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## THE FOUCAULT EFFECT IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

### ABSTRACT

This research proposes that Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and genealogy constitute a significant turning point, not only in philosophical and historical terms but also in the research framework of the sociology of knowledge. The first level of Foucault's contribution to the sociology of knowledge is widely recognized through the concept of discourse and its dimensions of materiality, power and knowledge. The second level is the analytical grid of power/knowledge itself, which focuses on the relays established between them. The third level, which we consider a crucial area open to further interpretation, is the concept of the history of the present. Although Foucault's contribution has already been acknowledged in contemporary sociological research of knowledge, our objective is to expand on this recognition by highlighting the significance of genealogy's dimensions to existing approaches, namely the historical sociology of knowledge and sociology of knowledge approach to discourse.

### KEYWORDS

Foucault, genealogy, knowledge, power, sociology of knowledge

## Introduction

Genealogy as a method used by Michel Foucault in his research has so far been the subject of numerous analysis (Elden 2003; Crowley 2009; Koopman 2013; Dreyfus, Rabinow 2017; Haddad 2020). The "project" of genealogy itself is contextualized in various ways: as a "later" or "second" phase of Foucault's work that comes after archaeology, or as an inseparable part of his opus. Despite the differences in approach and use, studies indicate the importance genealogy still has today (Haddad 2020; Erlenbusch-Anderson 2020; Lorenzini 2022).<sup>1</sup>

In this review of the significance of genealogy to the sociology of knowledge, the following dimensions are especially emphasized: power/knowledge

<sup>1</sup> Also in: Genealogy, a special issue of the journal *The Monist* (Vol. 105, Iss. 4, October 2022).



as an “analytical grid” and a concept of the history of the present. Foucault’s key contribution has already been recognized in contemporary research in the sociology of knowledge and discourse analysis (Keller 2012; Diaz-Bone et al. 2007; Khan&MacEachen 2021). Our aim is to add to these.

The first level of Foucault’s contribution is already recognized through the concept of discourse, especially through the dimensions of materiality, power and knowledge. The second, level is recognized through the “analytical grid” of power/knowledge and the “relays” established between them. The third level we recognize as a key domain: it is the the question of the *history of the present*. This concept embodies Foucault’s views on the relationship between the past and the present, and it sheds light on our understanding of truth and knowledge. It is significant because it prompts us to consider layers of practices that accumulate over time, like a palimpsest, rather than simply comparing them across different periods of history. This approach invites also to re-examine archaeology of knowledge and genealogy. Ultimately, it highlights the intricate networks of knowledge and practices that are currently in place and can be studied through empirical means.

### **Foucault, Studies of Discourse and Sociology (of Knowledge)**

The extent of Foucault’s influence on social sciences is recognized in various sociological disciplines through the concepts and areas he researched: space, urbanism, and geography (Foucault 1986; 1995; Prior 1988), medicine and public health (Foucault 2003; Lupton 1995), technologies of the self (Foucault 1988; Lupton 2016), education (Foucault 1995; Grant 1997), management and economics (Armstrong 2015), and studies of organizations (Power 2011). On the one hand, there are studies arguing that Foucault’s research is important in the context of bridging agency and structure, which has certainly been one of the key issues in debates in sociological theory (Silverman 1985; Eckermann, 1997). On the other hand, there have been criticisms that highlighted the shortcomings of Foucault’s research and emphasized the impossibility of the application of his concepts in sociology (Fox 1998).

There are good examples of elaborated research in which the influence of Michel Foucault is seen through the application of his concepts. A good overview is given by Michael Power (Power 2011), who has not only recognized the importance of Foucault’s work as a resource for various sociological disciplines, but also established an approach called *the historical sociology of knowledge*. Foucault’s key ideas and concepts recognized in sociology are elaborated by Power: discourse and archeology, power/knowledge, the “historical method”, and the problem of action. According to Power (2011), the research of the French thinker can be placed at the crossroads of philosophy and sociology. Topics such as madness, medical (expert) knowledge and psychiatry, sexuality, law, surveillance or space, are all areas of special interest to sociologists. In other words, the *Foucault effect* is seen in sociology even though he hasn’t often referenced sociologists (ibid.).

Ian Hacking is also a philosopher who has recognized the importance of Foucault's work in researching institutional and classification schemes for what he calls "making up people" (Hacking 2004). However, when it comes to key topics and Power's approach, one should start from the significance of discourse, as a concept that is important not only for sociology, but also for the sociology of knowledge. The concept itself is defined differently in Foucault's work and there are limitations and difficulties in recognizing the border line between discursive and non-discursive practices.

