Foucault Studies

ISSN: 1832-5203
Foucault Studies, No 6, pp. 110-114, February 2009

REVIEW

Jeffrey. T Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and its Intensifications since 1984*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), ISBN 9780804757027.

In *Foucault Beyond Foucault* Nealon draws out some of the most important and often ignored aspects of Foucault's approach to power. He explicates elements such as the productive aspects of power and the connections between discipline, biopower, and the subject while critiquing interpretations that see Foucault as outlining a repressive, "iron cage" approach to power or as being a converted humanist in his later work. While many Foucaultian commentators have pointed out the importance of productivity rather than repression, multiplicity rather than centralization, in their discussions of power, Nealon takes the important step of applying these ideas to a range of different topics including popular culture and capitalism. One of the most important concepts for Nealon's interpretation of the Foucaultian approach to power is "intensity"[1]. While many readers will recognize this term as Deleuzian, Nealon draws mainly upon Foucault's "middle" works in his discussion of the ways that "intensity" and intensification' can be useful tools of analysis. In addition to reading key texts such as *Discipline & Punish*[2] through the lens of the intensification of power relations, Nealon also uses it as a way to describe historical change, specifically the change in dominance of one mode of power over another.[3]

While I find the concept of intensity as utilized by Nealon to be a useful conceptual tool, I am not quite prepared to apply it in such a ubiquitous fashion. In his review of this book Todd May also voices some concern over intensification, specifically over its "transhistorical" appearance and the way it "cuts a wide swath across Foucault's work, perhaps too wide a swath".[4] Unlike May I do not so much take is-

1 Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and its Intensifications since 1984* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). See chap. 2.

2 Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1995).

3 Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, 25-31.

4 Todd May, Review of *Foucault Beyond Foucault*: *Power and its Intensifications since 1984*, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (2/14/2008).

sue with intensity as a concept that more or less accurately describes historical change but rather with the way it tends to shift our focus away from power as a "multiplicity of force relations"[5] and towards less useful questions such as which mode of power we are currently "in". Nealon also does not seem to be overly concerned with periodization but does use intensification along with the (also Deleuzian) concept of threshold to account for historical change from one mode of power to another (from discipline to biopower, for example). It is not my contention that this is the "wrong" reading of Foucault; however, I do believe that this more broadly historical application of intensity may in effect result in an overemphasis on: 1) the distinction between different modes of power rather than their simultaneous and often interweaving character; and 2) the internal unity of different modes of power rather than their heterogeneity.

Despite this broader historical application, Nealon continues on to emphasize the different "infiltrations" or connections between different modes of power even shifting from one meaning of the word "intensity" to another. He states, "The gruesomely painful intensity of Damien's torture and execution gives way to another sense of the word: intensity as the maximizing imperative of efficiency."[6] In this description of the transition from sovereignty to discipline as the dominant mode of power, Nealon reveals that he is actually tracing Foucault's shifting use of this concept, citing somewhat different usages in *Discipline & Punish* (the body) and in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (biopower, life). This would seem to indicate a question of emphasis rather than of accuracy. While one may or may not accept Nealon's use of intensification as historically causal, it is difficult to deny that he has opened up a much more interesting and potentially productive series of questions regarding Foucault's different uses of this concept.

Along with intensity another concept Nealon sees as connecting discipline to biopower is the "norm". Much of Nealon's discussion of norms echoes his approach to power; they are constituted in practice, are productive rather than repressive, and attempt to account for rather than to exclude the abnormal.[7] While Nealon's discussion of the "norm" as productive and inclusive in its effects is useful and serves to connect discipline and biopower, it also raises some difficult questions.[8] These ques-

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5 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol.1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1990), 92-93.

6 Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, 36-37.

7 Ibid., 48-51.

8 Of course, there is also an issue of what Link refers to as "semantic turbulence". In the many variations of this term (norm, normativity, normal, normalize, etc.) there is ample space for slippage in meaning, which raises another set of questions about the relations between these different variations. See Jürgen Link translated by Mirko Hall, "From the 'Power of the Norm' To 'Flexible Normalism': Considerations After Foucault," *Cultural Critique* 57 (Spring 2004).

tions begin with the fact that Nealon bases his discussion of the "norm" almost entirely on *Discipline & Punish* with an occasional reference to *The History of Sexuality*. While these are obviously not inaccurate or inappropriate sources, I believe that Nealon's emphasis on these texts leads to a somewhat individualized account of the norm, one that sidesteps issues of population, risk, and security. This is evident in his references to *Discipline & Punish*, which are almost entirely focused on the terms individual, individuality, or identity as well as in the absence of any discussion of the importance of population, a central concept in Foucault's later work.[9]

