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Journal of the Theoretical Humanities

ISSN: 0969-725X (Print) 1469-2899 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cang20>

## FOUCAULT, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND CRITIQUE

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To cite this article: Amy Allen (2018) FOUCAULT, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND CRITIQUE, Angelaki, 23:2, 170-186, DOI: [10.1080/0969725X.2018.1451570](https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2018.1451570)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2018.1451570>



Published online: 10 Apr 2018.



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**F**oucault's relationship to psychoanalysis is notoriously complex. On the one hand, he credits psychoanalysis for its (not completely successful) attempt to establish a dialogue with unreason (*History of Madness* 497), describes it as a critical counter-science occupying a privileged place in relation to the human sciences (*Order of Things* 373–86), and praises Freud's rejection of the racialized hereditary theory of neurosis (*History of Sexuality* 117–19). On the other hand, he criticizes psychoanalysis for its normalizing and confessional tendencies with respect to sexuality, its adherence to the repressive hypothesis, and its reliance on an overly simplistic juridico-discursive model of power (*History of Sexuality*). While one might be tempted to explain these divergent views by appealing to a developmental trajectory – a youthful enthusiasm for psychoanalysis that, over time, gives way to a more jaundiced assessment – or by claiming that Foucault's critique is aimed at some versions of psychoanalysis (Freud) but not others (Lacan), to my mind the best interpretation of Foucault's own position on psychoanalysis deploys the psychoanalytic concept of ambivalence.<sup>1</sup> As Adrian Switzer puts it, “‘ambivalence’ in the Freudian sense may serve as a guiding hermeneutic in reading Foucault's engagement with psychoanalysis,” explaining why even as the content of Foucault's assessment of psychoanalysis shifts considerably over time, “the *tone* of those remarks remains constant: they are always both positive and negative or critical” (411).<sup>2</sup>

Although I'm sympathetic with this interpretive approach, in what follows I propose to shift gears a bit and consider the relationship between Foucault and psychoanalysis through

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*two aspects of  
problematization*

the lens of the *Foucaultian* category of problematization.<sup>3</sup> As Colin Koopman has argued, problematization has two senses for Foucault: it is “both an act of critical inquiry (expressed in the verb form as ‘to problematize’) and a nominal object of inquiry (expressed in the noun form as ‘a problematization’)” (98). This two-sided character of problematization highlights that Foucault's aim is not so much to produce new problems out of whole cloth but rather to offer “existing problematizations a greater degree of self-consciousness than what they might be able to muster on their own” (99). In other words, his aim is to analyze existing aspects of social reality that are in some

sense already problematic, even if they are not clearly perceived as such, and through that analysis to clarify and bring those problems into focus in such a way as to open them up for possible transformation (93–98). Building on Koopman’s account of problematization, we might say that although psychoanalysis is clearly very tightly bound up with some of the central problems of modernity – the discourses of madness, criminality, and sexuality – and, in that sense, it clearly constitutes a problem (or perhaps a part of a larger problematization) for Foucault, it is also simultaneously a useful resource for the work of critical problematization as Foucault understood it. In other words, psychoanalysis is closely bound up with Foucault’s conception of critique.

In what follows, I analyze the relationship between psychoanalysis and the Foucaultian conception of critique from the perspective of these two aspects of problematization. I start by asking in what sense psychoanalysis constitutes a problem for a Foucaultian conception of critique. Foucault once famously described his interest in problematization this way: “I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problématiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad” (“On the Genealogy of Ethics” 256). In line with this thought, we might ask: what about psychoanalysis is dangerous, from the point of view of a Foucaultian conception of critique? I consider three potential answers to this question, three primary dangers that psychoanalysis is often thought to pose for a Foucaultian conception of critique; these dangers are grouped under the headings of normalization, the drives, and power. After arguing that these three dangers can be overcome – by which I mean that they do *not* amount to reasons for believing that psychoanalysis is conceptually incompatible with Foucaultian critique – I turn in my final section to the second aspect of problematization, and ask how psychoanalytic concepts and categories are related to Foucault’s method of critical problematization. There I argue that psychoanalysis – a certain version of it, at any rate<sup>4</sup> – far from being incompatible with

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Foucault’s understanding of critique, serves as a model for his own critical method understood as a radical approach to writing history.

