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A DISCOURSE OF CLASSIFICATION: WHAT TYPE OF "THING" IS THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR AND WHAT MAKES IT "WORK" ?

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Theorists who study discourses are interested in the social construction of reality through talk and text. The discursive construction of reality occurs at different (though interconnected) levels - from transient and situated instances and episodes of language use (Potter & Wetherell 1987), through to the circulation of durable sets of interrelated knowledge claims, usually created and maintained by certified experts attached to institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, prisons and courts (Foucault 1972, 1978). In this paper, we explore some aspects of these different dimensions of discourse, through a consideration of the creation, circulation and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), a popular personality typing tool. We argue that closer attention to the characteristics of discourses and the practices that surround them – that is, how they are created, maintained and structured – can help us to understand how they work to construct reality across a variety of contexts.

Discourse and discourse

Several theorists from quite different fields have analytically differentiated between transient and enduring dimensions of discourse, and explored how they are interrelated. Firstly, in a discussion of the cultural dissemination of psychoanalytic knowledge, Teri Walker (1988) made what she called a 'practical and pragmatic distinction only' between (lower case) discourse as 'speech and everyday talk' and (upper case) Discourse as a 'discipline or body of knowledge' (p. 78). She noted that 'the two forms of discourse do not exist in isolation but each forms and informs the other, in tension'. She examined how Freudian ideas have influenced our understanding and explanation of human nature and behaviour, and observed that 'what is said in Discourse becomes sayable in discourse [and] saying in discourse becomes, or stands for, what has been said in Discourse' (p. 76).

Secondly, in the sociology of education, Basil Bernstein (1999) differentiated between 'horizontal discourse' which 'is likely to be oral, local, context dependent and specific, tacit, multi-layered, and contradictory across but not within contexts' (p. 159) and 'vertical discourse' which

> takes the form of a coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure, hierarchically organized, as in the sciences, or it takes the form of a series of specialised languages with

specialised modes of interrogation and specialised criteria for the production and circulation of texts, as in the social sciences and humanities' (ibid).

Horizontal discourse is segmented and transient, in that there is no fixed, overarching formulation through which actors attempt to stabilize knowledge claims across different contexts. Vertical discourse, on the other hand, can be recontextualized in different times and places, in ways that enables it to retain a relatively stable set of meanings. This does not happen automatically, but is the result of numerous practices and procedures that regulate the production, evaluation and circulation of knowledge.

Thirdly, and more closely related to the field of organizational studies, Matts Alvesson and Dan Karreman (2000) identified a variety of ways that discourse is understood and studied in their (our) field. They categorized them according to two dimensions – the degree to which analysts present discourse as coupled to meanings (for example, does discourse construct or determine subjectivity, or is there a self that is separate from talk and text about it?), and the social level or scale at which discourse is studied (from highly localized micro instances of language use to broader, more enduring macro systems for making sense). In discussing the second dimension, Alvesson and Karreman also used lower and upper case 'ds' to distinguish between micro and macro forms of D/discourse. However, in their scheme they did not, as Walker and Bernstein did, specifically associate Discourse with webs of professional practice and formalized bodies of 'expert' knowledge. Instead, they viewed it more broadly, as 'an assembly of discourses, ordered and presented in an integrated frame' (p. 1133) or 'a more or less universal connection of discourse material.[..].more or less standardized ways of referring to/constituting a certain type of phenomenon, eg. business re-engineering, diversity or globalization' (pp. 1133-34). They claimed that it is very difficult for organizational theorists to move up and down what they call the 'ladder of discourse' – that is, to account for discourse and Discourse in the same study. The problem, in their view, is when to move from one to another. When, for instance, do statements about globalization stop being isolated and context-specific instances of discourse and become manifestations of a broader Discourse?

In this paper, we suggest that it *is* possible to explore discourse and Discourse together, and indeed that attempts to do so may enhance our understanding of *how* reality is constructed through D/discursive practices. To do this, however, we need to move away from the somewhat diffuse understanding of Discourse offered by Alvesson and Karreman to one that is closer to that proposed by Walker and Bernstein above. In other words, we need to view Discourse as not (just) an aggregation and integration of multiple instances of discourse, but also as a solidification and formalization of selected aspects of discourse, that render it capable of sustaining a relatively stable set of meanings across time and space. The selection, solidification and formalization of a D/discourse is an outcome of work done by people who create and circulate it – 'experts' of all kinds who seek to stabilize knowledge claims and have them taken up and used (but not appreciably altered) by others. In this view, the shift from discourse to Discourse, and back again, is not just a matter of judgement on the part of organizational theorists, but an active accomplishment of the people we are studying.