This is not to say that the individual is unimportant to biopower; it is rather to point out that the *connection* between individuals and the population is key. Foucault explored this connection in his lectures on the eighteenth-century concept of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, which he saw as "…at once an art of government and a method for the analysis of a population on a territory."[10] In his discussion of Von Justi's approach to this concept, Foucault states, "He [Von Justi] perfectly defines what I feel to be the aim of the modern art of government, or state rationality, namely, *to develop those elements constitutive of individuals' lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the state*."[11] [emphasis added].

Nealon's focus on the individual is also carried over in his discussion of contemporary capitalism. In this text he points out a number of interesting connections between biopower and certain aspects of contemporary capitalism, especially consumption and the Marxian issue of the "real subsumption" of labor. In his engagement with several neo-Marxist perspectives[12] Nealon again makes use of the concept of intensity to describe how money is "intensified" in what he refers to as "the globalized logic of finance capital".[13] While I find this to be a useful way of thinking about speculation and finance, it also refers to culture and the tendency of contemporary capitalism to proliferate and embrace differences. This tendency, of course, resonates with and is an important connection to biopower. It is here that Nealon's overemphasis on the individual is again revealed but with somewhat different effects. In his discussion of the increasing investment in "everyday life",[14] mostly

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9 For a discussion of the conceptual and historical importance of population see Francois Ewald, translated by Marjorie Beale, "Norms, Discipline, and the Law," *Representations*," 30, *Special Issue: Law and the Order of Culture*. (Spring 1990).

10 Michael Foucault, "'*Omnes et Singulatim'*: Towards a Critique of Political Reason," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984.* Edited by James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1994), 322-323.

11 Ibid.

12 Most notably Fredric Jameson and Michael Hardt & Toni Negri. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, chap. 3.

13 Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, 62-63.

14 This term itself carries with it quite a bit of ambiguity and invokes a number of different debates on the status of the "everyday". Nealon's footnote on this (chap. 4, footnote 25)

based on autonomist Marxists like Hardt and Negri, Nealon points to the importance of the private:

> If there is something that we might call the realm of the contemporary "common", that vector of power that directly connects the cultural to the economic, for better or worse Foucaultian biopower will show us that this common takes up residence in the *private* realm, not the *public* sphere.[15]

While privatization has become one of the most important foci of any discussion of neoliberalism and contemporary capitalism, there is a curious slippage in Nealon's choice of examples. These range from individualistic rap lyrics and popular memoirs to market-based solutions and the transfer of public assets to private corporations.[16] This mix of examples, which would seem to invoke different conceptions of the private, raises important questions about the conflation of the individual or self and the private, not to mention its relationship to the public.[17] Thus the importance of Nealon's analysis lies not only in its linking of the individual and the private to neoliberal capitalism but also in its registration of a more general set of issues related to the contemporary status of the private and the public.[18]

Overall I found *Foucault Beyond Foucault* to be a very useful text in its application of a Foucaultian approach to contemporary culture and capitalism. Nealon skillfully walks the difficult line between being relevant to a number of different important theoretical discussions as well as to contemporary culture and politics. In addition to applying Foucault's ideas about power in an innovative way, Nealon raises some important questions about specific concepts and the way they structure the

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is fascinating, especially his mention of Paulo Virno as Aristotelian contrasted with Toni Negri as Spinozan.

15 Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, 83.

16 Ibid., 86-88.

17 In my view Nealon's critique of the Deleuzian literature on value and affect (Brian Massumi, specifically) as being overly focused on the experiential or phenomenological raises similar questions. While much of this scholarship engages with biopower in a broad manner, I see Nealon's more rigorously Foucaultian critique as an important contribution to this debate. For a more in-depth discussion see Patricia Clough's "Introduction to Patricia Clough and Jean Halley", *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

18 The problem of the private and public in relation to biopower has been raised by Tiziana Terranova in "Futurepublic: On Information Warfare, Bio-racism and Hegemony as Noopolitics," in *Theory, Culture, & Society*, 24(3): 125-145 (Sage, 2007). I find her discussion of the ways in which public opinion is reconfigured in biopower to become a surface of intervention along with Nealon's discussion here, a way to open an important theoretical conversation.

way we read Foucault. His attempt to construct a "more useful" reading of Foucault opens up a number of important theoretical conversations and encourages us to do the same.

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