

Topic

Beyond Foucault's Culturalism: Translation between Biopolitics and the Archaeology of the Human Sciences

This essay reconsiders Foucault's work on biopolitics and archaeology in light of the critique of eurocentrism. In spite of Foucault's extreme eurocentrism, he was able to identify an economy of relation between experience and knowledge that lies at the core of the transformative hegemony known until now as the West. The fruits of this research bear important implications for the study of biopolitics. Precisely because the amphibological mixture of experience and knowledge defines the modern period, biopolitics must reflect upon the viability of appealing to the experience of life itself. Biopolitics, in other words, needs to be subjected to archaeological scrutiny just as much as the culturalist assumptions of the archaeological method need to be subjected to a biopolitical critique.

The essay begins with an archaeological explanation for the biopolitical meaning of governmental technologies that concern the apparatus (dispositif) of geocultural areas. Culturalism, which constitutes the historical a priori of The Order of Things, forms a nexus between disciplinary power and biopower. It is disciplinary in the sense that it forms the basis for the normalization of bodies trained in the knowledge of the Human Sciences, and biopolitical in the sense that it has been enshrined, through the principle of sovereignty, as the normative principle for the division of human populations and the organization of their governance according to territorial boundaries. Caught between the two, culturalism forms one of the principal technologies by means of which the modern era has tried to manage the methodological horrors of the amphiboly between knowledge and experience, the empirical and the transcendental, identified by Foucault's archaeology.

Abstract

The essay reviews the attempt to delink experience and knowledge through the category of translation, and aims to ask to what extent the biopolitics of translation can escape the archaeological strata of modernity? In order to return the concept of biopolitics from its culturalist detour into governmentality to the intersections of language, labor and life, recent work by Paolo Virno on the bioanthropological implications of neoteny and neurobiology provides a useful point of departure for elaborating a biopolitics of translation. Translation is the power to create new norms in the face of the continuity of social institutions and the discontinuity of social differences. Yet even the generative power of translation is filled with ambivalence and risk between experience and knowledge. It is perhaps only in a diagrammatology, the likes of which can be found in Laruelle's non-philosophy, that the neotenous animal can find a playground for the development of its fundamental ambivalence while being protected from the errors of second-order ambivalence such as the state and people, anarchism and mob. The essay concludes with a final look at how the biopolitics of translation may shed important light on the growing importance of biocapital.

Keywords:

biopolitics, governmentality, archaeology, genealogy, experience, knowledge, neoteny, neurobiology, eurocentrism, translation, culturalism, Foucault, Virno.