The MBTI as Discourse and discourse

To expand and illustrate our argument, we will consider the characteristics of one particular D/discourse that is often used in organizations and elsewhere – the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator ® (MBTI). The MBTI is a set of questions that sorts the people who complete it into one of 16 personality types. It was initially developed in the United States during and after the Second World

War by two American women - Katherine C. Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers. The MBTI and its accompanying documents and practices sort people according to 'the way [they] *prefer* to use their minds' (Myers 1980, p. 1, emphasis in original). The preferences it examines are arranged along four dichotomies as follows:

1. Extraversion (E) versus Introversion (I), or 'relative interest in ... outer and inner worlds',
2. Sensing (S) versus Intuition (N) - whether people perceive through their senses or through 'indirect perception by way of the unconscious',
3. Thinking (T) versus Feeling (F) - whether people make decisions using logic or personal, subjective values, and
4. Judging (J) versus Perceiving (P). This refers to a general 'method of dealing with the world'. Judging people like to order their lives, while perceiving people embrace uncertainty and ambiguity (ibid., pp. 2-9).

The description of the MBTI given above is an account of its characteristics as a Discourse. Its reliance on dichotomies is a symptom of a widespread human propensity to organize knowledge around contrasts and opposites. Our self-conscious creation and use of a distinction between Discourse and discourse also exploits the explanatory possibilities generated by viewing phenomena *as if* they were arranged along an imaginary spectrum linking two dichotomous categories. Our purpose is not to reify the categories or the link between them, but to use them as explanatory tools to examine uses, mobilizations and interpretations of the MBTI in a variety of contexts. Drawing on the work of Walker and Bernstein and (to a lesser extent) Alvesson and Karreman, we define Discourses as sets of formal statements outlining the 'official' professionally sanctioned version of a body of interconnected knowledge claims. Discourse appears in textbooks, handbooks and sets of official guidelines. For our purposes, its most important characteristic is its capacity to retain relatively stable meanings across time and space. At the other end of the spectrum is discourse, which we define as localized statements that represent personalized and individualized engagements with Discourse. Lower case discourse is concerned with individual situations, beliefs and responses. It is a customized version of Discourse, 'true' for specific times and places, but not necessarily applicable to a range of diverse situations. There is of course a large grey zone where Discourse merges into discourse, for instance, in training sessions and workshops where MBTI teachers and presenters create, through graphs, diagrams and verbal performances, situated knowledge claims that draw on and reproduce the official, written Discourse.

To illustrate these distinctions, we draw on some data that we have collected from a company in which many employees have been typed according to the MBTI, and where the typology's jargon has become part of every day conversation. [1] A booklet used in the company (Myers 1998) provides a source of official MBTI Discourse. It describes the typology, its origins and underlying principles. It devotes a page to each of the 16 types, outlining their characteristics and 'Potential areas for Growth'. Within this Discourse, we read, for instance, that 'ISTJs have a profound respect for facts'. They are perceived to be 'consistent and orderly'. However, they can 'become rigid about time, schedules, and procedures' (p. 11). On the other hand, INFPs are described as 'sensitive, concerned and caring'. They 'find structures and rules confining and prefer to work autonomously'. They can 'be impractical' (p. 24). In

[1] The first two authors spent more than 1,000 hours over a period of two years in the company observing meetings, participating in workshops and conducting informal and formal conversations and interviews. As part of the broader research project, the first author conducted semi-structured, taped one-to-one interviews with 16 managers who had attended a residential 'leadership' course that introduced them to the MBTI. Interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes.

an interview with the first author of this paper, Sue, a middle manager in the company and an INFP, drew on this Discourse to explain some of the difficulties she had encountered at work:

> It's not OK to be an INFP in this business... The guy I first worked for when I started as a trainee was a raging ISTJ and wouldn't let me go home at the end of the day without all the filing done. So for years that's the way I thought you worked, and I was seventeen when I started. So it took me probably six months to accept that it's OK to be an INFP. They're nice human beings, and you're actually allowed to be one, and it doesn't mean that you're weird or you're soft or you're strange.

