

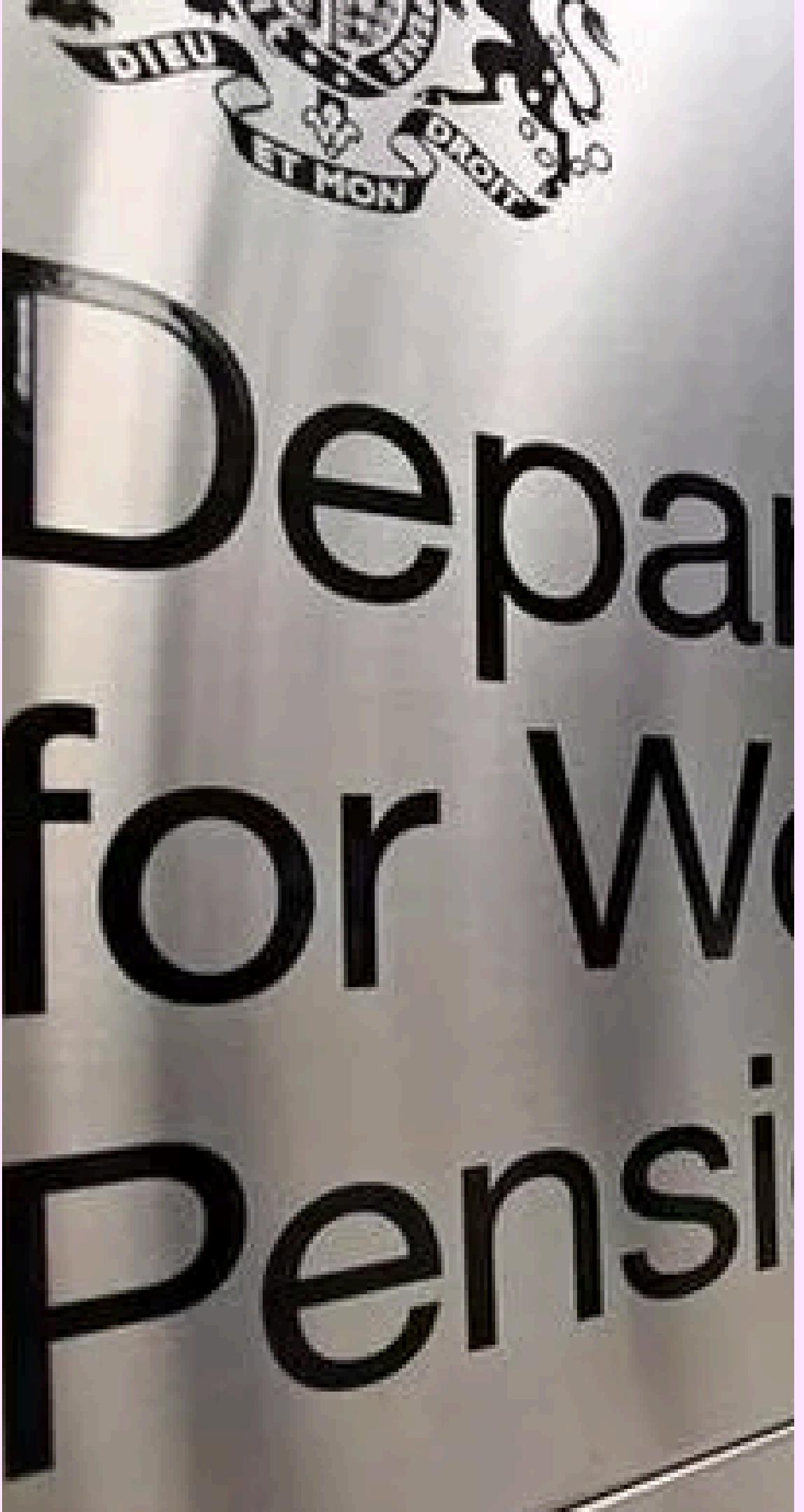
# Discourse Analysis Masterclass in Social Research

Dr Margarita Aragon



# Tonight

- What is discourse?
- Reading documents - Department of Work and Pensions, austerity's paper trail
- Some concluding thoughts



