

ARTICLE

Foucault On Psychoanalysis: Missed Encounter or Gordian Knot?

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ABSTRACT. Foucault's remarks concerning psychoanalysis are ambivalent and even prima facie contradictory, at times lauding Freud and Lacan as anti-humanists, at others being severely critical of their imbrication within psychiatric power. This has allowed a profusion of interpretations of his position, between so-called 'Freudo-Foucauldians' at one extreme and Foucauldians who condemn psychoanalysis as such at the other. In this article, I begin by surveying Foucault's biographical and theoretical relationship to psychoanalysis and the secondary scholarship on this relationship to date. I pay particular attention to the discussion of the relationship in feminist scholarship and queer theory, and that by psychoanalytic thinkers, as well as attending to the particular focus in the secondary literature on Foucault's late work and his relationship to the figure of Jacques Lacan. I conclude that Foucault's attitude to psychoanalysis varies with context, and that some of his criticisms of psychoanalysis in part reflect an ignorance of the variety of psychoanalytic thought, particularly in its Lacanian form. I thus argue that Foucault sometimes tended to overestimate the extent of the incompatibility of his approach with psychoanalytic ones and that there is ultimately no serious incompatibility there. Rather, psychoanalysis represents a substantively different mode of inquiry to Foucault's work, which is neither straightforwardly exclusive nor inclusive of psychoanalytic insights.

Keywords: Foucault, Freud, Lacan, psychoanalysis, sexuality

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of Michel Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis is a vexed one and has become a matter of great contention. Foucault was unquestionably influenced by Freud, like all French intellectuals of his generation, and occasionally laudatory towards Freud's thought, as he was towards the anti-humanist psychoanalytical thought of the most prominent intellectual acolyte of Freud in Foucault's own milieu, Jacques Lacan; at other times, however, Foucault was pointedly critical of psychoanalysis for its association with modern strategies of power. Accordingly, a spectrum of scholarly readings of the relationship has emerged, ranging from those that see Foucault as largely compatible with

psychoanalysis to those that treat him as its staunch opponent. The coexistence of Foucauldian and psychoanalytic perspectives in the humanities has given rise to novel hybridisations of the two as well as mutual denunciations between partisans of both sides. I want to suggest that the denunciations are misguided, and that Foucauldian and psychoanalytic – and particularly Lacanian – perspectives can coexist, while nonetheless resisting the elision of real differences between the two found in some prominent hybrid approaches. I will argue, moreover, that this was more or less the conclusion that Foucault himself had reached by his later years. My novel contentions here, in an area where much has been said and where debate continues, are that Foucault was effectively mistaken if he ever thought his position to be strongly antithetical to psychoanalysis, and that if Foucault missed his encounter with psychoanalysis, it was by a deliberate methodological choice.

I will begin by surveying Foucault's remarks on psychoanalysis chronologically and relatively superficially. I do this largely without interpretative gloss in order to prepare the ground to understand the diversity of interpretations that we then encounter when I go on to canvass the secondary literature on the relation between Foucault and psychoanalysis. I aim for completeness in this regard: my intention here is to be comprehensive in considering the variety of readings of Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis, even if this means necessarily sacrificing the depth of engagement with any particular scholar in favour of an extensiveness of purview. I pay special attention to feminist interpretations and those in queer theory, to treatments of his thought by psychoanalytic thinkers, to his relationship with Lacan, and to commentary on the place of psychoanalysis in relation to Foucault's late work. Through engagement with the various tendencies in the secondary literature, I make the following four main conclusions:

1. attempts to read Foucault as either having no serious disagreement with or as being entirely opposed to psychoanalysis are untenable;
2. there is some variation in Foucault's views over time and with respect to different facets of psychoanalysis and different psychoanalytical thinkers (broadly – but of course things are more complicated than this in ways I will indicate – Foucault goes through a long phase of critical sympathy for psychoanalysis lasting until circa 1970, after which he enters a more strongly critical phase lasting until 1977, after which he enters a phase of terminal silence about psychoanalysis; Foucault tends to have more respect for psychoanalysis as a theory than as a practice, and for Lacan than for Freud);
3. attempts to read Foucault with psychoanalysis based on concepts shared between the two are problematic; on the contrary, the best readings note the extent to which Foucault understands key concepts in different ways to their psychoanalytic meanings;
4. Foucault tends to overestimate his distance from psychoanalysis in this way because he makes a deliberate methodological choice to keep his distance from

psychoanalysis theoretically and thus does not keep up with Lacan's developing thought in particular. This is not then lamentable so much as necessary for Foucault to follow the intellectual trajectory he did. What it does imply, however, is that Foucauldianism is a methodological orientation that need not be exclusive of or antithetical to psychoanalysis, although it also implies that combining Foucault and psychoanalysis is a difficult task that few if any have managed without eliding important features of one side or the other.

2. FOUCAULT'S AMBIVALENCE

While it has been said that Foucault was never particularly interested in psychoanalysis¹ – a point to which I will return – he worked in an intellectual milieu where it was ubiquitous. The result is that we may say that 'Foucault's work is heavy with Freud's unstated presence'.² Joël Birman contends (as do Jacques Derrida, Lynne Huffer and John E Toews in their own ways) that Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis is a permanent force throughout his thought, even where he makes no explicit mention of it.³

Foucault's earliest publications show him at that time to be a sympathetic critic of psychoanalysis: his first book, *Mental Illness and Personality*, published in 1954, followed the fashions of the day in combining psychoanalysis, phenomenology and Marxism, though it is critical of classical Freudian psychoanalysis in favour of newer evolutionary psychology. In the same year, Foucault's French translation of the Heideggerian psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger's *Dream and Existence* appeared, with a long translator's introduction in which Foucault inveighs that psychoanalysis needs the supplement of Martin Heidegger's existential phenomenology to account for certain dimensions of human experience.

Foucault's next book, his 1961 doctoral thesis *The History of Madness*, sees him largely depart from his earlier theoretical coordinates through a highly original study of the development of modern attitudes to insanity. Psychoanalysis is mentioned only relatively marginally here since the historical scope of the study predates it. Foucault nevertheless does indicate that he sees psychoanalysis as emanating from historical tendencies of which he is critical, most obviously the privilege of the doctor in relation to the patient, albeit while suggesting that psychoanalysis is less problematic than other tendencies of modern psychiatry and psychology.

After this, throughout the rest of the 1960s, his attitude to psychoanalysis would seem to be mainly sympathetic. In 1962, a revised version of his first book, now retitled *Mental Illness and Psychology*, appeared, which Adrian Switzer suggests is closer to

¹ Maurice Blanchot "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him" [1986] in *Foucault/Blanchot* (1987), 73.

² Patrick H Hutton, "Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self*, ed. Luther H Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H Hutton (1988), 121.