## normalization

The complaint that psychoanalysis is normalizing – that is, that its goal is to assimilate subjects into the existing social order, rather than encouraging resistance to and transformation of that social order – remains a common charge against psychoanalysis, particularly prominent among feminists and queer theorists. Although Foucault’s own relationship to this claim is complex, and although it did not even originate with him – Adorno, for example, had long complained about the normalizing and de-politicizing effects of what he called “revisionist psychoanalysis” – critics who make this claim often marshal Foucaultian texts and ideas for support. And although it may seem a particularly odd charge to levy against Lacanian psychoanalysis, given the emphasis in Lacan’s late work on resistance to the demands of the big Other (*Seminar VII*), prominent Foucaultians such as Didier Eribon and Lynne Huffer (*Mad for Foucault*) have argued recently that Lacanian analysis too is deeply bound up with sexual normalization. Thus, although I myself in no way endorsing the claim that psychoanalysis in general is normalizing – which is not to deny that particular approaches to it may well be – it seems important to begin my discussion by dealing with this objection.

There are actually two distinct but closely intertwined components of the claim that psychoanalysis is normalizing. The first focuses on the *goal* of analysis and the second on the *means* that analysis employs to achieve this goal. With respect to the former, the worry is that the goal of psychoanalysis is to accommodate analysts to the demands of the existing social order, particularly but not necessarily limited to prevailing patriarchal and heterosexist norms of sex, gender, and sexuality. With respect to the latter, the concern is that the means that psychoanalysis employs to achieve this goal is a hierarchical authoritarian relationship between analyst and analysand that trades

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on the putative moral authority of the analyst who is taken to be both the representative and arbiter of “normality.”

As I said, these criticisms of psychoanalysis are by no means unique to Foucault; however, he does raise particularly powerful and influential versions of both of them. The former criticism emerges in the context of Foucault’s argument in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* that psychoanalysis represents a moment in the modern transformation of a much older, Christian tradition of sexual confession into a *scientia sexualis* (53–73). According to this story, psychoanalysis is no longer even terribly unique;<sup>5</sup> rather, it must be situated within a broader transformation of discourse which comes to demand “that sex speak the truth [...] and [...] that it tell us our truth” (69). Although Foucault doesn’t always mention psychoanalysis by name as he elaborates this critique, he seems to have Freudian analysis in mind in the following passage:

Situated at the point of intersection of a technique of confession and a scientific discursivity, where certain major mechanisms had to be found for adapting them to one another (the listening technique, the postulate of causality, the principle of latency, the rule of interpretation, the imperative of medicalization), sexuality was defined as being “by nature”: a domain susceptible to pathological processes, and hence one calling for therapeutic or normalizing interventions. (68)

Here Foucault not only calls into question the pathologization of sexuality, he also equates therapeutic interventions with normalizing ones.

The latter criticism – that psychoanalysis achieves its aims via a hierarchical and normalizing relationship between the analyst and analysand where the former is taken to be a moral authority – is summarized well in Foucault’s early critique of psychoanalysis, the *History of Madness*:

Freud [...] exploited the structure that enveloped the medical character: he amplified his virtues as worker of miracles, preparing an almost divine status for his omnipotence.

He brought back to him, and to his simple presence, hidden behind the patient and above him, in an absence that was also a total presence, all the powers that had been shared out in the collective existence of the asylum; he made him the absolute Gaze, the pure, indefinitely held Silence, the Judge who punishes and rewards in a judgment that does not even condescend to language; and he made him the mirror in which madness, in an almost immobile movement, falls in and out of love with itself. (510)

In other words, although Foucault in his early work credits Freud with attempting to reinstate the dialogue with unreason that had been broken off by positivist psychiatry – and for this reason we must “do justice to” him (339)<sup>6</sup> – in the end he maintains that Freud merely reinscribed the power structures characteristic of the asylum (silence, the gaze, and moral judgment) within the doctor–patient relationship, specifically, within the transference relationship (“the mirror in which madness [...] falls in and out of love with itself”). Although Foucault doesn’t use the term normalization here to characterize the analyst–analysand relationship – because the term hadn’t yet entered his lexicon – something like the concept of disciplinary normalization is very much at work even in Foucault’s early critique of psychoanalytic method (see Huffer, *Mad for Foucault* ch. 3).