Discourse is like a surface on which it is possible to see the effects of power/knowledge. What Foucault was interested in were the conditions of possibilities, thanks to which specific *effects of discourse* occur: power and knowledge. These conditions of possibilities or *rules* and *technologies* were a field of Foucault's interest. Other important area of influence of Foucault in sociology lays within the fields of social practices and methodology. Although Foucault's historical-philosophical approach was criticized both by historians and philosophers, and he considered himself neither one nor the other (Foucault 2007), the fact is that his analyzes and concepts are used both in socio-historical research and philosophy. According to Power, the field of Foucault's influence is also recognized in the research of social action. There are scholars, for instance, who developed analyses, after Foucault, "that do not appeal to the interests of specific agents, but rather seek to describe the formation of a historical a priori, in Foucault's sense, that shows how new accounting practices emerge at the conjunction of significant discourses governing what it is possible to say" (Power 2011: 44). However, Foucault's goal was not to develop a particular theory of action. He was rather interested in historical and social conditions under which people become subjects (ibid.). The fields of power, governmentality, and institutions are also the areas of research that have special significance for sociology, although governmentality studies are already recognized as a developed field of research (Burchell, Gordon, Miller 1991; Dean 2010).

In addition to the abovementioned, Michael Power (Power 2011) gives a draft for a *historical sociology of knowledge*. It takes into account the so-called *practice turn* in social sciences (Schatzki, Cetina, Von Savigny 2005). Foucault also recognized the importance of practices: "The goal of the analysis was not 'institutions', 'theory' or 'ideology', but practices – my intention was to capture the conditions under which they could become possible at a given moment [...] practices that could be understood as places of what was said and done, rules that were imposed, and reasons that justified them, places where what was planned and taken for granted meets and intertwines" (Foucault 1991: 75).

Discursive practices are of particular interest in the sociology of knowledge. Then, there is something that Foucault calls the *isomorphism* of discourses. It could be described as a common feature of discourses in different areas of social life, which permeate them as diagrams or 'axes'. In addition to discursive practices, which are crucial for genealogical analysis, the scope of research in the sociology of knowledge includes other behaviors/actions of people, such as rituals, objects, institutions, etc. These are all fields or practices in which

power relations *fluctuate*. For instance, in the domain of naming, and through the processes of (de)legitimization of knowledge. It is precisely on the discursive level, or in the “text” itself, where the rules and norms are “hidden”, as well as the strategies and technologies of power.

In methodological terms, practices should also be understood as sets of *relays* that bridge these discursive foundations, while discourse is also a relay that connects two different practices. It is like the relation between theory (discourse) and practice: “No theory can be developed without running into a wall, and then, it turns to practices in order to break down the wall” (Erlendbusch-Anderson 2020).

Finally, discursive practices are elementary units both in the genealogical analysis and in the sociology of knowledge, especially in the so-called SKAD approach (Keller 2012). Yet, practices are the ones that define objects (Foucault 2002), practices articulate different types of power/knowledge, discourse regimes, truths and ways of its (de)legitimization. Furthermore, discursive practices represent an opportunity to create a world of social experience, because “discourses map out what people really do and think, without realizing it” (Veyne 2010: 29). The orientation of sociological approach towards practices in this sense moves the focus of research from the abstract to the experiential. The directions of analysis also move from the analysis of ideas, which are “localized in the individual consciousness of doers”, to impersonal arenas of discourse. Or, to paraphrase Ann Swidler, the “old area” of analysis, with its ideas and agents, begins to be divided into the domain of the practical and the domain of the discursive (Swidler 2005: 75).

Let us go back to Power’s conception of the historical sociology of knowledge. Interestingly, he considered *The Order of Things* (2005), first published in 1966, to be the most representative work in which “the most explicit articulation of Foucault’s historically oriented sociology of knowledge” was articulated (Power 2011: 37). In Power’s opinion, it was also interesting – in the context of the development of the sociology of knowledge – that the famous Berger’s and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* was published in the same year. What Power claims is that Foucault’s interest in practices, opened up space for research different from the history of ideas, research that led to questioning the *conditions of possibilities* for the emergence of power/knowledge. We completely agree. However, for us it does not still mean that it was an approach built as the “historical sociology of knowledge”.