³ Joel Birman, *Foucault et la psychanalyse* (2007), 7; Jacques Derrida "'To Do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," *Critical Inquiry*, 20:2 (1994); Lynne Huffer, *Mad For Foucault* (2010); John E Toews, "Foucault and the Freudian Subject: Archaeology, Genealogy, and the Historicization of Psychoanalysis," in *Foucault and the Writing of History*, ed. Jan Goldstein (1994).

psychoanalysis than the original.⁴ In 1964, Foucault presented a paper, 'Nietzsche, Freud, Marx', situating Freud alongside the other two eponymous thinkers as together constituting a major turning point in the Western history of interpretation, while nonetheless being somewhat critical of Freud's interpretative mode. By the mid-sixties, 'psychoanalysis was a prominent topic in Foucault's courses. Foucault had long ago renounced Marx, but he remained very attached to Freud.⁵ Foucault's 1966 *The Order of Things* finds him expressing a positive attitude towards psychoanalysis, both taking it as a model (positing a 'cultural unconscious' behind scientific knowledge as a guiding notion for the study)⁶ and lauding it in the concluding chapter as one of several contemporary innovations that point in the direction of a radically new knowledge associated with the putative end of 'man' as the privileged centre of scientific inquiry.⁷ Though Foucault here situates Freud as belonging to an outmoded order, in the end he effectively aligns himself with the contemporary French 'structuralist' movement, explicitly including psychoanalysis in this connection in a way that can only mean to refer to the pre-eminent French psychoanalyst of the day, Jacques Lacan.⁸ Though Foucault does not name him in this book – Alain Badiou casts Foucault's avoidance of formally engaging with Lacan as Foucault's sole form of 'conformism'⁹ – he does mention Lacan in salutary terms in this connection in an interview later the same year.¹⁰ Lacan incidentally criticised details of Foucault's *Order of Things* in his seminar the week before that interview went to print, leading Foucault himself to attend Lacan's following seminar to hear more of this discussion.¹¹ Nonetheless, Foucault continues to echo his earlier, positive assessment of psychoanalysis in passing in his next book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.¹²

During the 1970s, however, coinciding with Foucault's political turn and new 'genealogical' methodology, he effectively returns to his historical critique of psychoanalysis from the *History of Madness*. In the lecture series (most particularly 1973–74's *Psychiatric Power*) culminating in 1976 in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, he produces a critical genealogy of psychiatry, taking up historically where the *History of Madness* had left off, and thereby extending its critique of psychoanalysis. Foucault posits psychoanalysis now as a privileged point of intersection between the medicalisation of society and the development of confessional practices. These practices underpin what Foucault calls 'subjection' (*assujettissement*), a peculiarly modern process of subject formation that simultaneously subjugates the individual and constitutes them in their

⁴ Adrian Switzer, "Psychoanalysis" in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (2014), 413.

⁵ Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault* [1989] (1991), 139.

⁶ Foucault, *The Order of Things* [1966] (1970), 380.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 373ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁹ Alain Badiou, *Pocket Pantheon* [2008] (2009), 124.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1* (1994), 514.

¹¹ Thomas Brockelman, "The other side of the canvas: Lacan flips Foucault over Velázquez," *Continental Philosophy Review* 46: 271 (2013).

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1976] (2002), 14.

individuality.¹³ While acknowledging psychoanalysis's resistance to the pervasive racism of the early twentieth century, Foucault accuses Freud of colluding with at least three tendencies of which Foucault is critical. Specifically, Foucault alleges that Freud builds traditional, patriarchal family relations into his metapsychology, that Freud's focus on the sexual contributes to the production of sexuality, a normalising regime of power in which people are encouraged to classify themselves according to their desires, and that Freud's focus of 'repression' perpetuating a model of the operation power that ignores its productivity.¹⁴

After this point, however, Foucault never again, in his remaining six years of life and work, makes critical remarks about psychoanalysis. This is perhaps unsurprising inasmuch as the focus of his research moves to historical periods and themes that have relatively little to do with psychoanalysis, first to the development of modern government, then to ancient ethics, leading up to his death in 1984. However, this period sees Foucault thematise subjectivity to a greater degree than ever before, which might have provided a venue for a renewed engagement with psychoanalysis but did not. The solitary exception to this is an unplanned engagement with psychoanalysis in response to audience questions about Lacan during his 1982 lecture series, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. Here, Foucault situates himself and Lacan as engaged in parallel projects concerning the relation of truth and subjectivity (with Foucault seeing himself as following Heidegger in this regard).¹⁵ *Pace* Switzer's reading of these lectures,¹⁶ this does not amount to a repudiation of psychoanalysis as such so much as an unprecedented stance of deliberate, public neutrality towards it.

3. TENDENCIES OF SECONDARY RECEPTION

The secondary scholarship on Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis is extensive and diverse, reflecting and magnifying the diversity of Foucault's own views.

Given Foucault's insistence that we should not expect authors to maintain the same position throughout their lives,¹⁷ one might be tempted to read him as simply changing his mind a number of times in relation to psychoanalysis. Perhaps surprisingly, though, few commentators have actually read him as vacillating in this way in relation to psychoanalysis; the only prominent example is Didier Eribon.¹⁸ More critically one might allege that Foucault is simply confused or self-contradictory in his views, but no commentators actually do, although Jacques Derrida does consider this possibility before dismissing it.¹⁹ Instead, secondary scholarship typically casts Foucault as having a single orientation (albeit often one that is complex and internally differentiated) towards

¹³ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1* [1976] (1978).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal* [1999] (2004), 189.

¹⁶ Switzer, "Psychoanalysis," 415.

¹⁷ Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 19.

¹⁸ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*.

¹⁹ Derrida, "'To Do Justice to Freud.'"

psychoanalysis across his work. However, the scholarship is divided as to what this orientation is. I would suggest that the secondary literature falls into two broad camps regarding Foucault's stance in relation to psychoanalysis.

One group of commentators take Foucault and psychoanalysis ultimately to be mutually opposed, this opposition outweighing any contradictory remarks of Foucault's. One finds both Foucauldian and psychoanalytic scholars taking such a position: the Foucauldian side includes Hubert Dreyfus, James Bernauer, Eribon, Toews, Chloë Taylor, and Huffer; on the psychoanalytic side may be counted Joan Copjec and Mladen Dolar.²⁰ I will contend that such readings cannot, ultimately, account sufficiently for Foucault's positive comments about psychoanalysis.

Given Foucault's mixed remarks about psychoanalysis, the more obvious and more common interpretation of his relationship to it is one of ambivalence. Scholars differ in their interpretations of the logic of this ambivalence. Both Foucauldians and psychoanalytically oriented scholars have attempted to explicate this, including Arnold I Davidson from a Foucauldian perspective, and Christopher Lane, Teresa de Lauretis, Jacques-Alain Miller, Joel Whitebook, and Derrida from more psychoanalytically oriented ones.²¹ There are also scholars who treat Foucault and psychoanalysis as more-or-less compatible, but, as I will discuss below, this is inevitably either via the refutation of Foucault's criticisms of psychoanalysis²² or by eliding the differences.²³

In what follows, I will consider these multitudinous readings in detail under the four thematic heads already mentioned, namely those of feminism and queer theory, the psychoanalytic reception of Foucault, the relation of Foucault to Lacan, and the psychoanalytic relevance of Foucault's late thought. While I am sympathetic to both Foucault and psychoanalysis, I have adopted neither a Foucauldian nor a psychoanalytical methodology here, not least because I do not believe such an approach would be apt to produce the kind of balanced assessment that I am aiming to achieve. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is rather easy to diagnose Foucault and his followers (and indeed anyone else who might have disagreements with psychoanalysis) as evincing a psychological resistance to Freud's insights that merely confirms their correctness. From a Foucauldian perspective, it is easy enough to dismiss psychoanalysis as essentialising,

²⁰ Dreyfus, Hubert, "Introduction to the California Edition," in *Mental Illness and Psychology*, (author) Michel Foucault (1987); James W Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought* (1992); Eribon, *Michel Foucault*; Toews, "Foucault and the Freudian Subject"; Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession* (2009); Huffer, *Mad for Foucault*; Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (1994); Milan Dolar, "Cutting Off the King's Head," in *Lacan Contra Foucault: Subjectivity, Sex, and Politics*, ed. Nadia Bou Ali and Rohit Goel (2019).