The claim that psychoanalysis takes sexual normalization as its goal – and should therefore be rejected by those who consider themselves Foucaultians – has recently been forcefully reiterated by Didier Eribon. Against queer theorists such as Judith Butler and Leo Bersani who have prominently argued for a reconciliation of Foucault with Freud, Eribon insists that such reconciliatory projects

in the end serve to blunt the radical force of Foucault’s thought by seeking out a compromise between what he was trying to do – to produce a different way of thinking about subjectivation and relationality – and what he was trying to undo – the psychoanalytic conception of desire and the subject of desire. (85)

As Eribon sees it, the psyche is itself an effect of disciplinary power and psychoanalysis is a component part of the “disciplinary technology” of society (ibid.): it pathologizes queer sexuality and enforces heterosexist norms. This generates a “fundamental incompatibility” between psychoanalysis and queer theory, which leads Eribon to ask: “Wouldn’t the urgent task, for critical, radical thinking, rather be to resolutely turn its back on psychoanalysis?” (82).

One might be tempted to respond to this criticism by distinguishing between psychoanalysis as a body of theory and its institutionalization as a form of practice, and locating the normalizing impulse in the latter rather than the former. However tempting this response may be, it doesn’t seem available to a Foucaultian who is committed to thinking through the complex intersections of knowledge and power.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, one could distinguish between different varieties of psychoanalysis, and argue that some (such as ego psychology) are guilty of social normalization whereas others (such as Lacanian theory) are not. However, although Lacan famously criticized ego psychology precisely on the grounds that it preaches normalization (*Seminar II*), and although his late work construes the ethical import of psychoanalysis as the refusal to give ground relative to one’s desire regardless of the demands of the social order (the big Other) (*Seminar VII*), Lacan’s conservative views with respect to sexuality have still left him vulnerable to a version of this criticism (see Eribon 81).<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps a more promising approach is suggested by Foucault himself. In a 1977 discussion with a group of Lacanian psychoanalysts, Foucault claims that it is a mistake to think that Freud’s great discovery was sexuality and its role in generating neuroses. “The strength of psychoanalysis,” he continues, “consists in its having opened out on to something quite different, namely the logic of the unconscious. And there sexuality is no longer what it was at the outset” (“Confession of the Flesh” 212–13).<sup>9</sup> When pressed, Foucault clarifies that this strength is not unique to the work of Lacan, but can already be found in Freud, provided

one focuses on Freud’s metapsychology rather than his developmental theory of sexuality.<sup>10</sup> In other words, even if we grant that the developmental psychoanalytic theory of sexuality is bound up with problematic, normalizing, disciplinary technologies of power, this theory can be distinguished from the logic of the unconscious. This logic, which poses a serious challenge to the traditional conceptualization of the subject, represents for Foucault psychoanalysis’s profound insight. As I will discuss below, this insight also served as inspiration for the radical approach to history so central to Foucault’s conception of critique.

If, however, one takes seriously the logic of the unconscious, then one is likely to be skeptical about any and all claims to complete ego mastery or smooth accommodation to the demands of social reality. The unconscious produces a split within the subject that can never be fully healed or overcome, though there are for psychoanalysis better and worse ways of managing that split. Although this is a message that is perhaps most closely associated with Lacanian psychoanalysis – which holds that psychic wholeness is a fantasy, and a dangerous one at that (see, for example, Lacan, *Seminar VII* 300) – a similar idea can be found in Freud’s work as well. To see this, it is helpful to follow Joel Whitebook in distinguishing between Freud’s official position – which is Kantian, rationalist, unambivalently pro-Enlightenment, progressive, and Oedipal – and his unofficial position – which is romantic, skeptical, and oriented toward the maternal, the archaic, and the pre-Oedipal (*Freud* 1–16). Whitebook argues that although Freud’s official position, which inspired the development of ego psychology, seemed to take the goal of analysis to be the repression of the id by the ego, his unofficial position acknowledged not only the impossibility but even, implicitly, the *undesirability* of this goal. According to the unofficial position, “the strength of the ego is not to be measured in terms of its defensive or repressive capabilities” but rather in terms of its capacity for “expansion, greater integration, and differentiation of its associative web” (154). As Whitebook argues elsewhere, the expansion,

differentiation, and integration of the ego's associative web is an ongoing, never-ending task ("Against Interiority" 336).<sup>11</sup> In other words, one does not have to be a Lacanian – Whitebook most certainly isn't<sup>12</sup> – to believe that the logic of the unconscious implies that there is no end to the process that psychoanalysis initiates: no possibility of achieving wholeness or reaching a state of final integration.