From Power’s perspective, Foucault’s earlier research into madness and medicine could be understood as historical case studies of the specific “truth regimes” (ibid.: 37). Furthermore, Power compared Foucault’s approach with the approach of David Bloor in the so-called *strong programme* of the sociology of knowledge (Bloor 1976), insofar as he recognizes that the stake for Foucault was not true as such: “[B]ut the social and institutional historical conditions under which authorized statements can be made that count as true” (Power 2011: 38). In this way, Foucault seemed to apply the *principle of symmetry* that Bloor advocated as well. However, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault

explored the concepts of discourse and knowledge in three constitutive areas: life, work, and language (Marinković, Ristić 2016), which contributed to the historical appearance of man.

This is also a study of the conceptual transformation of knowledge and something he calls *an episteme* (Foucault 2005). In other words, the historical-epistemological move and transformation of the classification of knowledge (knowledge of the history of nature, wealth, and general grammar), is “without consciousness of the role of human subjects in practices of representation” (Power 2011: 38). New forms of knowledge in science (biology, political economy, and linguistics), bring two important points. First, every field of knowledge meets new “epistemological requirements” that lead to “depth” beyond the surface of phenomena. Secondly, Foucault sees in this the possibility for the development of human sciences, which recognize that “behind money” there is a dynamic system of wealth production, that “behind grammar” there are mechanisms for creating and changing language and speech, and that “behind living organisms” there are hidden evolutionary processes (ibid.: 38). The transformation of *episteme* and the appearance of new forms of knowledge also meant the possibility for the emergence of sociology within the new *trihedrals of knowledge* (Foucault 2005; Marinković, Ristić 2016).

Power’s conception of the historical sociology of knowledge is composed of two important elements. Firstly, it involves studying the epistemological shift that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and paved the way for the emergence of human sciences like sociology. Secondly, it involves examining the practices of control that evolved into instruments of political economy and population governance. In particular, it focuses on the interplay between two essential elements, power and knowledge, and how they influence these processes (Power 2011: 41).

Our position is that Power’s concept of the historical sociology of knowledge represents a sociological historicization of forms of knowledge. We do not deny its validity, but we believe that it is just one of the possible directions for utilizing Foucault’s concepts in the field of the sociology of knowledge. Instead, we prefer to explore the conditions that make knowledge possible, which aligns with Foucault’s notion of genealogy. It is because this approach opens up the possibilities for the sociology of knowledge and offers a broader research path.

Another field of research emerging under Foucault’s influence, very close to the sociology of knowledge, is Foucauldian discourse studies (Diaz-Bone et al. 2008). It is a *field* rather than a *paradigm* (Kuhn 1962), because it employs Foucault in qualitative discourse research. In the last two decades or a bit more, this field of research has been growing (Diaz-Bone et al. 2008: 10). One of these fields is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Although there are many intersections of CDA with sociological research of discourse, knowledge and ideology, it is possible to single out one particular approach that significantly emphasizes the importance of Foucault’s work for sociology of knowledge. This is the approach developed by Rainer Keller (*Wissenssoziologische*

*Diskursanalyse/Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse – SKAD*) (Keller 2011; 2012; 2013). This approach is of particular importance not only because it connects the study of discourse and the sociology of knowledge, but also because it develops a complete *research program* to be used in empirical research. In relation to the CDA, conversational analysis, or other similar “programs”, SKAD is not characterized by “focalization on language use”. In Keller’s opinion, it rather goes hand in hand with the absence of questioning production and circulation of knowledge in contemporary societies, despite the current agenda of social sciences (Keller 2012).

According to Keller, Foucault has given several basic ideas for introducing the concept of discourse into the sociology of knowledge. The following aspects are especially important: the idea of materiality and regularity of discursive practices, their structuring (discursive formations), as well as proposals for the analysis of these processes, concepts of statements (enunciation), the notion of dispositives, rejection of using causal, reductional hypotheses and strategies that multiply directions in research depending on the affinity for some qualitative methods in sociology, and analysis of local (micro) practices (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, Keller notices very well that from the point of view of “empirical sociology of knowledge”, Foucault’s tradition lacks social actors (individual and collective) that are not “truly conceptualized”. It is because Foucault analyzes discourses as abstract structures without considering social actors or “subjects” such as classes, for instance. Precisely because of that, Keller proposes a modified version of the concept of discourse, which includes relations of regularity between the specific totality of practices and the material basis of statements and semantic content affecting the symbolic structure of the world (*ibid.*). Furthermore, Keller rightly believes that “processes of discursive structuring” should be analyzed rather than “singular linguistic actions” or discourses as “abstract structures”. Relying on Giddens, he points out that the sociological approach pays special attention to normative rules for legitimate production of statements, semantic rules, resources of action and “other elements of dispositive” for “production and circulation of sense” (*ibid.*). The concept of actors is necessary, but one should be aware that they are “holders or exhibitors of discourse”. That does not mean that the roots of discourse should be sought in them. Finally, for Keller, discourse analysis is primarily about an analytical reconstruction of the materiality of discourse, and then its historical and social localization. This approach further tackles the concept of knowledge, as it involves the practices of the symbolic structuring of the world (*ibid.*).