²¹ Arnold I Davidson, "Foucault, Psychoanalysis, and Pleasure" in *Homosexuality & Psychoanalysis*, ed. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (2001); Christopher Lane, "The Experience of the Outside: Foucault and Psychoanalysis" in *Lacan in America*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (2000); Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive* (2008); Jacques-Alain Miller, "Michel Foucault and Psychoanalysis" [1989] in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. Timothy J Armstrong (1992); Joel Whitebook, "Against Interiority: Foucault's Study with Psychoanalysis" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (2005); Derrida, "'To Do Justice to Freud'."

²² E.g. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (1995).

²³ E.g. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997).

too systematic, and aligned with various strategies of power, both discursive and institutional. For such reasons, I think most scholars who have tackled the relationship between the two have not untangled the knot it represents but rather merely intervened, however lucidly, in favour of one side or the other.

4. FEMINISM AND QUEER THEORY: FREUDO-FOUCAULDIANISM VERSUS ANTI-ESSENTIALISM

Foucault's thought and psychoanalysis have been preponderant influences in the development over the last three decades of the closely related discourses of queer theory and academic feminism of the 'third-wave'. As Huffer argues in *Mad for Foucault*, the former discourse in particular has been dominated by a *mélange* of these two influences. This has resulted in what she calls a 'Freudo-Foucauldian' tendency that takes Foucault and psychoanalysis to be easily compatible or complementary discourses.²⁴ The most prominent and influential figure implicated here is Judith Butler, whose work *inter alia* makes copious use of both Foucault's thought and psychoanalysis without critically examining the difficulties in doing so. The original thought she thus develops is beyond the scope of this article to consider as it is beyond the remit of Huffer's criticism. Huffer rather means to point out here the extent to which Butler and others' combinatory use of Foucault and psychoanalysis has served (however inadvertently) to occlude the former's very real criticisms of the latter. Given that Foucault does not try to provide anything approaching a metapsychology, psychoanalysis provides for 'Freudo-Foucauldians' like Leo Bersani and Butler a psychological supplement to Foucault's political insights.²⁵ Such writers do not totally ignore any differences between Foucault and psychoanalytic theory – Butler (1997) situates herself 'between Freud and Foucault', which in itself clearly implies a difference between the two – but they do not dwell on them. This is because they are not engaging in secondary scholarship on the Foucault–psychoanalysis relationship but rather developing their own original perspectives and insights. Thus, such primary works are in general not the places to look for insights into the relationship of Foucault and psychoanalysis, even if they might teach us much about the potentialities of both perspectives. An exception to this rule is Bersani's brief discussion of psychoanalysis directly in relation to Foucault in *Homos*, claiming that Foucault's criticism of psychoanalysis around sexuality results from a conceptual confusion. I will revisit this thesis when discussing such conceptual questions in section 7 below.

Unlike Bersani's *en passant* conciliation, however, dedicated secondary scholarship by feminists and queer theorists on the Foucault–psychoanalysis connection has tended in the direction of invoking Foucault against psychoanalysis. This tendency is exemplified by Huffer herself, as well as by Eribon and Taylor. However, these different thinkers pursue quite different arguments in pursuit of this conclusion. The main problem posed

²⁴ *Mad for Foucault*; see also Lynne Huffer, "Freudo-Foucauldian Politics and the Problem of History," *Contemporary Political Theory* 15:1 (2016).

²⁵ Bersani, *Homos*, 100.

for all such readings of Foucault as more or less anti-psychoanalytic is how to deal with his many sympathetic comments about psychoanalysis. Most of these readings simply do not or cannot account for these comments, as I will now note in relation to each particular case.

Perhaps the most extreme account of Foucault as anti-psychoanalytic is Toews's reading.²⁶ While neither feminist nor queer, Toews focuses on the same basic question that occupies feminist and queer critics of psychoanalysis, namely the conception of subjectivity implied by psychoanalysis. Toews reads Foucault's entire intellectual project as amounting to a critique of psychoanalysis qua the point at which the scientific impulse and the problematisation of the subject meet in late modernity. Toews notes Foucault's positive comments about psychoanalysis through the 1960s but does not explain them, which I would suggest leaves his thesis unproven.

Two more recent readings of Foucault against psychoanalysis by feminist philosophers, Taylor and Huffer, largely ignore this contradictory evidence in Foucault's corpus. Taylor nonetheless considers the lack of any explicit, direct condemnation of psychoanalysis as such by Foucault to be a difficulty for her account.²⁷ She reasonably suggests, indeed, that Foucault would not condemn psychoanalysis outright even if he were minded to.²⁸ One might mention in this regard, though she does not, Foucault's well known disdain for polemics; Taylor instead suggests that Foucault would not engage with psychoanalysis at its own level because he needs to remain outside of it to critique it. Such an argument, however, belies the presence of psychoanalytic concepts in Foucault's work and is thus directly opposed by Derrida's reading of Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis, discussed below. Ultimately, Taylor condemns psychoanalysis in a normative way quite foreign to Foucault's own *modus operandi*, namely based on a set of canonical feminist values that psychoanalysis allegedly violates.

One might argue though that if Taylor's morality is un-Foucauldian, psychoanalysis should also be condemned by the same logic from a Foucauldian standpoint for its own normativity. Taylor herself makes a convincing case that there is a strong moralising-normalising tendency in Freud's work,²⁹ but there is reason to think this is an issue specific to Freud that psychoanalysis in general has not necessarily inherited from him: Whitebook situates the problem of patriarchal prejudices in Freud in particular as a symptom of his age that later analysts have been able to jettison.³⁰ Taylor indeed ends up allowing that psychoanalytic thinking can escape such problems, holding up Kelly Oliver's thought as a singular example of this.³¹

Huffer, for her part, proceeds primarily by criticising others for failing to note Foucault's opposition to psychoanalysis, in particular in the first volume of the *History of*

²⁶ "Foucault and the Freudian Subject."

²⁷ *Culture of Confession*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137ff.

³⁰ Joel Whitebook, "Freud, Foucault and 'the dialogue with unreason'," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 25:6 (1999), 41.

³¹ *Culture of Confession*, 153 ff.