Sue's discourse draws on and reproduces, albeit in a personalized and customized form, the official Discourse contained in the MBTI handbook. The difference between her discourse, and the formal Discourse (in our admittedly artificially imposed scheme) lies in the level of generality of the statements within them. Sue's discourse is about a *particular* INFP in a *particular* situation. In the MBTI Discourse, statements are general and detached from context. According to the logic of the Discourse, ISTJs respect facts and INFPs are sensitive whether they work in a coal mine in Australia or an accounting firm in Canada. As Walker noted, discourse and Discourse feed off and reinforce each other. There are important tensions between them, however. Exploring these tensions is a fruitful way of investigating the means through which power is mediated through D/discourses in organizations and society more generally. In order to explore this further, we would like to attempt a brief climb up and down the ladder of discourse. The MBTI 'works' because it is simultaneously stable and customizable. How was this stability achieved, how was the Discourse spread, and what makes it so readily customizable in different settings?

Creating and Maintaining Discourse by Stabilizing 'Facts' and Policing their Uses

The MBTI is a relatively small and self-contained, but also widely dispersed and popular, fragment of the vast and varied discursive domain of the psychological sciences.[2] Scholars in the Foucauldian tradition have highlighted the importance of psychological Discourses and practices for contemporary forms of governance that oblige people to know and manage themselves (Henriques et al. 1998, Rose 1996, Townley 1993). Instruments (tests) that measure and sort people into categories are an integral part of the disciplinary apparatuses associated with this type of knowledge. As Nikolas Rose (1996, p. 90) noted, 'The test becomes a tiny but highly transferable diagram of a procedure for the inscription of human difference into the calculations of authority'. Psychological tools act as '*techniques for the disciplining of human difference*: individualizing humans through classifying them, calibrating their capacities and conducts, inscribing and recording their attributes and deficiencies, managing and utilizing their individuality and variability' (Rose 1996, p. 19, emphasis in original). Foucault's own comments (1982, p. 212) on 'the form of power that makes individuals subjects' are also relevant:

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2 Most academic psychologists consider the MBTI to be marginal to, or outside, the mainstream of psychological knowledge. Among the reasons for this are the unconventional nature of its initial development (by people not associated with the academic psychologists, particularly in prestigious universities), its unconventional use of psychometrics (e.g. bipolar rather than continuous scales of measurement), and its association with both C.G.Jung (generally not seen by US academics as part of mainstream psychological thought) and the notion of personality typologies (generalisations about traits of whole populations being the standard psychometric approach).

> This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him (sic) by his own identity, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him.

Moreover, by opening up and suggesting areas for improvement (or 'Potential areas for Growth', as in the MBTI handbook cited above), the MBTI can act as a 'technology of the self' (Foucault 1988, p. 18)

Foucauldian interpretations such as these are valuable for capturing how Discourses mediate power through knowledge (Foucault 1978, p. 100). However, they do not have much to say about how Discourses are produced in the first place, or how they are spread and maintained. How do transient and situated statements about human nature (observations by Jung, for example, or Briggs' and Myers' early adaptations of Jung's ideas) become codified into 'truths' that are solid and enduring enough to shape knowledge and practice across many different sites? To explore this question, we need to 'follow the actors' (Latour 1987) as they create and evaluate new facts and instruments, and attempt to stabilize and circulate them.

The origins of the MBTI can be traced back to Katherine Briggs' interest in personality types.[3] In 1923 she encountered CG Jung's book *Psychological Types* (1921/1971). She was impressed with Jung's ideas and expected that professional psychologists in the US or elsewhere would turn them into a practical personality-typing tool. However, this did not occur, possibly because psychologists in the US were more interested in behaviourism, and psychologists in Europe, including Jung, were not interested in quantification. The outbreak of World War 2 stimulated Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Myers, to 'do something that might help peoples understand each other and avoid destructive conflicts' (Black 1980, p. x) . Although they were not formally trained in psychology or mathematics, they decided to transform Jung' s ideas into a psychometric tool. This work was performed predominantly by Myers, who acquired sufficient statistical expertise to carry out the task. She worked on various Forms of the MBTI from 1942 until her death in 1980. The first 'official' version of the questionnaire (Form C) appeared in 1943, and was copyrighted in the same year.