To summarize: the SKAD approach is important insofar as it emphasizes the sociological concept of discourse. It emphasizes the orientation towards empirical, towards materiality of discursive practices, while not excluding the importance of symbolic interaction and “production of sense”. In addition, the orientation of SKAD towards social processes of communicative construction, stabilization, and transformation of meaningful and discursive dimensions of practices, opens a possibility to explore *the effects* of discursive practices. To that extent, SKAD is not the opposite neither to the Power’s conception nor to



ours. The common emphasis is not only on discourse or knowledge, but also on the “related” phenomena and their historical and social contextualization.

Foucault’s genealogical approach provides a valuable framework for analyzing knowledge, but it can be supplemented by sociological analysis that takes into account the layers and palimpsests of discursive practices. This means that every knowledge contains traces of current and past practices, and past and present coexist within the same time/space framework. In other words, knowledge is where past and present intersect, and some knowledge from the past is always embedded in current forms and practices. This idea of the “legacy” of the history of the present is a crucial concept for the sociology of knowledge, and the metaphor of the *palimpsest* is particularly useful in understanding it. This approach also incorporates the material and sociological aspects recognized in the SKAD approach. The significance of Foucault’s concept of the history of the present will be further elaborated in the next section. Additionally, it is important for the sociology of knowledge to use interpretative discourse analysis to recognize the time/space and power dimensions of knowledge, not just its importance in the social world.

## Palimpsest of Practices: Analytical Grid of Power/Knowledge and History of the Present

### Analytical grid of power/knowledge

In order to additionally explain the importance of Foucault’s genealogical analysis for the research program of the sociology of knowledge, this section pays attention to what Foucault called the “analytical grid” of power/knowledge and the concept of the history of the present. It seems important because it clarifies the part of Foucault’s research which leads to understanding that in every present there are many layers or *palimpsests* which have their origins in different time/space frameworks.

Unlike Kant, who approached the issue of *Aufklärung* through the problem of knowledge, Foucault opened the possibility that this issue, as well as the issue of critique, should be considered closely to *power*. It is not just about the examination of legitimacy, but also the question of eventualization (événementialisation) (Foucault 2007: 49). Knowledge is heterogeneous and it generates different power effects (ibid.: 50). An important question for Foucault was also the connection or link that could be established between the mechanisms of coercion and the elements of cognition. That is what “power games” are about. Those are the games in which “a given element of knowledge takes on the effects of power in a given system” (ibid.: 50). Therefore, it is not just about truth, or the question of the possibilities and limits of knowledge. That was the case in Kant.

The term *knowledge* (*savoir*) in the context of Foucault’s research, and especially in his lecture on critique (ibid.: 51) “refers to all procedures and all

effects of knowledge (*connaissance*) which are acceptable at a given point in time and in a specific domain". Another key term, *power*, "covers a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, which seem likely to induce behaviors or discourses" (ibid.: 51). Foucault also thought it is important to prevent an immediate introduction of the perspective of legitimization into the analysis of power/knowledge games (ibid.: 51). What connects power and knowledge (or *ratio* and *truth*) is meaning "that is being solely constituted by systems of constraints characteristic of the signifying machinery", that "only exists through the effects of coercion" (ibid.: 41).

One of Foucault's key innovations, especially in relation to classical sociology and the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber was his understanding of the term *power* in "historical perspective", or to put it simply, recognition that *power has history* (Marinković, Ristić 2017). At the same time, one should not forget the historicity of power that Marx saw as a continuous conflict between the ruling and subordinated classes, from ancient times to industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century. Weber's definition of power as a social relationship was crucial for sociology, but it remained in constant search for legitimacy and permanently tied to institutional actors such as political parties, the state and its institutions. In fact, Weber "interpreted the emergence of the modern state as a comprehensive process of the monopolization and centralization of power in new state structures" (Anter 2014: 27). These were classic conceptions in the great "Hobbesian shadow" in which "power traditionally exercised two great functions: that of war and peace, exercised through the hard-won monopoly of arms, and that of the arbitration of lawsuits and punishments of crimes, which it ensured through its control of judicial functions" (Foucault 1980a: 170). Making a big turn from Hobbes's conception of power, Foucault actually distanced himself from both Weber and Marx:

I distance myself, it seems to me, from both a Marxist and a Para-Marxist perspective. As for the first, I am not one of those who try to determine exactly the effects of power at the level of ideology. I wonder, namely, whether, before the question of ideology is raised, it would no longer be in the spirit of materialism to study the question of the body and the effects of power on it. Because what bothers me in those analysis which give priority to ideology, is that we always assume some human subject whose model was given by classical philosophy and who would be endowed with an awareness that would be grabbed by power. (Foucault 1994a: 756)

Moving away from classical concept of power was one of the most important indications of Foucault's "regionalization" and "decentralization" of fundamental categories on which classical social theory was built. Because, the great "Hobbesian shadow" of sovereignty obscured all other "power games". In this old "sovereignist matrix", there were always centers, hotspots and final outcomes. Foucault's analysis of power offered something completely different: "Scattering of micropowers, a network of scattered apparatus, without a single apparatus, without foci and centers, and transversal coordination of institutions

and technologies” (Foucault 1994b: 34). Only in this way power could acquire its recent, current historicity, the history of the present or “effective history” (Hook 2005). “What we need, however, is a political philosophy that is neither raised around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the King’s head: in political theory that has still to be done” (Foucault 1980b: 121).

Consequently, Foucault claimed that we have to reject the image proposed by Hobbes in which, with the appearance of the exercise of sovereign [power], war was expelled from [the sovereign power’s] space (Foucault 2015: 32). Behind the great legal story on sovereignty and “sovereign’s past” (ibid.: 239), genealogies of power emerged on the “scene” of revenge, on the penitentiary body, but also where classical legal and state (royal) apparatus could not have guessed it: in practices over the sick body (biopolitics), in architecture, urbanism, prisons, hospitals. Furthermore, in the new optics of unverifiable surveillance, in sexuality, madness and psychiatry. “When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *History of Madness* (2006) or *The Birth of the Clinic* (2003), if not power? Yet I’m perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had such a field of analyses at my disposal then” (Foucault 1980b: 229).

However, this new field of analysis in which practices and discourses of power/knowledge were placed in a genealogical perspective carried the risk of opposing the methodologies which function was in “centralizing power-effects of institutional knowledge and scientific discourse” (Hook 2005: 6). With all the risks he accepted, Foucault’s fields of analysis reinforced the awareness “that things have not always been as they are” (ibid.: 7). This was especially true of the notions of power and knowledge.

In the Foucault’s analysis of power and knowledge, then, it is never about *one* knowledge or *one* power, nor about knowledge *as such* and power *as such*, which can “operate” on themselves. Power and knowledge are only an analytical grid (Foucault 2007: 60). To see the analytical link between power and knowledge means to recognize that nothing can exist as an “element of knowledge if, on the one hand, it does not conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of a given type of scientific discourse in a given period” (ibid.: 61). Also, the elements of knowledge always contain some effects of coercion or at least incentives (what is generally accepted, rational). Conversely, writes Foucault, “nothing can function as a mechanism of power if it is not deployed according to procedures, instruments, means and objectives that can be validated in more or less coherent systems of knowledge” (ibid.: 61). Hence, it is not a matter of determining how “power abuses knowledge”, but of identifying and explaining the *links* between power and knowledge, which can answer the question of how a particular practices has been established (as “normal”, “legitimate”, etc.). Foucault showed that while researching penal, sexual and practices related to mental illness.

Such an understanding of the analytical grid is of particular importance for the sociological approach to knowledge, as it opens up the possibility of

taking into account *empirical records* and practices – in the sense what people do – in which knowledge arises. The analytical grid of power/knowledge is also there to direct the analysis in determining the “conditions of possibilities” for the emergence of some practices, because there are neither relations nor practices without power. Therefore, the analysis of power/knowledge is neither a question of evaluation, legitimacy or truthfulness as such. Also, it is not about what is fundamental in the relationship of power and knowledge. The question is rather how certain links (*relays*) between sets of practices are established, what conditions brought them “to surface” and how a social relationship or practice is established through the game of power and knowledge. In Foucault’s words: “It is a type of procedure which, unconcerned with legitimizing and consequently, excluding the fundamental point of view of the law, runs through the cycle of positivity by proceeding from the fact of acceptance to the system of acceptability analyzed through the knowledge-power interplay” (ibid.: 61). “There is no foundational recourse, no escape within a pure form” (ibid.: 63). It is important to go towards singularities, towards the analysis of networks that enable and create a singularity as an effect. The goal of the analysis is not to “bring a whole group of derived phenomena back to a cause, but rather to make them capable of making a singular positivity intelligible precisely in terms of that which makes it singular” (ibid.: 64) as a *concrete socio-historical event*. This is something that Karl Mannheim set from the very beginnings of the sociology of knowledge. The important difference and lack in Mannheim’s position is the idea that sociology of knowledge has had more to do with the *comparative method* or comparison of knowledge that arises in different historical circumstances (Mannheim 2015).