Sexuality – although this is, on my account and the accounts of others I will discuss below, one of the main loci for Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis, it is true that this is the key Foucault reference for those whom Huffer deems ‘Freudo-Foucauldians’. Huffer’s corrective to such misreadings is to focus on the *History of Madness* with its criticism of psychoanalysis. I am sympathetic to the project of troubling the elision of differences between Foucault and psychoanalysis by the Freudo-Foucauldians, which has certainly served to generate a widespread false impression of Foucault’s relationship to psychoanalysis. However, in the pursuit of this aim, in my view, Huffer produces something that the Freudo-Foucauldian camp does not, namely an explicit (rather than merely implicit) account of Foucault’s relation to psychoanalysis, which I want to deal with as a step on the road to reaching the best synthetic view I can of the Foucault-psychoanalysis relation. It might seem unfair to focus on this while not engaging in a direct critique of, for example, Butler, on the same issue, but this is because Butler does not actually offer a direct reading of the Foucault-psychoanalysis relation that would fall within the remit of this essay to discuss, and also because I have repeatedly critiqued Butler’s readings of Foucault elsewhere.³² Conversely, I am reading Huffer selectively in relation to the particular question in hand and do not pretend to be giving an overall assessment of or do justice to the richness of her work (indeed, the same thing can be said to some or other extent of every thinker under discussion here).

In relation to Foucault’s overall stance in relation to psychoanalysis, Huffer pays scant attention to the intervening decade-and-a-half of Foucault’s thought between his histories of madness and sexuality. By Huffer’s lights, this is unnecessary: on her reading, Foucault in *The History of Madness* excoriates psychoanalysis so severely that any later remarks of his to the contrary appear relatively marginal and inconsequential by comparison. This reading depends on an identification of psychoanalysis as being so strongly in continuity with the earlier history of psychiatry that Foucault’s entire critique of psychiatry in the *History of Madness* can be read as a critique of psychoanalysis. Huffer thus quotes comments by Foucault that are not directed specifically towards psychoanalysis as if they are so directed. This identification of the broad sweep of Foucault’s archaeology in this book as condemnatory of psychoanalysis is not a justifiable inference, however: Foucault’s treatment of psychoanalysis in that book is, as I have already suggested, marginal and outside of the main historical frame of his analysis.

By contrast, Eribon argues in more or less the exact opposite direction to Huffer in relation to Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis, inasmuch as he reads Foucault’s early work as not only sympathetic to psychoanalysis³³ but as fundamentally psychoanalytic, although he maintains that Foucault dramatically changed his orientation towards psychoanalysis such that his mature position was thoroughly anti-psychoanalytical, matching Eribon’s own position.³⁴ Against this, we may invoke Huffer’s argument that it

³² See in particular Mark G E Kelly, *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (2009), 88–96, 100–103, 120–121.

³³ *Michel Foucault*, 272.

³⁴ Specifically, Didier Eribon “Toward an Ethics of Subjectivation: French Resistances to Psychoanalysis in the 1970s,” in *Foucault Now*, (ed.) James Faubion (2014).

is only possible to imagine Foucault as ever having been uncritical of psychoanalysis if one overlooks the *History of Madness*, which is indeed exactly what Eribon does in his biography of Foucault in regard to Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis.³⁵ Eribon and Huffer's positions effectively cancel out the main force of the other's since each points out tendencies in Foucault's thought that directly contradict the other's narrative.

Another queer reader of Foucault who argues in a quite opposite direction to Huffer, this time in a pro-psychoanalytic way, is De Lauretis, who complains that those who read the *History of Sexuality* in isolation are not led to underestimate the scale of Foucault's opposition to psychoanalysis but, on the contrary, to underestimate the extent to which it presupposes a background of psychoanalytic understanding.³⁶ She sees Foucault's project as deeply psychoanalytic, a Lacan-influenced hyper-Freudianism that posits a more severe Unconscious-Conscious split than Freud does, with the subject appearing even more powerless than in Freud.³⁷ While it might certainly be true that psychoanalysis has influenced Foucault's thinking in this deep way, this cannot, however, explain away the real criticisms he levels at psychoanalysis in this book. De Lauretis indeed does not try to explain them away but rather simply defends psychoanalysis against Foucault, accusing him of wanting to reduce Freudian drives (*Triebe* – 'instincts' in the old 'Standard Edition' translation of Freud to English) to the effect of power relations when he says that 'sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive'.³⁸ Here, though, I would suggest she misreads Foucault: his dictum does not imply that drives do not exist but rather only that sexuality as such is not a drive. Indeed, I have argued that something like Freudian drives are actually presupposed by Foucault's Nietzschean account of power.³⁹

A more modest attempt to align the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* with psychoanalysis is made by Deborah Cook, who makes the point that while Foucault might disagree with what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis', this is only because of its exclusive focus on repression;⁴⁰ he substantively agrees that the repression identified by psychoanalysis in relation to sex is real and self-consciously seeks a liberation that includes but goes beyond mere liberation from sexual repression to liberate us from the regime of sex itself.⁴¹ Still, all this means is that Foucault does not *totally* reject psychoanalysis in this work, and he once again leaves his criticisms of it there to be reckoned with.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, 272.

³⁶ De Lauretis, *Freud's Drive*, 40ff.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹ Kelly, *Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*, 53. This argument of mine is based on a passage from Foucault's "Truth and Juridical Forms" where he actually uses the word *pulsions* (Foucault, *Dits et écrits* 2 [1994], 548), the French translation of Freud's *Triebe*, unlike in the passage de Lauretis quotes from Foucault casting him as anti-Freudian, where, as she notes, he uses the French *pousée*.

⁴⁰ Deborah Cook, "Foucault, Freud, and the Repressive Hypothesis," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 45:2 (2014).

⁴¹ Michel Foucault, "The Gay Science," *Critical Inquiry* 37:3 (2011), 388.

5. FROM A PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Let us now move on to consider how partisans of psychoanalysis have dealt with Foucault's criticisms. I will begin with someone who, while not primarily a psychoanalytic thinker, nonetheless pointedly defends Freud's legacy against Foucault: Derrida. As the highest-profile figure to have written on Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis, as well as someone who knew Foucault and came from the same milieu, Derrida's reading carries peculiar weight.

Derrida views Foucault as deeply conflicted in relation to psychoanalysis. He reads Foucault as, like himself, ultimately thinking within horizons partly provided by psychoanalysis. Thus, when Foucault tries to criticise psychoanalysis, the immanence of this critique unavoidably entails ambivalence. This moreover implies a criticism of Foucault for failing to understand the way the pervasive influence of psychoanalysis limits his ability to critique it, with his lack of awareness of its limits constituting an inherent flaw in his critique. While Foucault's ambivalence cannot be unrelated to the influence of psychoanalysis on him, it gives Foucault remarkably little credit to imagine him being simply blind to this influence. Something similar may be said of Switzer's more recent reading of Foucault as 'ambivalent' in a technical sense developed by Freud.⁴²

Foucault for his part did not allow that he was caught in the same episteme as Freud – even if he does align himself epistemically with Lacan, who in turn sees himself as entirely Freudian. Derrida posits a chronologically much longer epistemic unity than Foucault does, seeing Freud as essentially similar to the father of modern philosophy, René Descartes, and citing Lacan to the effect that we are in a single post-Cartesian philosophical era.⁴³ Foucault, by contrast, posits multiple small breaks during the modern era and indeed does not really posit the existence of philosophy as such, effectively criticising Derrida for maintaining a relatively conventional conception of philosophy as a privileged discourse.⁴⁴

Moreover, Foucault seems to place different dimensions of single thinkers' thoughts in different epistemes: in the case of Marx, for example, Foucault thinks his economics is an obsolete artefact of an older epoch⁴⁵ but (in his next book) declares Marx's view of history to still be cutting edge.⁴⁶ Similarly, with Freud, it would seem his thinking about the family, sexuality, and the practice of psychoanalysis all align with forces Foucault wants to criticise (which incidentally does not necessarily imply that they formally belong to a bygone episteme but only that they are things Foucault wants to move away from), whereas Freud's position that consciousness is a relatively weak component of the mind is an insight that is relatively radical and actively influences Foucault (for example in his above-mentioned notion of a cultural unconscious).