In her early development of the tool, Myers conducted private research in which she tested out questions and developed the questionnaire using her own and family resources and networks, while also offering occasional licenses for use (to Hay in 1944 and Mackinnon in 1948). In 1956, she signed a contract with the Educational Testing Service, a recently-founded publisher of psychological instruments, mostly for use in education. This facilitated further development of the tool, and its dispersal to a wider audience. In 1962, a manual was published to assist interpretation of an updated questionnaire. The MBTI was licensed for translation into Japanese in 1968, and is now available in more than 30 languages. In the early 1970s, people who were interested in the MBTI began to create formal organizations to pursue research and carry out other MBTI-related activities. A Typology Laboratory was established at Florida University in 1972. This later became the Center for Applications of Psychological Type (CAPT). In 1975 Consulting Psychologists Press took over the publication of the questionnaire, thus facilitating further expansion of the MBTI network. Another interest group, the Association for Psychological Type, was formed in 1979. There are now Associations for Psychological Type in Australia, Britain, France, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa and elsewhere. The first conference specifically on the MBTI was held in 1975. Biennial conferences in the US (referred to as International) have followed, with US Regional conferences and equivalents in other countries. Over time, the MBTI has become increasingly popular and widespread.

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3 This account of the history of the MBTI is partly drawn from Geyer 1995, which adopts an actor-network approach (Latour 1987) to the analysis of the development of the instrument.

According to the web-site of the Center for Applications of Psychological Type, approximately two million people complete the MBTI each year world wide (www.capt.org). There is now abundant MBTI information on the internet. In May 2002, for instance, a search for "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" on the Google search engine yielded 21,900 pages.

It is clear that a great deal of work has gone into creating, extending and protecting the networks that circulate and maintain the MBTI. Briggs' and Myers' initial interest in Jung's typology may have gone nowhere, had they not succeeded in enrolling the Educational Testing Service, psychologists at Florida University and numerous others into their cause. As Bruno Latour noted:

> The problem of the builder of 'fact' is the same as that of the builder of 'objects': how to convince others, how to control their behaviour, how to gather sufficient resources in one place, how to have the claim or the object spread out in time and place. In both cases it is others who have the power to transform the claim or the object into a durable whole (1987, p. 131).

In other words, 'facts' and 'objects' on their own do nothing. There is nothing within the MBTI itself that caused it to move from 1940s Washington to a manufacturing plant in Australia in the 1990s, or indeed into a conference paper on Organizational Discourse in 2002. Discourse is maintained and spread through networks of action. As Latour noted, a crucial problem for fact-builders (creators and maintainers of Discourse) is how to control this action. How to ensure that the Discourse remains relatively stable, so that it does not mutate into something else as it is passed through the network?

Latour investigated how fact-builders try to control the behaviour and perceptions of others. One of his major contributions to social theory has been to highlight the role of material objects in the collective construction of reality. The MBTI would not exist were it not for the printed questionnaires that are used to type people, and the various handbooks and guidelines that outline how results are to be interpreted and used. These paper objects (now supplemented with digital versions) hold the network together, and ensure that ISTJ and INFP mean roughly the same things in Korea and South Africa as they do in the UK and the US. In Latour's terms, the questionnaires and associated documents are 'immutable mobiles' – consistent, durable, two-dimensional representations of a slice of 'reality' that can be easily transposed from one context to another without significant loss of meaning (Latour 1990, Geyer 1995).

The relative stability of the MBTI is also maintained by rules that (try to) limit and control the conditions of its use. The questionnaires are protected by copyright law, and are only supposed to be administered by registered psychologists or people who have been accredited through certified training programs. Such policing of its uses, however, requires constant work, and is highly unlikely to control all instances of MBTI use. For example, in the company in which we conducted field work, we observed managers who had learned about the MBTI attempt to guess the types of their colleagues and conduct speculations about as to how they would react in certain situations. As the MBTI has become more popular and widespread, its uses and meanings have become more difficult to control. This problem has become particularly acute since the advent of the internet. The home-page of the US Center for Applications of Psychological Type (www.capt.org) carries this message (downloaded 18 May 2002):

> ATTENTION: Although there are numerous sites on the Internet that purport to offer information on the MBTI®, we encourage you to seek out legitimate providers of MBTI® resources and services. Many psychological type instruments posted on the Internet have not

undergone reliability and validity testing, which ensures accuracy of instrument results. For links to some of the legitimate MBTI® sites, please go to Related Organizations.