Contrary to the analysis that seeks the unity of some (original) cause, genealogy searches for (many) beginnings that can make singularities more understandable. These are multiple relationships in the field of possible interactions, in which singularities become fixed by their “acceptability conditions”. These conditions we recognize through knowledge. Furthermore, recognition of these conditions as socio-historical events and singularities is precisely what opens the possibility for Foucault’s analytical grid of power/knowledge to be operationalized for the needs of research in the sociology of knowledge. The common feature of the genealogy and sociology of knowledge is therefore *the research of empirical conditions for the emergence and use of power and knowledge*, rather than examination of causes of their origin.

Invention (*Erfindung*) in Foucault “is opposed to origin and is ‘not a synonym for beginning (*commencement*)’” (as cited in Elden 2017: 33). Foucault also states that “*connaissance* does not have an origin, but it does have a history, and this means that it is not innate in human nature” (but see: Elden 2017: 33). He understands this in the sense that “behind knowledge there is something altogether different, something foreign, opaque, and irreducible to it”. Nietzsche was the first who “unraveled the idea that knowledge is a quest for truth, suggesting that truth is something imposed later, and that what precedes it is not even the ‘non-true’, but something which ‘is prior to the division specific to

truth” (ibid.: 34). Further, as Stuart Elden writes: “Nietzsche’s argument is that knowledge is grounded on the very thing that prevents us from knowing, ‘its force and not its form’, from which Foucault, among other things, concludes that the practice of cognition is related to the practices of power” (ibid.: 34).

Precisely such Foucault’s conceptualisation of knowledge (*connaissance*) and his comprehension of knowledge through the *network of relations* is important for the sociology of knowledge in which the notion of knowledge is not ascribed with legitimacy or (social) ontological status.

Without entering into further discussions in the philosophical framework, and the very philosophical (Nietzschean) background of this understanding, we can conclude, together with Stuart Elden, that Foucault made an important turn for such an understanding of truth, knowledge and power, by contrasting Nietzsche and Aristotle, and opposing a view close to Husserl’s phenomenology. In Foucault’s words: “The first characteristics of this historical-philosophical practice, if you will, is to desubjectify the philosophical question by way of historical contents, to liberate historical contents by examining the effects of power which truth affects them, and from which they supposedly derive” (Foucault 2007: 56–57). And that is the key turn that has taken Foucault towards a *relational understanding* of knowledge that is at the same time sociologically relevant.

Another important dimension that makes Foucault’s analysis of power/knowledge important for the sociology of knowledge is the reference to empirically available forms and types of knowledge. Foucault has analyzed knowledge that is “embedded” in complex institutional systems. This is knowledge which emerges in a regulated, everyday practice (Elden 2017). Knowledge is a kind of *response* to special socio-historical conditions. This means that no knowledge can be formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation and transfer, which are in themselves a form of power. On the other hand, no power can act without appropriating, distributing and retaining knowledge (*savoir*). At this level, there is no knowledge (*connaissance*) on the one side, and society or science and the state on the other side. There are only fundamental forms of power/knowledge (ibid.). What supports these theoretical understandings are elaborated concepts and analyses conducted by Foucault. For example, he has associated *measure*, as a form of power/knowledge, with the Ancient Greek polis; *inquiry* with “formation of the medieval state”; *examination* “as a form of power-knowledge linked to the systems of control, exclusion, and punishment characteristic of industrial societies” (ibid.: 69). Thus, measure, investigation, and examination are the practices of power, but at the same time the rules for establishing knowledge (*savoir*). Measure, as a way or means to re-establish order, and a matrix of mathematical and physical knowledge as well; investigation as a way of determining facts, events, actions, property, rights, and the matrix of empirical knowledge of natural sciences as well; and finally, examination, as setting or correcting norms, rules, distributions, exclusions, which is at the same time a matrix of psychology, sociology, psychiatry, in short, the science of man (ibid.).