⁴² "Psychoanalysis."

⁴³ "'To Do Justice to Freud,'" 232.

⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness* [1961] (2006), 576.

⁴⁵ Foucault, *Order of Things*, 262.

⁴⁶ *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 13.

This is consonant with the reading of Foucault proffered by Jacques-Alain Miller,⁴⁷ the leading theoretician of the largest single school of Lacanians since the death of his father-in-law Lacan. Miller reads Foucault's shift from being guided by psychoanalysis in the *Order of Things* to attacking it in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* plausibly as resulting from a shift of focus: in the former book, Foucault's focus is on the human sciences, where psychoanalysis appears radical for challenging the centrality of human consciousness, whereas, in the second, the critical focus is on sexuality, which psychoanalysis seems to Foucault to defend. Defending psychoanalysis, however, Miller argues that sexuality is too broad a notion for Foucault's approach to work.⁴⁸ I will discuss this defence in more detail below in relation to Lacan's thought.

Psychoanalyst and critical theorist Joel Whitebook sees in Foucault's differential assessment of psychoanalysis a thinker torn between his critical engagement with the human sciences and his tendency to valorise transgression, with the former tendency leading him towards psychoanalysis and the latter to reject it.⁴⁹ I think the truth is somewhat different here, however, viz. that Foucault's thought is rigorously negative, and he had no interest in building a theoretical framework in the way that psychoanalysis tries to. This is in a sense transgressive, but it is not merely transgression for its own sake, even if Foucault did derive some *jouissance* from the transgressive aspect of his work. Whitebook is like other Frankfurt School critical theoretic readers of Foucault in seeing Foucault's resistance of theoreticism as invalid, thereby not allowing that an anti-theoretical methodology makes sense.⁵⁰

A recurrent complaint of psychoanalytic readers of Foucault like Whitebook and Miller is that he does not really understand psychoanalysis. There is some substance to this complaint: Foucault was no scholar of psychoanalysis but rather of a series of historical discourses (nineteenth century psychiatry, psychology and ethnology in particular) to which psychoanalysis was only obliquely related. In light of this, an obvious interpretative move is to suggest that Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis should be understood as applying only to the discourse's institutional imbrications rather than taken to say anything about its theoretical claims (an approach taken by Philippe Van Haute).⁵¹ As Amy Allen notes, however, Foucault's position does not readily allow for such a distinction given his emphasis on the complex interrelation of knowledge and power.⁵² Foucault holds that it is necessary for genealogy always to 'wage its struggle' against 'organised scientific discourse', citing psychoanalysis as an example,⁵³ and he indeed claims that the history of the *dispositif* of sexuality 'can serve as an archaeology of

⁴⁷ Miller, "Michel Foucault and Psychoanalysis."

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁹ Whitebook, "Freud, Foucault and 'the dialogue with unreason'."

⁵⁰ Mark G E Kelly, "Foucault Contra Honneth: Resistance or Recognition?" *Critical Horizons* 18:3 (2017).

⁵¹ Philippe Van Haute, "Michel Foucault: Psychoanalysis and the Problem of the Law," *Epoché* 2:2 (1994).

⁵² Amy Allen, "Foucault, Psychoanalysis, and Critique: Two Aspects of Problematization," *Angelaki* 23:2, 2018, 173.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (1980), 84.

psychoanalysis',⁵⁴ implying that historically psychoanalysis cannot be separated from the device of sexuality.

Still, this does not imply that a separation cannot be effected at some point; indeed, Foucault's 'rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses' implies precisely that one and the same discourse may have utterly different political significance in different contexts.⁵⁵ Indeed, Foucault more or less explicitly allows this point in relation to psychoanalysis in his celebrated 1969 essay 'What Is An Author?', where he speaks of the transformative effects of 'a re-examination of the books of Freud',⁵⁶ alluding surely to Lacan's work (Lacan himself was in the audience of the original lecture and later lauded it in his seminar).⁵⁷ In this relation, I would draw particular attention to the way in which Lacan used Freud's apparently patriarchal (Oedipus) and sexist (phallus) vocabulary in new ways. And while it is quite clear that Foucault's methodology is not simply psychoanalytical (even if it is influenced by psychoanalysis), Foucault does not claim that his approach is the only correct one, and he does not in principle oppose the promiscuous combination of insights from his thought with those from elsewhere, as with psychoanalysis in queer theory and feminist thought. Indeed, he explicitly offers his work as a toolbox from which one can take what one needs.⁵⁸

6. LACAN: SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

Huffer and others claim that Foucault's rejection of core aspects of psychoanalysis specifically precludes any recombination of his thought with psychoanalysis. The Foucauldian feminist/queer critique of psychoanalysis is that psychoanalysis gives us a limiting, hetero-normative, patriarchal model of the psyche that denies human potentiality. Generically, psychoanalysis stands accused of invoking an invariant model of the human psyche that ignores historical change, in contrast to Foucault's historical accounts of the constitution of the subject. While Foucault does indeed accuse psychoanalysis of lacking a sense of historicity, this seems a somewhat unfair accusation inasmuch as psychoanalysis, at least since Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, has explicitly concerned itself with giving an historical account of the development of the human psyche. Of course, the claims of that book apply to the entire swath of human history in a way Foucault could not endorse – and indeed he explicitly criticises such work for not accounting for the history of 'the production of theories of sexuality'⁵⁹ – but the notion that basic structures of the psyche are historically constituted has allowed for a historically

⁵⁴ Foucault, *History of Sexuality 1*, 130.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 100ff.

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (2009), 332.

⁵⁷ See Lorenzo Chiesa, "Author, Subject, Structure: Lacan Contra Foucault," in *Lacan Contra Foucault: Subjectivity, Sex, and Politics*, ed. Nadia Bou Ali and Rohit Goel (2019).

