to “land in unexpected places and form shapes that I had never thought of” [18, pp. 333–34]. They are able to do this because statements are real; they have a material existence and, as such, have the potential to physically circulate among readers. The readers, in turn, have the capacity to “manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose, and recompose, and possibly destroy” [2, p. 105] those statements. As Foucault describes, “Instead of being something said once and for all . . . the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced. Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realization of a desire, serves or resists various interests, participates in challenge and struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry” [2, p. 105].

Again, consider this article you are reading. As a material statement, it has the potential to appear in many different places under the eyes of many different readers. It may be deployed in many different discursive formations. Here is Foucault being read in the context of LIS scholarship, for example. This article/statement has the potential to produce entirely new statements (books, articles, letters, syllabi). These statements, in their turn, will enter into discursive circulation and also have the potential to generate many more new statements, and so on ad infinitum. This discursive engine, if you like, generates the networks that constitute the discursive formation.

Foucault captures these ideas vividly in his discussion of Gustav Flaubert’s *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* [19–21] where Foucault considers *The Temptation* not just in terms of a great work of literature, but as a statement that is composed and made possible by the arrangement of other statements. Foucault writes that Flaubert’s text “may appear as merely another new book to be shelved alongside all the others, but it serves, in actuality, to extend the space that existing books can occupy. It recovers other books; it hides and displays them and, in a single movement, it causes them to glitter and disappear” [20, pp. 91–92]. Likewise, this article is also the result of other books, other articles, other statements. The reference list stands as testimony to this. It locates this text in the context of a discursive formation of other texts that it has modified, integrated, selected, dissected, and so on. The reference list is like the library shelf—one can see the context of the other statements in which this article has appeared.

History as a Discursive Formation

At this point Foucault's concept of the discursive formation and the role of the statement have been described. How does all this allow the LIS scholar to transcend the bounds of her own discursive formation? Is the LIS scholar simply encouraged to read more Foucault? What good would that do? As both Wiegand and Foucault forcefully argue, this awareness of the discursive formation is not designed to encourage LIS scholars to simply read outside of their own areas, although this is certainly desirable. It also about reading their own discourse in a new and potentially radical way. To perform this new reading, both Wiegand and Foucault advocate a return to the question of history. For both scholars, history is identified as that realm where the relationship between knowledge and material documentation (statements) is most readily apparent. Wiegand writes, "Perhaps the time is right to apply broader, more interdisciplinary and theoretically rich perspectives on [the] past in order to focus some attention on what I see as tunnel vision and blind spots affecting plans now being crafted for librarianship's future" [1, p. 3].

Foucault's main interest in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is the question of history and what it tells us about the present. His *Madness and Civilization* [22] reads like a history of the asylum, *The Birth of the Clinic* [23] reads like a history of modern medicine, and *The Order of Things* [24] reads like a history of the contemporary social sciences. However, these are not histories in the traditional sense. The traditional conception of a historical narrative has been the ordering of events in the past: "What link should be made between disparate events? How can a causal succession be established between them? What continuity or overall significance do they possess?" [2, p. 3]. Written documents have a central role to play in answering these questions. Traditionally, historical documents were interrogated in terms of whether or not they were authentic, whether or not they were telling the truth, and whether or not they were written by authoritative sources. Each of these questions pointed to one and the same end: "the reconstitution, on the basis of what the documents say, and sometimes merely hint at, of the past from which they emanate and which has now disappeared far behind them; the document was always treated as the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace" [2, p. 6].

In his archaeologies, Foucault treats each document as a statement rather than a record of some past event. The importance of a document/statement lies not in what it says, but in the fact that it has materially *appeared* and what is subsequently *done* with it. Any particular historical document/statement is, in itself, a micro-discursive forma-

tion. It represents an arrangement of discourse (sentences, claims, diagrams, instructions, sections, and so on) in exactly the same way as this article can be considered its own discursive formation. As such, the historian needs to do work on the document. She must, for example, decide which statements within the document are important and relevant, and which are not. According to Foucault, the historian "organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations" [2, pp. 6–7].

However, like any statement, whether it be a book on the library shelf or a single sentence within this article, historical documents do not speak for themselves. Their significance lies in their place within a greater discursive formation, that is, in the ways they are combined and arranged with other documents/statements. The task of the historian is to arrange these documents/statements to produce a coherent discursive formation, "to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations" [2, p. 7]. In its essence, "history is the work expended on material documentation (books, texts, accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.)" [2, p. 7]. It is one way in which "society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked" [2, p. 7].