## The history of the present

According to Foucault, genealogy involves investigating numerous origins, uncovering multiple “births”, and examining the duration and layers of phenomena. Additionally, exploring the history of the present provides an opportunity to identify enduring practices and the archaeological strata of discourses, and consequently power/knowledge. This aspect of Foucault’s legacy is also significant for the sociology of knowledge.

In one of the earliest formulations of the idea of the history of the present, which could be found in an interview in 1969, Foucault said that “to diagnose the present is to say what the present is, and how our present is absolutely different from all that is not it, that is to say, from our past. Perhaps this is the task for philosophy now” (Foucault 1989; but see: Koopman 2013: 26).

Foucault used history to “help grasp the way in which this configuration had come into existence and to diagnose some of the fault lines ingrained within it” (Rabinow, Rose 2003: 8). Certainly, he did it to explain the present. In the book *Discipline and Punish* (1995), he explicitly described his “engagement” with history. He was not so much interested in the past but more in the *critical study of the present*. In other words, he was not interested in writing the history of the past in the categories of the present, but in writing the history of the present (Foucault 1995).

For Foucault, dealing with the history of the present didn’t mean a turn towards historical methodology or historical sociology. Perhaps because genealogy was basically a critical project and an interpretative analysis which transgress established frameworks and boundaries set in the social sciences. Genealogical analysis could begin with a question about here and now, but it needs the past in order to understand a *condition of possibility* (emergence) for certain singularities. Rabinow and Rose argued that for Foucault the first important goal of writing the history of the present was an attempt to make the present outdated (Rabinow, Rose 2003: 21). Not in terms of relativizing its meaning or significance, but in terms of distancing or attempting to re-imagine the problems and their past.

The present in that context is a question of the intersection of temporal and historical processes through which we have constituted ourselves as subjects. As Koopman (2013: 29) writes, the present is constituted by its historicity and temporality. The history of the present as a tool of genealogical analysis has a specific, instrumental relationship to history. History is not a context, but a variable that indicates the connections between phenomena that are still sedimented in the archaeological layers of practices in the present. This is something that Foucault explains in the *Archeology of Knowledge* (2002) in his call for a re-examination of the status of a (historical) *document*. While in classical sociology of knowledge the task was to “move” through different epochs and explain differences in understandings of knowledge, as well as to deal with its social contextualization, Foucault’s *history of the present* opens the possibility for a different *analytical attitude* towards the past. Focusing on the history of



the present is a *kind of critique* of the present, which indicates another feature of genealogical analysis and its importance for the sociology of knowledge. The meaning of the term *critique* certainly depends on the scientific and disciplinary framework. Thinking about the need for critique within the framework of the sociology of knowledge, we will single out and briefly describe two aspects.

First, critique is understood as unmasking the system of power/knowledge (Messner, Jordan 2019) in the way we have already described above. Second, critique is seen as an effort to broadly identify and explain ways of using knowledge in different social practices. Critique as problematization, in this first sense, could be defined as a practice of thinking and research that aims to unmask the rationality that underlies a practice of power/knowledge. Practices of rationality in this sense are all those practices in which some knowledge *is applied* in a certain way. By questioning different types of rationality in practices that are seemingly unproblematic, critique aims to unmask or make transparent primarily the effects of power. In other words, to make them *visible* (ibid.: 7). This is not the question of objectivity, because the goal of critique in this sense does not necessarily lead to the task of delegitimization. Sociology of knowledge, by using this kind of genealogical analysis as a research strategy, search for a “knowledge” that “circulates” in some “regime of truth” on which people rely. Only at the level of *explanation*, the sociology of knowledge can identify and distinguish between the types of knowledge (science, ideology, belief/conviction, etc.).

In a narrower sense, critique can be understood as “critical reflection” (ibid.). It answers the question of how certain knowledge *is applied* in practice and how that practice eventually produces the effects of power. The aim of critique in this sense is to explain how a certain “regime of truth” has become acceptable in a given historical context.

We have already pointed out that Foucault’s concept of critique meant a kind of turn in relation to Kant’s question on enlightenment. While Kant has been more interested in the question (limits) of knowledge in an epistemological sense, Foucault has turned to the problem of power. Critical practices, understood in this way are certainly ambivalent. But it can be put aside in this context, because our goal is not to discuss the problem of objectivity or the ontological status of critique (as a type of thought), but to identify the potentials of critique which, in the context of genealogical analysis, make it a suitable *research tool*.