⁵⁸ Foucault, *Dits et écrits 2*, 323.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, "Sexuality and Power" in *Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault*, ed. Jeremy Carette (1999), 118.

differentiated account of metapsychology to develop, particularly within the Lacanian orientation.⁶⁰ Foucault's differentiation of himself from Lacan on the basis of his own Heideggerianism may be taken primarily to allude to his following Heidegger in taking an historical approach to subjectivity, but this comparison ignores the influence of Heidegger on Lacan himself. Lacan famously exchanged visits with Heidegger, and Lacan's historical enframing of psychoanalysis is at times directly Heideggerian, for instance in his straightforwardly Heideggerian claim that 'in the course of man's history things have happened to him that have changed the subject's relation to being'.⁶¹ Indeed, Lacan was clearly receptive to using Foucault's own historical studies to buttress psychological understanding in a way that has paved the way for further work bringing Lacan and Foucault together.⁶² While Foucault might have thought that Lacan was trying to install desire as a permanent and ineluctable truth of human existence,⁶³ one might also read Lacan as trying to problematise desire much as Foucault did. Indicating the attentiveness to historicity of Millerian Lacanianism in particular, Miller contends that 'psychoanalysis does, after all, contain within itself the possibility of its own mortality. Freud knew this and said it'.⁶⁴ Much depends in the end on whether one reads Freud and Lacan as theoretical dogmatists. They are often read in this way, but they were constantly revising their thinking in an open-ended way, with neither figure ever making any claim to theoretical completeness, and the notion that scientific discourses cannot capture truth is constantly reiterated as a guiding principle of Lacan's epistemology, which focuses on the inability of linguistic knowledge to grasp what he calls 'the real'.

Here, as often, Lacan is rather close to Foucault's own position. As Samo Tomšič notes, Foucault and Lacan have very similar epistemological orientations rooted in a particular strand of twentieth century French philosophy.⁶⁵ Lacan's name is peculiarly prominent in the secondary literature on Foucault's relation to psychoanalysis with good reason: Lacan was the single most prominent living psychoanalytic thinker in the scene in which Foucault was working, and clearly the psychoanalytic figure closest to Foucault himself, in time, space, and in intellectual influences. I have already mentioned attendances by the two Parisian intellectuals at one another's events; Foucault indeed knew Lacan personally and dined at his house several times.⁶⁶ What is striking about their relationship, however, is that, despite geographical, intellectual and even personal proximity, Foucault remained ultimately relatively uncomprehending of Lacan's thought. I will now briefly trace the history of his engagement with that thought.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Samo Tomšič, "Better Failures: Science and Psychoanalysis" in *Lacan Contra Foucault: Subjectivity, Sex, and Politics*, ed. Nadia Bou Ali and Rohit Goel (2019) on Lacan's analysis of the effects of capitalism on subjectivity.

⁶¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion* [2005] (2013), 22.

⁶² E.g. Lee Grieveson, "The death of psychoanalysis? Foucault on Lacan," *New Formations* 31 (1997).

⁶³ *History of Sexuality 1*, 150.

⁶⁴ "Michel Foucault and Psychoanalysis," 59; cf. Lacan, *Triumph of Religion*, 67.

⁶⁵ Tomšič, "Better Failures: Science and Psychoanalysis"; see also Mark G E Kelly, "Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of the Self," in *A Companion to Foucault*, ed. Chris Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki (2013).

⁶⁶ Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, 154.

Foucault attended Lacan's first public seminar in 1953 but claimed not to have understood much.⁶⁷ Jacqueline Verdeaux, who brought Foucault onto the Binswanger translation project, remembered Foucault as seriously hostile to Lacan at that time.⁶⁸ However, this represents a point very early in Foucault's intellectual development and quite early in Lacan's.

When Foucault makes more positive comments about Freud in the *History of Madness*, in contrast to the relatively negative ones there, he does so in a way redolent of Lacan, viz. for taking 'up madness at the level of its *language*',⁶⁹ Lacan's major innovation in psychoanalysis being to read Freud's unconscious as an essentially linguistic phenomenon. Foucault further develops this Lacanian reading of Freud in *The Order of Things*.⁷⁰ During this period, Lacan and Foucault were both popularly considered members of the 'structuralist' school in France. Eribon indeed claims Foucault's entire archaeological project was based in part on Lacan.⁷¹

Eribon posits a turn in Foucault's thought thereafter against psychoanalysis specifically opposing Lacanianism,⁷² citing Foucault's comments on the 'law' in relation to sexuality.⁷³ Since Lacan is the only major psychoanalytic thinker to strongly thematise this concept, these indeed must be directed towards him. Foucault thus displays a familiarity with Lacan's terminology but shows some ignorance of its meaning by inferring from the use of this term a conventional conception of power focused on the law, an accusation repeated recently by Huffer.⁷⁴ However, as Yannis Stavrakakis points out, Lacan's concept of the law has 'a certain homology with Foucault's conception of power' insofar as Lacan conceives the law as not merely repressive but 'productive'.⁷⁵ Van Haute notes that Foucault effectively considers a possible response by Lacanians to his criticisms that the concept of the law does not imply a *repressive* model of power but nonetheless does imply a juridical conception of it.⁷⁶ However, van Haute points out that Lacan's notion of the 'law' is not only intended as non-repressive but as non-judicial; it is rather a metaphor, one Lacanians themselves have indeed tended to take too literally. It refers either to the subject's encounter with a rule-governed language outside their control or to the 'law of castration', which implies a complex by which the subject limits their investment in particular objects of desire in relation to which desire is itself constituted.

Van Haute also seeks to exempt Lacan from Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* as instantiating a confessional culture by which

⁶⁷ Ibid., 93. It has been suggested to me that this is mere modesty on Foucault's part, but, for my part, I find it hard to imagine any young person (even one as erudite as Foucault) confronted with Lacan's teaching being anything other than confused.

⁶⁸ David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (1993), 69.

⁶⁹ *History of Madness*, 339.

⁷⁰ *Order of Things*, 393–394.

⁷¹ *Michel Foucault*, 272.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *History of Sexuality 1*, 150.

⁷⁴ Huffer, "Freudo-Foucauldian Politics," 133.

⁷⁵ Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (1999) 33.

⁷⁶ Van Haute, "Psychoanalysis and the Problem of the Law," 56; *History of Sexuality 1*, 82–83.

we are encouraged to constitute ourselves as (sexual) subjects through the production of narratives about ourselves.⁷⁷ Van Haute shows that Lacan does not conceive of analysis as intended to attach the self to a 'true' identity. Rather, consistent with an epistemology that does not allow any final truth to be discovered through language, the Lacanian position is that the end of analysis involves realising that there is no true identity to be discovered. Indeed, Lacan himself pointedly rejected any identification of analysis with religious confession, claiming that 'in analysis, we begin by explaining to people that they are not there in order to confess'.⁷⁸

All this I think betokens a relatively superficial engagement with Lacan on Foucault's part. His relative lack of knowledge of the nuances of Lacanianism emerges in an interview with analysts shortly after the publication of *History of Sexuality I*, where Foucault is surprised to learn from Miller that, as Miller puts it, it is a Lacanian 'axiom' that 'that there is no sexual relation'.⁷⁹ This formula is basic enough to Lacan's account of sexuality that this seems to indicate that Foucault has no knowledge of it at all. I do not mean to imply that there is anything reprehensible about the unfamiliarity. Lacan's position has always been hard to understand, and, moreover, Lacan's thought was primarily transmitted orally during his lifetime through seminars, while his writing was scattered, occasional, and relatively impenetrable. Foucault noted as much himself: 'From what I've managed to learn about his theories, Lacan has certainly influenced me. But I haven't followed him in a way that would enable me to say that I've had an in-depth experience of his teaching. I've read some of his books; however, it's well known that in order to understand Lacan well, it's not only necessary to read him but also to listen to his lectures, participate in the seminars he gives, and, if possible, to undergo analysis with him. I haven't done any of that. In 1955, when Lacan commenced the essential part of his teaching, I was already outside France'.⁸⁰

Indeed, Foucault never attempted comprehensively to understand psychoanalysis more broadly, he never undertook a study of it in the way he did earlier psychiatry and psychology, and this was something in the order of a conscious choice on his part. While he does comment on it, it is never the actual target of his writing so much as something that is noted on the periphery. He simply does not have an overall assessment of psychoanalysis as an object but rather assesses it as it appears in relation to ethnology (where his assessment is broadly positive, seeing it as offering a critical tool) and in relation to the histories of psychiatry and sexuality (where psychoanalysis is caught in Foucault's line of fire).