With respect to the claim that psychoanalysis's means for achieving its goal is itself normalizing in that it repeats the objectifying structures of the asylum within the form of the analyst–analysand relationship and rests on the alleged moral authority of the analyst, Whitebook also offers a promising line of response. The key here is the notion of countertransference.<sup>13</sup> As Whitebook puts it, countertransference, the idea that the analyst's own unconscious and affective responses to the analysand are every bit as much at issue in the analysis as is the transference, "calls into question the very distinction that Foucault finds so offensive – namely, between the normal, healthy doctor and the sick patient" ("Against Interiority" 330).<sup>14</sup> Lacan develops this point when he claims that what the analyst has to offer the analysand is "nothing other than his desire [...] with the difference that it is experienced desire" (*Seminar VII* 300).<sup>15</sup> In other words, particularly once analysis begins to take seriously the role of the countertransference, analysts are compelled to recognize that they have no moral authority over the analysand. They do not represent normality or health, and, thus, they are in no position to judge or even to diagnose; all that they have to offer is the experience of having engaged in the process of working through their own desire to the point of having encountered its limit.

In sum, whatever may be said of the psychoanalytic theory of sexual development, the logic of the unconscious not only does not have normalizing implications, it has significant *anti*-normalizing implications, given its radical critique of the traditional philosophical subject. As Foucault himself put this point: "psychoanalysis has undoubtedly been the practice and the theory that has reevaluated in the most

fundamental way the somewhat sacred priority conferred on the subject, which has become established in Western thought since Descartes" ("Truth and Juridical Forms" 3). Moreover, insofar as the practice of psychoanalysis has come to take countertransference dynamics seriously, it has long since left behind the kind of objectivizing, authoritarian, and normalizing structure that Foucault criticizes. Thus, the persistent worry about normalization does not, in the end, constitute an unsurpassable obstacle to mobilizing psychoanalytic insights in the service of a Foucaultian conception of critique.

### the drives

To be sure, even if the appeal to the logic of the unconscious helps to address the concern about normalization, it also raises potential problems of its own. Chief among these is a problem that stems from Foucault's commitment to relentless historicization and his related suspicion of any and all universal, transhistorical claims about what human beings are like. Given Freud's conception of the death drive, for example, as a fundamental, "indestructible feature of human nature" (*Civilization* 114), one might reasonably wonder (how) the psychoanalytic conception of unconscious drives can be compatible with a Foucaultian commitment to historicization.

Foucault's commitment to historicization is so fundamental to and pervasive throughout his work that it is difficult to isolate a single passage that encapsulates this commitment. Still, the following passage from a late interview might be taken as reasonably representative of the role that historicization plays in Foucault's critical method:

history serves to show how that which is has not always been; that is, the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as *its* necessity or, rather, what different forms of rationality offers [*sic*] as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of

contingencies from which it emerges can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational; it means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history – and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made. (“Structuralism and Post-Structuralism” 450)

Foucault’s commitment to relentless historicization in the service of critique and possible ethical and political transformation seems quite clearly to imply a suspicion of any and all strongly universal or transhistorical claims about human beings insofar as such claims purport to transcend the fragile and precarious contingencies of history. Not surprisingly, Foucault articulates his suspicion regarding the concept of human nature in precisely these terms in his debate with Noam Chomsky. There, he suggests that the danger of appealing to a human nature that stands outside of history is the risk of unwittingly “defining this human nature – which is at the same time ideal and real, and has been hidden and repressed until now – in terms borrowed from our society, from our civilization, from our culture” (Chomsky and Foucault 131–32). This suspicion is reflective of perhaps Foucault’s most basic methodological commitment: to view all of our concepts – including human nature, reason, truth, and the like – as having a history, as having been constituted through contingent social forces. On this view, the danger of deploying ahistorical concepts such as human nature is that they run the risk of obscuring the contingent social forces that have constituted them – the very forces that ought to be the object of our critical attention.

It would seem, then, that Foucault’s commitment to historicization runs counter to the core psychoanalytic notion of unconscious drives, at least insofar as those drives are taken as strong claims about (indestructible) features of human nature. This seems particularly problematic given my argument that the unconscious was the psychoanalytic concept that Foucault found the most important, original, and productive. To be sure, drive is a notoriously

complicated, controversial, and contested concept within psychoanalysis. As careful readers of Freud will be quick to point out, psychic drive (*Trieb*) is importantly distinct from animal instinct (*Instinkt*), even though this distinction is unfortunately obscured by the standard English translation of Freud’s work. Moreover, in his middle period, metapsychological work, Freud famously defines drives as emerging on the border between psyche and soma. For Freud, the drive is “the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind [...] a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body” (“Instincts and their Vicissitudes” 122). Hence although drive has a clear connection to the bodily and the somatic, it is far from a crudely or simplistically biological or natural category. To complicate matters still further, as Benjamin Fong has recently argued, in Freud’s late work the border concept definition of drive gives way to a different conception according to which “drives are *psychic forces shaped in relation to the environment*” (10). Later psychoanalytic thinkers have further de-naturalized the notion of drive, translating it into more object-relational (Melanie Klein) or linguistic (Lacan) terms.