Perhaps it should be noted that there is an obvious problem and question that arises from understanding of critique as a practice of unmasking power/knowledge. If we say that critique aims at unmasking, what does it mean? Foucault himself (2007) believed that critique contributes to the games of power and knowledge. It can eventually “undermine” dominance if it makes it transparent. Critique as a type of problematization is always an element or a role in the game of power (Messner, Jordan 2019). However, this is not its limit. Precisely as such, within the framework of power and knowledge games, critique should be a *trigger* for the development and production of new practices

and new knowledge. If you identify relationships of power and knowledge in practices, you are potentially able to *explain* social relations and the way they function (why they are accepted, legitimate, and so on). Critique, as Messner and Jordan (2019) write, is there to “unlock power relations”. In short, critique is there to problematize the existing *order of things*. Foucault’s use of critique as a *research tool* is a significant contribution to the sociology of knowledge. On the one hand, it enables the “unmasking” of power/knowledge relations in society. More importantly, it explains how and why different types of knowledge are *employed* in various social practices.

This is part of the broader concept of the *history of the present*, which brings us to two key points. Firstly, it involves comprehending knowledge in all its complexity, with its *palimpsest* of layers from the past and present. Secondly, it entails understanding knowledge in terms of its potential to reveal the power relations that exist in society.

### Concluding Remarks

According to Koopman (2013: 24), genealogy articulates “or makes sayable and visible, that is conceptually available, the problematizations of our present”. In this sense, it has the potential to recognize and *single out* singularities, dealing with the local characteristic of events, rather than with total history. This also makes it as an appropriate analytical strategy and methodological tool significant for the sociology of knowledge. Investigating knowledge itself, and the effects of knowledge, starting from the present and asking about the *conditions of possibilities* of current practices. These are the tasks to which the sociology of knowledge and genealogy are dedicated.

To study power/knowledge, as we demonstrated, means to account for their contingency and to open the possibility of their transformation. At the same time, in a sociological key, it means to study practices of normalization, institutionalization or what is in everyday life taken for granted (as knowledge). Our emphasis in this sense is on one, perhaps already common place in the analysis of Foucault’s work. This is the notion of power/knowledge, which we have pointed out as an important *analytical grid*. Furthermore, this is the notion of *the history of the present*, which also opens the possibility for doing research in the sociology of knowledge. The greatest potential of these two concepts elaborated in our research is of more theoretical than empirical significance: it is about the change in the relationship towards the object of study – knowledge itself.

The sociology of knowledge deals with the study of *simultaneous existence* or palimpsests of different types and layers within knowledge, their interrelationships and effects of power. Then, the *networks of relations*, practices in which they are “caught” and in which they mediate. Foucault has already demonstrated that in the analysis of the “births” of the clinic and gaze. For example, the question of the emergence of health institutions and health policy in the eighteenth century could not be explained without understanding the



*dispositives* that lead to different domains of the social life, its materiality and practices (Foucault 1980a), since “it acts” as a *bricolage* (Rabinow, Rose 2003).

There are more concepts in the *toolbox* called “Foucault” to be used and further developed in the sociological research. However, our main aim was to single out, in addition to already existing and developed programs, dimension of genealogy that, to the best of our knowledge, have not been used in terms of its analytical potential since.

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### Efekat Fuko u sociologiji znanja

#### Apstrakt

U ovom istraživanju polazimo od hipoteze da Fukoovi koncepti moći/znanja i genealogije predstavljaju ne samo značajan zaokret u filozofskom i istorijskom smislu, već i kada je u pitanju istraživački okvir sociologije znanja. Prvi nivo Fukoovog doprinosa sociologiji znanja prepoznat je u njegovom konceptu diskursa i dimenzijama materijalnosti, moći i znanja. Drugi važan nivo na kojem je dao doprinos ovoj disciplini je analitička rešetka moći/znanja u kojoj fokus stavljamo na odnose moći i znanja. Treći nivo, koji prepoznajemo kao ključan i u kojem vidimo prostora za dalje interpretacije jeste koncept istorije sadašnjosti. Iako je Fukoov doprinos već prepoznat u okviru socioloških istraživanja znanja, naš cilj u ovom radu je da, oslanjajući se na neke od tih pristupa – poput istorijske sociologije znanja i analize diskursa iz ugla sociologije znanja – objasnimo značaj pomenutih dimenzija genealogije.

Ključne reči: Fuko, genealogija, znanje, moć, sociologija znanja.