Given his ignorance of the topic, what motivated his relative turn against psychoanalysis? I would suggest one factor might have been his burgeoning friendship in the early 1970s with Gilles Deleuze, and his reading of the 1972 book Deleuze co-wrote with the dissident Lacanian psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, the title of which

⁷⁷ "Psychoanalysis and the Problem of the Law."

⁷⁸ *Triumph of Religion*, 63.

⁷⁹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 213.

⁸⁰ Michel Foucault, *Remarks on Marx* [1981] (1991), 73–74.

clearly trumpets its anti-Freudian agenda. This influence becomes immediately palpable in Foucault's thinking, for example in his 1973 lectures 'Truth and Juridical Forms', where he discusses at length how appealing he finds Deleuze's anti-Oedipal contentions, before distancing himself from 'structuralism' and declaring a filiation instead with Deleuze, Guattari, and Jean-François Lyotard⁸¹ – a quite different list of intellectual confreres to the one he had provided in the mid-1960s when he was aligning himself with Lacan. Still, even here, faced in the post-lecture discussion with questions from the psychoanalytical scholar Hélio Pellegrino, Foucault notes that Guattari himself remains a kind of psychoanalyst and hence does not in fact pronounce himself opposed to psychoanalysis as such.⁸²

I would suggest, then, that it is perhaps not mere coincidence that Foucault's anti-psychoanalytic invective effectively ceases after 1977 when his relationship with Deleuze cooled.⁸³ Something else that year to which a disappearance of Foucault's hostility to psychoanalysis could speculatively be attributed in part is his published discussion with Miller et al. I read in this interview a genuine change of position on Foucault's part in the face of persistent challenges from his psychoanalytic interlocutors. Foucault initially disputes the historical significance of psychoanalysis, but he concedes to his interviewers the importance of Freud's conceptualisation of the unconscious, something he had himself earlier asserted in *The Order of Things*, and is apparently quite surprised to learn about an essentially negative account of sexuality.⁸⁴ By the following year, Foucault is averring that he is not 'anti-psychoanalytic' and that "although my project, in doing the history of sexuality, is the reverse of that perspective, this is not at all to say that psychoanalysis is mistaken, not at all to say that there is not in our societies a misunderstanding by the subject of his own desire,"⁸⁵ the last clause clearly referring to Lacanian perspectives.

In 1981, Foucault was interviewed on the occasion of Lacan's death.⁸⁶ This very brief interview, never published in English, is entirely overlooked in the Anglophone secondary literature on Foucault and psychoanalysis. In it, Foucault notes that Lacan intended to wrench psychoanalysis away from psychiatry and psychology, that he (like Foucault) opposed normalisation, and that reading Lacan's early writings had been an influence on Foucault along with the rest of his generation in understanding subjectivity. Given the context, one can expect, of course, that Foucault would here focus on the points of agreement between the two thinkers, but it is not insignificant that Foucault readily identifies these particular points.

⁸¹ *Dits et écrits*, 553ff.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 623.

⁸³ Macey, *Live of Michel Foucault*, 394.

⁸⁴ *Power/Knowledge*, 213.

⁸⁵ Foucault, "Sexuality and Power," 118.

⁸⁶ Michel Foucault, "Lacan, le «libérateur» de la psychanalyse" [1981], in *Dits et écrits 4*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (1994).

7. THE SUBJECT AND THE LATE FOUCAULT: THE PROBLEM OF VOCABULARY

The problem that Foucault runs into with the notion of the 'law' is one of translation between Lacan's idiosyncratic terminology and Foucault's own conceptual lexicon. Good work translating such vocabulary has been done, including van Haute's on the law and Bersani's on the 'sexual', as well as Tim Dean's work carefully noting the differences in the two thinkers' use of the notion of pleasure.⁸⁷ However, false friends continue to mislead. Given that most of Lacan's key terms are simply absent from Foucault's work, scholarship bringing the two together tends to focus on the few terms that appear in both thinkers' writing, the most prominent example being the word 'subject'. Butler is a case in point here, effectively taking this word to mean the same thing for both thinkers.⁸⁸ This conflation of Lacan's subject with Foucault's is compounded, de Lauretis suggests, by running together different senses of the word used by Foucault himself, conflating 'the subject of Foucault's later works, the individual agent of practices that make sexuality an "art of existence", with the subject of reverse discourse in Volume I'.⁸⁹ These three accounts of subjectivity – Foucault's 1970s analysis of its constitution correlative to power relations, Foucault's 1980s analysis of ancient subjectivity constituted through ethical 'practices of the self', and Lacan's understanding of subjectivity as the psyche formed through infantile experiences – do not mutually exclude one another, but to use them together successfully would require careful conceptual mediation, and this, I would contend, is generally missing in attempts to bring them together. Miller, for example, claims explicitly that, in Foucault's late work, where subjectivity was prominently thematised for the first time, 'Foucault's subject had become the same as Lacan's'.⁹⁰ Birman reads Foucault and Lacan as tracing a somewhat similar trajectory, with their respective late works becoming increasingly simpatico with one another's.⁹¹ Deborah Cook has likewise seen similarities between psychoanalytic accounts of the formation of the subject and Foucault's late work.⁹² We should remember, however, that it is precisely in the context of his late work that Foucault suggested that his and Lacan's approaches to the relationship of subjectivity and truth were fundamentally distinct. Lacan's understanding of subjectivity rests on an edifice of psychoanalytical elaboration which is completely absent from Foucault's work. As I have detailed elsewhere, Foucault conceives subjectivity as correlative to practices, where Lacan understands it as a complex psychological structure established early in life.⁹³

Foucault (1980, 213) himself reaches a similar conclusion in relation to sexuality rather than subjectivity when, in conversation with Miller, the latter insists that sexuality is, from

⁸⁷ Tim Dean, "The Biopolitics of Pleasure," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111:3 (2012).

⁸⁸ Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*.

⁸⁹ *Freud's Drive*, 44.

⁹⁰ "Michel Foucault and Psychoanalysis," 62.

⁹¹ Birman, *Foucault et la psychanalyse*.

⁹² Cook, "Foucault, Freud, and the Repressive Hypothesis."