'To Classify is Human' – From Discourse to discourse and back again

Immutable mobiles work because they formalize and abstract elements from a messy reality and arrange them into a form that is not only transportable, but that also helps people in new contexts to 'make sense' of themselves and their environment in novel and sometimes productive ways.
Thus, Sue could attribute the discomfort she felt at work to her having being trained by 'a raging ISTJ' boss to adopt work habits that were antithetical to her INFP preferences. According to Sue, the MBTI enhanced her appreciation of 'why other people seem to be so organized and I'm not. And that's OK, and understanding that that's OK'. Karl Weick argued that the construction of identity is a fundamental aspect of sense-making, and that it is driven by perceived needs for self-enhancement, self-efficacy and self-consistency. Feelings of dissonance, as experienced by Sue, act as stimuli to sense-making activities (1995, pp. 20-24).

But what is it about the MBTI that facilitates such activity? Weick has also written about how sense-making is 'focused on or by extracted cues' which are 'simple familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring' (1995, p. 49-50). Briggs' and Myers' construction of the MBTI involved extracting and manipulating cues from the populations they studied in Washington during the 1940s and 1950s. These cues consisted of choices among questionnaire items that were made to point to, and stand for, broader patterns of psychological type. The questionnaires and associated documents enable the extraction and interpretation of cues in a wide variety of situations. The array of questionnaire choices made by an individual links the particular (his/her personality) to the general (psychological type). Extraction and interpretation of cues involves categorization, sorting and classification.

The characteristics and capacities of systems of formal knowledge, such as those used to categories and sort, have recently been active areas of research in the sociology of scientific knowledge (Berg 1997, Bowers 1992, Bowker & Star 1999, Star 1995). Rather than deconstructing these systems because they always, inevitably, fall short of complex reality, these scholars seek to explore their 'generative power' (Berg 1997). That is, what makes them useful? Why do people keep creating and using lists, procedures, databases, standards, and classificatory schemes? Such activity is ubiquitous, and often habitual. Indeed, the introduction to Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's book on the sociology and politics of classification is titled 'To Classify is Human'. In it, they point out how routinely we classify objects. 'We sort dirty dishes from clean, white laundry from colorfast, important email to be answered from e-junk' (1999, p. 2). Our computers, offices, homes and cities could not exist without the myriad systems of formal knowledge that facilitate their creation and operation (that is, when they are not broken or otherwise unworkable).

For Bowker and Star, standards and classification schemes are neither neutral nor innocent. They create 'social and moral order' (p. 3). According to Bowker and Star's definition, classification is 'a spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world'. They continue: 'A "classification system" is a set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to then do some kind of work – bureaucratic or knowledge production' (p. 10). Ideally, classification systems exhibit three properties (ibid.):

1. 'There are consistent, unique classificatory principles in operation'. That is, there are formal or informal 'rules' for relating cues (particularities) to categories.

2. 'The categories are mutually exclusive'. For example, in the MBTI, people fall into only one of 16 possible psychological types. They cannot be belong to more than one category.
3. 'The system is complete'. The 16 types generated by the four dichotomies covers the entire range of human variability. There are no other types of people (at least not within the MBTI).

Individual cases do not, however, always fall neatly into categories. Borderline, marginal and unclassifiable cases (transgender humans, surrogate mothers) frequently generate flurries of concern because they throw our often unacknowledged and implicit classificatory schemes into disarray (Star 1991). Within the MBTI, a few people elude classification. They are considered to be undifferentiated in their preferences.

Categorizations have social, political and moral consequences. Sue's perception of herself, and her place in the company, was altered because of the MBTI. Rather than perceiving herself as deficient because she was disorganized and somehow different to her colleagues, she could consider herself (after some struggle) to be a normal INFP ('you're actually allowed to be one') working in an environment dominated by ISTJs. Bowker and Star thus reinforce Foucault's argument that ostensibly 'neutral' and 'scientific' forms of knowledge mediate power because they construct their subject matter. They alter the shape of what is visible and knowable, sick and the healthy, normal and deviant.

In the company in which we carried out our fieldwork, consultants and HR personnel deliberately used the MBTI to try to alter perceptions of deviance and normality (Garrety et al. submitted, Badham et al. submitted). Interest in the MBTI was intensified by a 1994 consultant's report that identified the company as an ISTJ organization. This was not surprising, as it employed many engineers and technicians, and ISTJs are reputed to favour that type of work (Myers 1980, pp. 149-164). By the mid-1990s, however, some senior managers and human resources personnel began to perceive the dominance of ISTJ-like behaviour, with its reserve, respect for tradition, and emphasis on logic, as problematic. In their view, an ISTJ company was not well-equipped to deal with rapid change, and its typical manager lacked 'people skills'. At workshops that introduced middle managers to the MBTI, consultants attempted to use the device to alter perceptions of desirable and undesirable behaviour. Sally, a female engineer[4] related her experience as follows:

> There were about thirty of us and they split us up into four categories. There were two guys and myself in one group and then there were the other groups. Most were in the IJ category. I was in the EP group. I remember them saying that this category of three people – the EPs - are the doers and the other people were systems and procedural people. They then said we need more people in the organization like these three. If you had more people in this category as leaders then [the company] would be a very dynamic workforce, because you need doers in leadership.