Still, even if drive is not understood as a crudely biological or natural concept, and even if one maintains that the specific content of the drives is shaped and structured by our early experiences which are themselves historically inflected, the notion of drive nonetheless seems to stake a claim about universal, fundamental, and inescapable features of human beings. In other words, even if, as Fong argues, it is through our early experiences of being not only held, fed, cared for, and loved but also neglected, disciplined, and ignored that “drives are not elicited but *formed*,” still those drives are formed along a few set pathways – “we *learn*,” as he says, “what it is to love, to master, to aggress” (11). Thus, even on a de-naturalized conception of drive, the claim seems to be that there are two or perhaps three basic drives – the libidinal drive, the death drive, and the drive to mastery – that are fundamental to human existence but



that can be shaped and constituted in different ways, including ways that are connected to historically specific and contingent practices.

As Fong acknowledges, even this de-naturalized and partially historicized conception of drive seems to be at odds with a Foucaultian position, according to which, as Fong puts it, “it is wrong to speak of ‘drives’ [...] as if there are anything like universals when it comes to the myriad ways in which human beings conceive of their interiority” (16).<sup>16</sup> However, as Fong himself argues, psychoanalytic drive theory can be defended without making strong claims about indestructible features or innate constituents of human nature but rather on the basis of more modest claims about the implications of certain (for all we know) inescapable preconditions for human existence. From the psychoanalytic point of view, perhaps the most important of these preconditions is the fact that human beings, unlike many other animals, are born into a protracted state of helplessness upon their caregivers.<sup>17</sup> As Fong elaborates this point:

what care *is* can be radically different in different societies, but *that* human beings enter life completely dependent on the responses of other human beings (and for a fairly lengthy amount of time in comparison to other animals) is invariable. (17)

To say this is not to make a strong claim about a timeless and immutable human nature but rather to make a more modest claim about what we might call, following Hannah Arendt, the human condition, a condition that places constraints on what kinds of creatures we become and what that process of becoming is like. Fong argues that in light of these constraints

there will be certain drives that all human beings share; but *how* these particular drives are formed – and, in turn, how they impact our lives and thus what they mean to us – as well as the *vicissitudes* available for their expression vary markedly in different societies and at different times. (Ibid.)<sup>18</sup>

So, the important question for our purposes is this: is the Foucaultian methodological

commitment to relentless and ongoing historicization incompatible with this way of conceptualizing drives? Here we might once again helpfully turn to Foucault himself for an answer. In his pseudonymously written encyclopedia entry from the early 1980s, Foucault, perhaps unsurprisingly, describes his method as involving “a systematic skepticism toward all anthropological universals” (“Foucault” 461). However, he immediately clarifies that this “does not mean rejecting them all from the start, outright and once and for all” only that “nothing of that order must be accepted that is not strictly indispensable” (ibid.). This leads him to formulate his “first rule of method” as follows: “Insofar as possible, circumvent the anthropological universals [...] in order to examine them as historical constructs” (462).<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Foucault himself examines the notion of instinct as a historical construct in his lecture course *Abnormal* (129–33).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Mark Kelly has argued that the notion of drive – understood in a Nietzschean sense – plays an important role in his conception of subjectivity. As Kelly puts it: “from what is the individual fabricated? The answer is simple and obvious, given Foucault’s Nietzschean political ontology: it is made from the animal existence and drives that precede the existence of the individual” (*Political Philosophy* 96; see also Cook 155). In other words, not only does Foucault *not* reject any and all anthropological universals such as the notion of drives, he both critically interrogates them as historical constructs and deploys them in his own work.<sup>21</sup>