⁹³ *The Political Philosophy of Michel Foucault*; Kelly, "Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of Self."

a Lacanian perspective, precisely something that does not have a history: Foucault takes the point but notes that there is a history of sexuality in a different sense, that is, that the two thinkers mean quite different things by 'sexuality'. Apropos here is Bersani's (1995, 98) argument that differing conceptions of sexuality conceal the fact that Freud is engaged in fundamentally the same project as Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, namely 'desexualization', that is, the project of getting rid of the sexual as a special category. He argues that Freud engaged in an 'attempt to desexualize pleasure' – albeit one that is obscured by the fact that Freud's desexualisation is performed by broadening the concept of the sexual to cover what would ordinarily be considered nonsexual, rather than declaring war on the very concept of 'sex' as Foucault in effect does. Bersani (1995, 102) notes that Foucault distinguishes between the sexual and the 'erotic', and that what Freud means when he talks about the sexual is in effect what Foucault calls the erotic.

Other commentators have compared psychoanalysis with other concepts in Foucault's late work, but I think these comparisons similarly tend to indicate a great distance between the two perspectives. Simon O'Sullivan has compared Foucault's late reflections on ethics to Lacan's own consideration of psychoanalysis as an ethical practice, ultimately telling us that Foucault and Lacan have different problematics.⁹⁴ Nancy Luxon has suggested that the ancient practice of parrhesia (courageous truth-telling), in which Foucault was in his last years so interested, resembles psychoanalysis,⁹⁵ but the similarity here is thin, amounting to the fact that both have some commitment to the truth and require some form of courage – in particular, the specifically political and individual characteristics of ancient parrhesia as a form of telling truth to power at the risk of being punished for doing so can be likened to the stakes of psychoanalysis only in a quite metaphorical way.

8. CONCLUSION

Taking Foucault's remarks on psychoanalysis together, we get a mixed picture, with psychoanalysis in some respects representing a radically new way of thinking and in other ways failing to break with tendencies that Foucault wants to critique. However, I have suggested that Foucault's identification of these continuities with past practice in psychoanalysis is unreliable, or at least that the continuities are contingent. Foucault justifiably identifies affiliations of psychoanalysis to strategies of power that he wants to resist, but the centrality of these to psychoanalysis is contestable. Psychoanalysis has come to be increasingly separated from institutional psychiatry in much of the world in the decades since Foucault's time and instead has come to figure again as a counter-discourse, a tendency palpable already early in its history in Freud's preference for maintaining

⁹⁴ Simon O'Sullivan, "Lacan's Ethics and Foucault's 'Care Of The Self': Two Diagrams of the Production of Subjectivity (and of the Subject's Relation to Truth)," *Parrhesia* 10 (2010).

⁹⁵ Nancy Luxon, *Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault* (2013).

psychoanalysis's independence from academic and medical institutions.⁹⁶ I would thus characterise Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis as to some extent a missed encounter, owing to Foucault encountering psychoanalysis personally at a time when it was too closely associated with strategies of power. This, then, implies no criticism of Foucault since he could not be expected to investigate every possible tangent from his research fully, but rather an intervention against those who invoke Foucault as providing good reasons to reject psychoanalysis holus-bolus.

There was a point early in Foucault's career when he might have become a primarily psychoanalytical – or at least psychological – thinker: this is the Foucault who wrote his first book about psychology, took a diploma in psychology, was employed principally as a psychology lecturer, worked in a psychiatric hospital, attended Lacan's seminars, and avidly studied Binswanger's form of existential psychoanalysis. In this context, there was already an unavoidable encounter with psychoanalysis. But Foucault deliberately struck out from this context on a different trajectory, which was the historical critique of the medicalisation of the mind. While it is true, as several commentators point out, that Foucault was ineluctably influenced in this effort by the critical ethos of psychoanalysis itself, this also required a critical distance from psychoanalysis, as noted by other (and some of the same) commentators. This critical distance is achieved precisely by a deliberate decision *not to study psychoanalysis*, even if psychoanalysis continually loomed closely enough that Foucault found himself at every turn having to engage with it marginally – sometimes in the modality of saying laudatory things about the ways in which psychoanalysis might be doing similar things to him (in *The Order of Things*, for example) and at other times noting its similarity to the main object of his critical genealogies (in *The History of Sexuality*, for example).

A second proper encounter might have occurred – but clearly did not – in Foucault's late work on subjectivity. Foucault's archaeological work had been premised on a bracketing of the subjective in order to attend to words at the level of discourses, finding the structural underpinnings (that is, the *epistemes*) that govern the production of knowledges, and this took him diametrically away from psychology. He had then moved on to consider discursive production in relation to strategies of power, which again bypassed the question of depth psychology in favour of understanding the specifically political constitution of subjectivity. He could perhaps have moved next, as Judith Butler in his wake has, to consider the 'psychic life of power'. But this is pointedly not what Foucault does: rather, he goes back to an antiquity in which contemporary psychology would be deeply anachronistic and prefers instead to understand ancient subjectivity in terms of practices, which is effectively (though not in as many words) how the ancients themselves viewed the problem. One reason for this is surely historiographical, but there is another one, I think, namely that Lacan was already doing the structural analysis of subjectivity as a psychological phenomenon. For Foucault to move into this space would have been redundant and reduplicative from a scholarly perspective. It is also the case that his interests did not lead him in this direction. One might always speculate that he

⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Question of Lay Analysis* (1969).

might have moved in such a direction later in his studies had he lived longer, but there is no particular reason to believe he would have, nor indeed is there any reason Foucault should have done that. Ultimately, to the extent his studies are non-psychoanalytic, this is no reason they should be deemed illegitimate from a psychoanalytic perspective, any more than a Foucauldian perspective should imply a condemnation of psychoanalytical ones.

Foucault never seeks to dismiss psychoanalysis in the way some of his followers have. Foucault's overall assessment of psychoanalysis, I think, is neatly encapsulated in this 1975 assessment of Jan van Ussel's then-recent work on the history of sexuality: 'Although such notions may be valid in psychological or psychoanalytic analysis, they cannot, in my view, account for the mechanisms of a historical process'.⁹⁷ That is to say, Foucault thinks that psychoanalysis has not performed the kind of historical analysis that he is engaged in, but this implies no rejection of it qua psychological inquiry, only that it is foreign to the problem that he has set himself from at least the time of his doctoral thesis *The History of Madness* onwards, the point at which he decided that his life's task was fundamentally an historical one into the emergence of psychology as a disciplinary formation rather than the history of the human psyche.

Miller's schematic account of Foucault's attitude towards psychoanalysis as shifting primarily according to the shifts in the focus of his work, from psychiatry to epistemology and back again, is essentially correct. Indeed, I think something similar can be said of most of the attitudes of most scholars on the topic: queer theorists and feminists, for example, who are concerned with attacking the abuses of psychiatric power, tend to accentuate Foucault's anti-psychoanalytic strand, whereas those trying to articulate a positive account of the psyche prefer to read him as compatible with the resources they find in psychoanalytic theory, with both sides naturally tending to ignore details that do not help their practical purpose.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Australian Research Council [Grant FT140101020].

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⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal* [1999] (2004), 236.

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