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4 It is interesting that the illustrative extracts that we have used in this paper come from two of the three women we interviewed. The number of managers we interviewed was small - 3 women and 13 men. Within this sample, the women, as interview subjects, engaged in more personal reflection than the men. They were much less inclined to (somewhat mechanically and impersonally) identify with and reproduce the company rhetoric - as more than half the men did. The personal responses of the women may have been influenced by the fact the interviewer was also female. Alternatively, it is possible that the women's more personalised sense-making was stimulated by their doubly marginal status (deviant in MBTI type as well as gender) in the company. If so, this affirms Weick's observation that sense-making is stimulated by feelings of dissonance. At this stage of our research, these speculations are necessarily very tentative. Nevertheless they suggest interesting possibilities for future research on factors which influence the ways people draw on Discourses to make sense of local, private troubles.

> Unfortunately they tend to use us doers as doers all the time, so you don't get into a leadership position because they rely and depend so much on you going out and doing things. That's fine, but I'm sure that we doers can certainly be effective in leadership too. You need the two to complement, right? [...] So, yeah, I probably gained a lot from the course on that. But I don't think the procedural and systems people have really taken that out of the lesson.

This is another example of Discourse being turned into discourse. In the process, the MBTI was simultaneously recontextualized, personalized and reproduced. The space between Discourse and discourse is where actors attempt to impose, or challenge or alter, social and moral order through systems of classification. In this case, it seems as though the attempt was not a great success, even though Sally does seem to draw some pride from being recognized, by the consultant at least, as a 'doer' and therefore a source of dynamism within the company.

Sally's final statement – that, in her view, the 'procedural and systems people' have not, after all, learned to value their dynamic EP colleagues, is significant. It illustrates why an examination of relationships between Discourses and discourses is important. Discourses do not construct reality in any simple or deterministic fashion. The MBTI may indeed (attempt to) 'render human difference technical' (Rose 1996, p. 90). It may be used to calibrate, inscribe, manage and utilize individual variability (Foucault 1982, Rose 1996). However, not everyone is equally manageable. Foucault recognized this of course, but he did not explore the detailed forms that resistance and ambivalence took. Although he frequently stated that power is mediated through myriad social interactions (the 'microphysics' of power) his refusal of dualisms meant that he turned his attention to other issues..

Conclusion

This paper is, in part, a theoretical outline for a research project that we hope to conduct in the next few years into the way power is mediated through the D/discourse of the MBTI. Preliminary research in a company where people use the MBTI has suggested that subtle power shifts can be engendered by reconfiguring identities and relationships through the device. However, MBTI use in the company was highly variable and often different to that outlined in the 'official' Discourse versions. These observations suggest that the power of Discourses do not lie in the Discourses alone. That is, they do not, in and of themselves, compel particular patterns of belief and ways of behaving. To explore the variety of 'realities' that a D/discourse is capable of producing, we need to examine how the generic and the particular interact – how people draw on, subvert, reinterpret and reproduce the D/discourses they encounter. If we focus solely on the content of a Discourse (for example, statements outlining 'Potential Areas for Growth' in an MBTI text), we risk overestimating the power it carries and homogenizing its effects (Gabriel 1999, Knights & McCabe 2000). We also ignore the massive amount of social negotiation and sheer work that it takes to construct, maintain, circulate and control Discourses and their associated practices.

The MBTI is, perhaps on the surface, an easy D/discourse to study because its jargon and its interrelated knowledge claims are readily identifiable. It is also relatively discrete and circumscribed. These qualities mean that we can 'follow' it around – from the various institutions that publish it and attempt to control its meanings and uses to the many sites where it is used in organizational development programs to the private reflections of people who have encountered it. A study of how it features in the professional strategies of various organizational actors becomes feasible, as do explorations of how a diverse range of people use it to reconfigure self-understandings and interpersonal relationships. In this way, we aim to contribute empirical richness to our understanding of *how* D/discourses construct the objects about which they purport to produce knowledge.

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