The main point of these insights for Wiegand is Foucault's demonstration in *Madness and Civilization* [22], *The Birth of the Clinic* [23], and *The Order of Things* [24] that there is more than one way to arrange any particular collection of documents/statements and, as a result, there is the potential to produce different historical narratives from the same data. It all depends on which statements are included and which excluded, and how the statements that are included are organized. For example, consider the text of this article you are reading now. This text is the end result of a first draft, a conference presentation, a second draft, revisions suggested by anonymous referees, revisions of these revisions, and so on. Many different arrangements have been tried, different references and quotes have been added and deleted. Who is to say that, even after all this revision, the arrangement you have now is the "best" or "optimum" one? Who is to say that this article could not be improved by some revision or addition? In a sense, this article is never really finished. It is just a step on the path to something else. Philosopher of science Jacob Bronowski recognized this in the case of the artist painting a portrait of someone's face. Bronowski writes: "We are aware that these pictures do not so much fix the face as explore it; that the artist is tracing the detail almost as if by touch; and that each line that is added strengthens the picture but never makes it final" [25, p. 353]. Foucault expresses a similar sentiment with respect to his own

writing. He writes, "I don't want to enter this risky world of discourse; I want nothing to do with it insofar as it is decisive and final; I would like to feel it all around me, calm and transparent, profound, infinitely open, with others responding to my expectations, and truth emerging, one by one" [26, pp. 215–16]. Both Bronowski and Foucault understand that no text is final. No text is fixed. Each sentence that is added, each revision that is made, strengthens the text but never makes it final.

The same is true for the production of historical narratives and discursive formations in general. Who is to say that the historical narrative of LIS is the "correct" one? Foucault writes that "*Recurrent redistributions* reveal several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination" [2, p. 5]. In writing his archaeologies of madness, the clinic, and the social sciences, Foucault refused to embrace the dominant discursive formations that represented the dominant historical thought on those subjects. Foucault returned to the original documents/statements themselves and attempted to form new discursive formations from them. As Foucault's doctoral thesis advisor, George Canguilhem, notes, "The archaeologist has to have read a great number of things that the others have not read. Here is one the reasons for the astonishment that Foucault's text has aroused in several of his sternest critics. Foucault cites *none* of the historians in a given discipline; he refers only to original texts that slumber in libraries. People have talked about 'dust.' Fair enough. But just as a layer of dust on furniture is a measure of the housekeeper's negligence, so a layer of dust on books is a measure of the carelessness of their custodians" ([27, p. 82]; see also [28]).

Canguilhem's reference to the layers of dust collecting on books that "slumber in libraries" is a reference to our willingness to accept the discursive formations of traditional histories without bothering to refer to the original documents/statements that make them possible. Foucault the archaeologist chooses to work with those raw documents/statements and attempts to discover new arrangements, new unities, and new narratives. He is attempting to turn history against its own discursive formations, to "sever its connection to memory, its metaphysical and anthropological model, and construct a counter-memory—a transformation of history into a totally different form of time" [29, p. 180]. If you should decide to read one of Foucault's histories/archaeologies, you may find them a little strange. Todd May argues that Foucault's histories appear this way because he uses arrangements of statements that are generally forgotten in order to raise questions about arrangements that are taken for granted [30]. Foucault does not claim to have found what is "really going on" in history, as opposed to what people mistakenly think is going on, because the

ultimate truth is not what grounds his historical knowledge. For Foucault, what grounds this knowledge is that which can be justified within the limits that make up the structure of historical discourse. Foucault's histories not only inform about the subject matter under investigation. They also challenge the conventions that apply in the writing of history in the present. This well-known passage from Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* sums up his approach: "Why [history]? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present" [31, p. 31]. This leads to an investigation that "is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" [32, pp. 45–46].

Conclusion: Wayne Wiegand and an Archaeology of LIS

The subtitle of Wayne Wiegand's article that provided the impetus for the writing of this article is "Reflections on the Twentieth-Century History of American Librarianship" [1]. Hence, the reason why Foucault's approach to the study of history is so important and relevant to advancing Wiegand's cause of breaking out of the traps of LIS' discursive formations. Wiegand remarks that "without a deeper understanding of the American library's past we cannot adequately assess its present and are thus unable to plan its future prudently" [1, p. 2]. What Foucault adds to this understanding of the field's past is the realization that invoking this history is not meant to simply tell us how LIS came to be the way it is. It is not merely the telling of a story. It is also invoked to put comfortable conceptions into doubt, to disturb them, and to encourage critique and reexamination of familiar practices that have become, in Wiegand's terms, the field's tunnel vision and blind spots. An archaeology of LIS would be an attempt "to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" [33, p. 9]. Similarly, Wiegand's vision of the role of history in LIS is of a "constant reexamination of our past from alternative perspectives" that "like a convex mirror . . . can show the parameters of tunnel vision and reveal many of the blind spots" [1, p. 3]. Again, the point of talking about our past is to help us understand the nature of our present.

Taking an archaeological approach to LIS is not something that is likely to generate much popularity within the field, since its purpose is to disturb those boundaries, vocabularies, and objects that are so

familiar. Any text taking this approach is asking to be deliberately misunderstood, because in the misunderstanding of the archaeologist comes the realization that the understanding of the discipline is not as simple as once thought. It consists not in giving clarity, but in making strange. It consists not in providing definitive answers, but in raising more questions. Allan Megill writes that Foucault is a thinker who regards his writings as bombs directed against extant reality, who wants them to "self-destruct after use, like fireworks" [34, p. 184].

Wayne Wiegand is proposing something similar. The goal of an archaeology of LIS along the lines described by Foucault would be to weave a new discursive cloth incorporating statements hitherto considered beyond the pale. It would seek to create new arrangements, new unities, and new ways of talking about the LIS profession that go beyond that section of the library labeled LIS. The work of Michel Foucault provides an excellent model for such a campaign. It is not a history of LIS that is needed to see the past the tunnel vision and the blind spots, but an archaeology.

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