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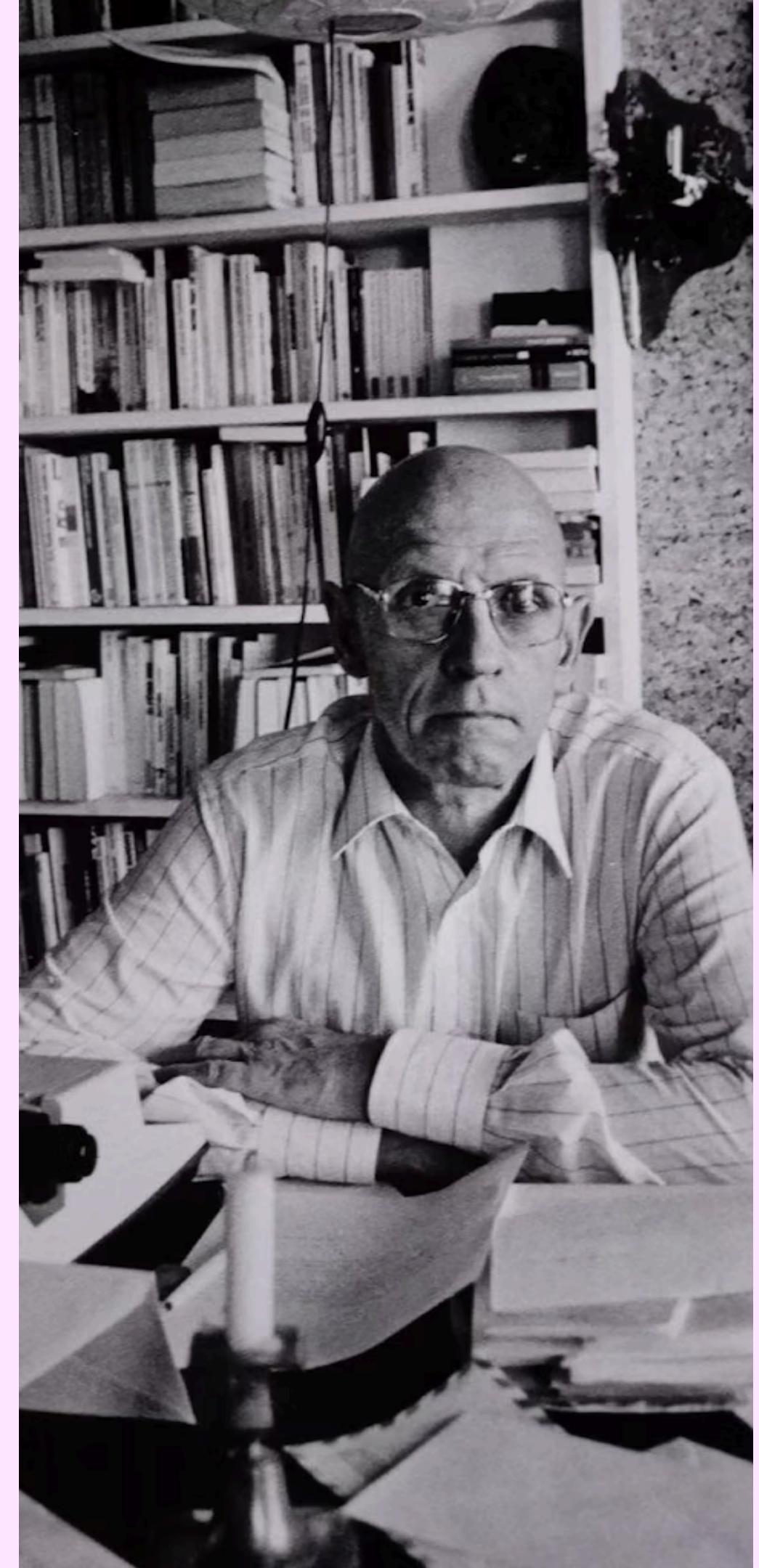
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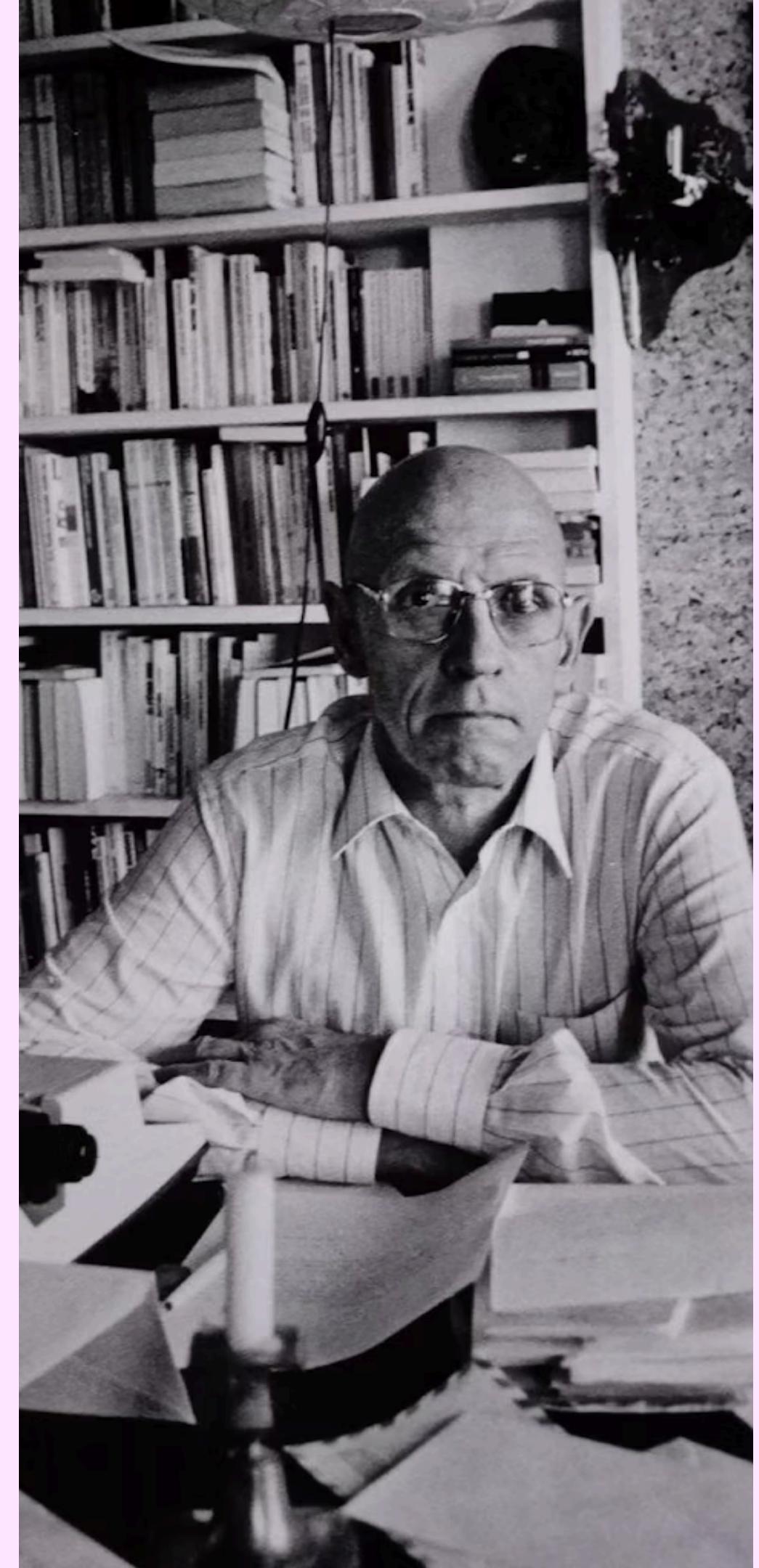
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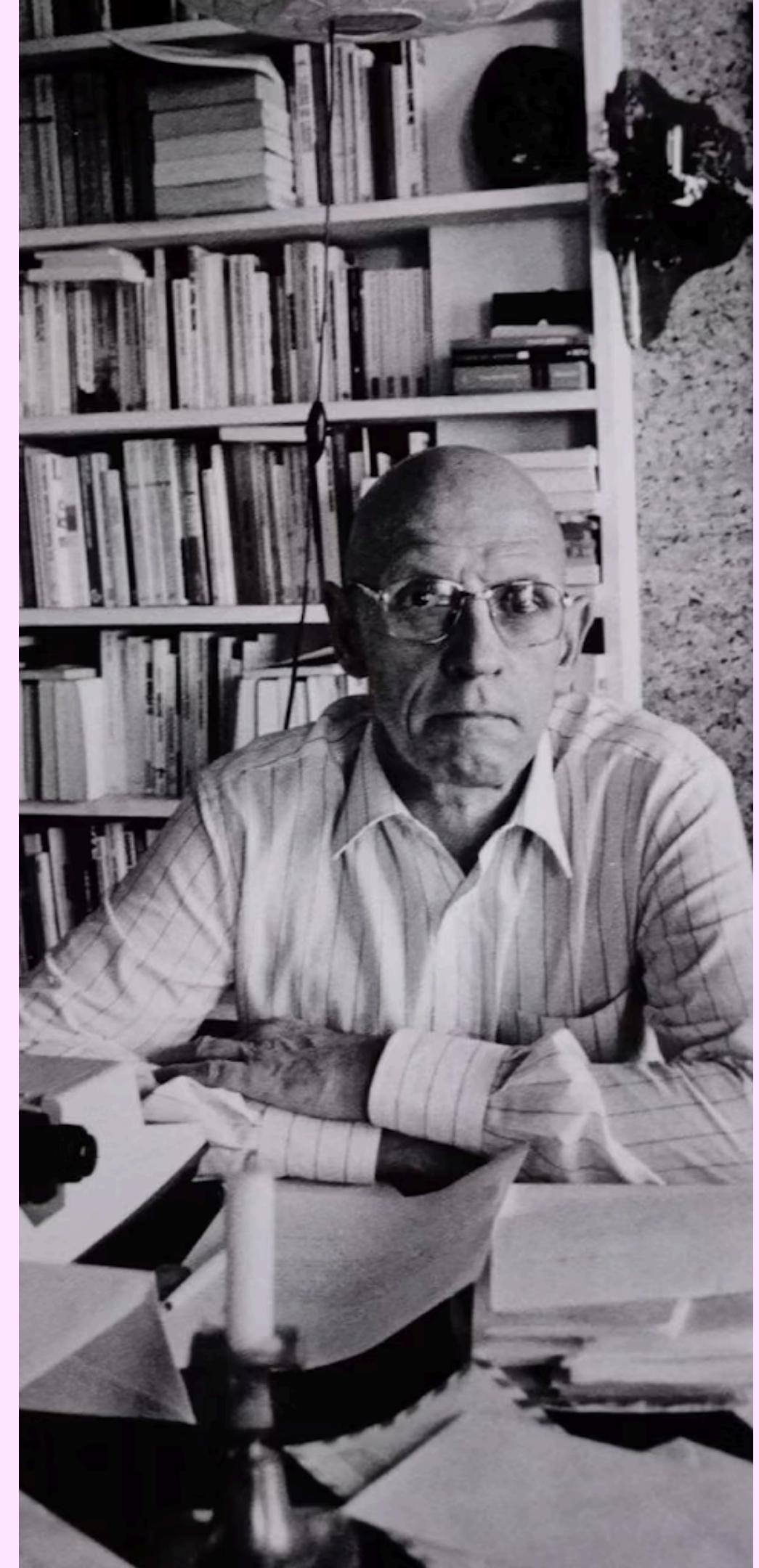
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- Disciplinary institutions- not just the rhetoric, but also the practices and rituals of institutions; the organization of space; the directed movement of bodies



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Discourse is involved in establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions. (Gil 2000, 176)

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  - Eg. 'My car has broken down.' (Gil 2000, 176)

# Analysing documents

Documents - materials used to share, record, or convey information- are the material traces of a vast range of personal, institutional and cultural interactions. Rather than just providing background information about a given social reality, documents can be examined as sites in which social worlds are constructed and contested.



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- Social media, websites, newspapers, comment sections
- Gravestones, flyers, graffiti in bathroom stalls or school desks, messages in bottles....



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to make sense of one document, it often helps to look at those it engages with, implicitly or explicitly

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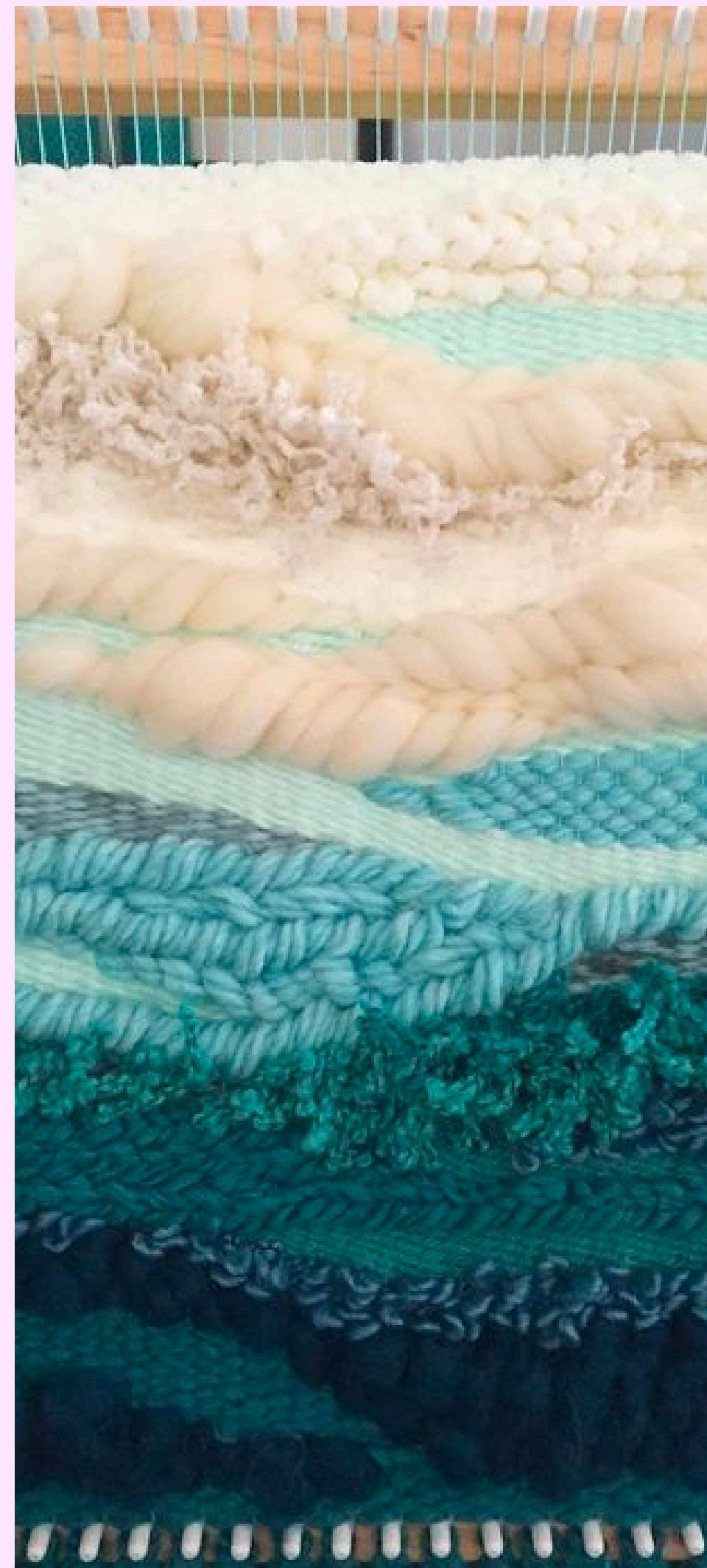
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- claims should be situated; open to nuance and complexity



# Zoot Suit Discourse

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What does the riot discourse tell us about anti-Mexican and anti-black racisms in the US?

- Many negative articles about Mexican youth. 'Positive' articles also important



# Department of work and pensions documents

Discourses of disability in austerity governance:

- requires looking at constructions of work, fitness, citizenship



Working for a  
healthier tomorrow

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## Chapter 4 – Changing perceptions of fitness for work

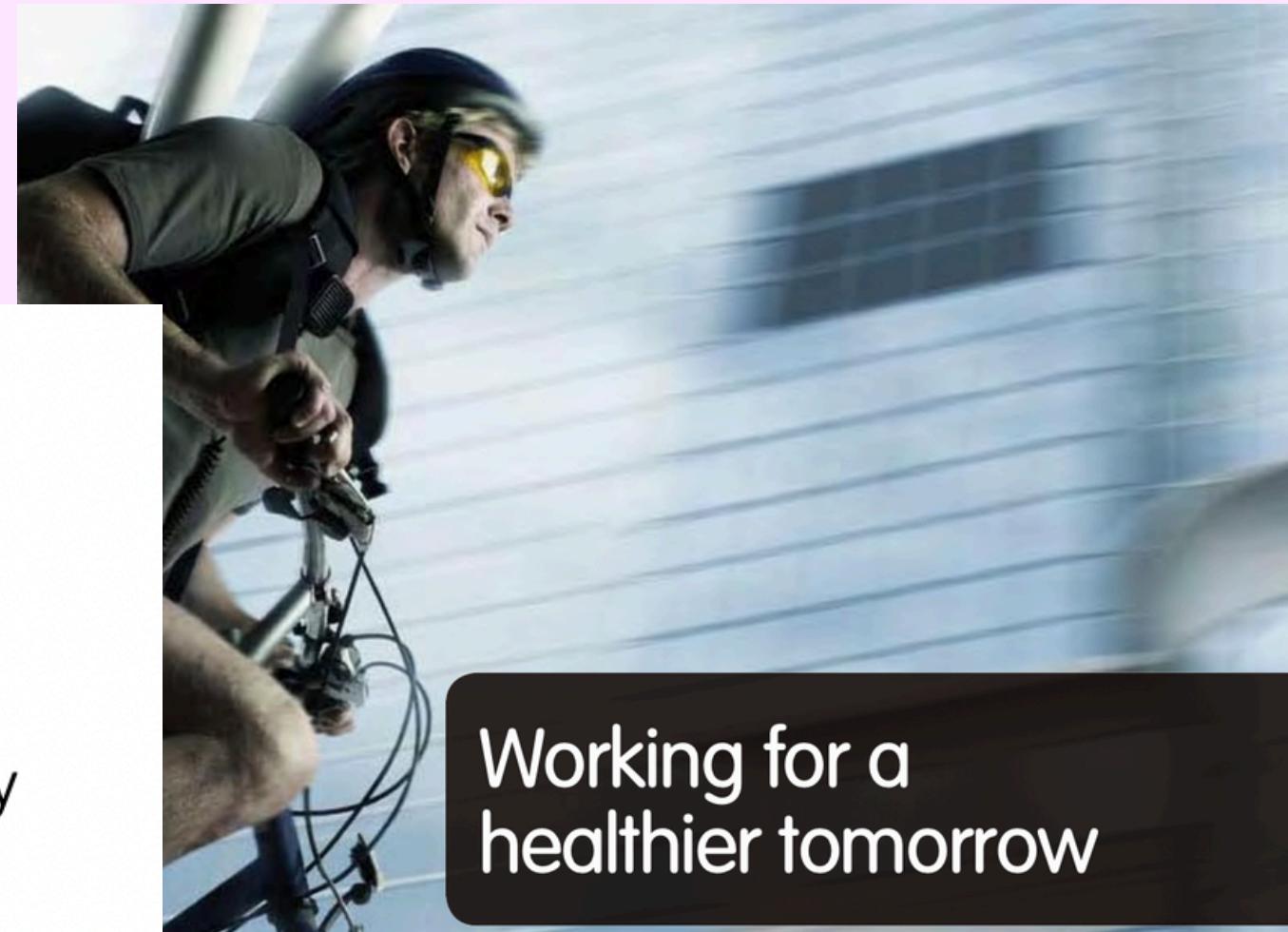
Any improvement in work-related support for those who develop health conditions will need to be underpinned by a fundamental change in the widespread perception around fitness for work; namely, that it is inappropriate to be at work unless 100% fit and that being at work normally impedes recovery.



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- 5 GPs often feel ill-equipped to offer advice to their patients on remaining in or returning to work. Their training has to date not prepared them for this and, therefore, the work-related advice they do give, can be naturally cautious.
- 6 The current sickness certification process focuses on what people cannot do, thereby institutionalising the belief that it is inappropriate to be at work unless 100% fit and that being at work normally impedes recovery.

## Fit notes: the ESA65B Letter

- The DWP sent a letter to doctors urging them not to provide 'fit notes' to patients who had been found fit for work in Work Capability Assessments undertaken by a private company
- 72% of those found fit to work appealed the decision, 9 out of 10 of them successfully
- In fact, these patients needed fit notes to continue to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) while they appealed the decision
- What insight does it offer and what questions does the letter raise? What contradictions do we see?

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- Discourse analysis an important and necessary means of examining power relations - not the only means.
- can be used in conjunction with many other methods
- analysis of documents has to engage deeply with documents but also has to move outside of them - the connections you make will reflect your particular theoretical and political commitments