However, the crucial point for our purposes is not so much what Foucault himself said or believed but the fact that the conception of drive articulated above – where the features of drives that are claimed to be anthropologically universal are understood as rooted in certain for all we can tell inescapable facts about the human condition, and according to which the shape and structure of those drives are thoroughly malleable and plastic, historically and socially constituted through and through – seems perfectly compatible with Foucault’s first rule of method. Moreover, even this rather minimal conception of drive has



important and far-reaching consequences, consequences that Foucault's work helpfully illuminates. As Joel Whitebook argues, the fact that we are born helpless and dependent on the care of others means that socialization is necessary for us to become subjects; this socialization is made possible by our prolonged dependence on our primary caregivers and our plastic, mutable drives. Extending Whitebook's point, we might note that the fact that socialization is necessary for us to become subjects is arguably what makes us vulnerable to the deeply ambivalent processes of subjection that Foucault has traced so subtly and powerfully in his middle-period work.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, although some conceptions of drive might well be at odds with a Foucaultian commitment to historicization, the conception of it that I sketched above is not. Perhaps this should not be terribly surprising, since Foucault not only draws on the language of drives, particularly in his more Nietzschean moments, he also seems at least implicitly committed to some claims regarding anthropological constants. How else should one understand his infamous claim that power is everywhere (*History of Sexuality* 93)? I take this to mean that power is co-extensive with human social relationships, which has the further implication that although we might be tempted to imagine or to posit a form of social relationship in which power is not at work, the individuals engaged in such a relationship would not be recognizably human. If this is a plausible reading of one of Foucault's most well-known claims about power, then it would seem to be based on some sort of claim about anthropological universals to the effect that, given the constraints of the human condition, we are the kinds of creatures whose relations with others are such that power is at stake in them.

## power

This leads me, then, to the question of power. Based on a rather straightforward reading of *The History of Sexuality, volume 1*, it may well seem that a Foucaultian conception of critique is incompatible with psychoanalysis

because of the latter's commitment to the repressive hypothesis and its related reliance on the juridico-discursive model of power and resistance. As is well known, the repressive hypothesis holds that repression or prohibition is "the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch" (12). Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis questions the claim that "repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age" and the related assumption that freeing ourselves from repression will require "nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech" (5). Foucault doubts not just that sexuality has actually been repressed – at least to the degree that we might think it has been – but also, and more importantly, that repression is the right model for understanding the operation of power in modern societies. To the contrary, he suggests, the discourse of repression is itself part of the same dispositif of power and knowledge regarding sexuality that it denounces (10).<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, Foucault acknowledges that there are important differences between Freudian and Lacanian models of repression, and that while the former focuses on the repression of bodily based instincts, the latter understands desire to be constituted by the imposition of the Law of the Symbolic, thus by the very activity of repression or prohibition. Thus, whereas the Freudian model (at least as Foucault presents it) suggests that desire or drive pre-exists repression (and, in that sense, lies outside of the operation of power), for Lacan, as Foucault acknowledges, "where there is desire, the power relation is already present" (81). However, Foucault insists that the important difference between these two models of repression has to do solely with how they understand the drives, and not with how they conceive of power. Both the Freudian and Lacanian models rely on what Foucault calls the juridico-discursive conception of power – indeed, he presents them as exemplars of that conception – according to which the relation

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between power and sex is always negative and power operates at all levels through mechanisms of law, taboo, and censorship (83–84). As Foucault famously sums up his case, the juridico-discursive model of power is problematic insofar as according to it:

power is poor in its resources, sparing of its methods, monotonous in the tactics it utilizes, incapable of invention, and seemingly doomed always to repeat itself. Further, it [...] only has the force of the negative on its side, a power to say no; in no condition to produce, capable only of posting limits, it is basically anti-energy [...] And finally, it[s] [...] model is essentially juridical, centered on nothing more than the statement of the law and the operation of taboos. All the modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience. (85)

While Freud and Lacan share a common commitment to the juridico-discursive model of power, Foucault argues that their differing conceptions of drive produce contradictory results when it comes to resistance. For Freud, for whom “power is seen as having only an external hold on desire,” resistance becomes “the promise of a ‘liberation’” (83) of the desire that has been repressed, a desire that lies outside of power. For Lacan, by contrast, for whom power “is constitutive of desire itself,” resistance is impossible: “you are always-already trapped” (83).<sup>24</sup> For Foucault, by contrast, resistance is both possible and internal to power relations; as he famously puts it: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). In other words, Foucault formulates his account of resistance quite deliberately as the negation of both the Freudian and Lacanian juridico-discursive accounts. That resistance is always internal to power relations means that, contra thinkers of the Freudian left, such as Herbert Marcuse, “there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary” (95–96). But resistance is always

possible and must be analyzed in terms of a “plurality of resistances, each of them a special case [...]” (96).<sup>25</sup>

Although Foucault’s primary target seems to be left-wing psychoanalytic social theorists such as Wilhelm Reich and Marcuse, it is important to note that his critique of the psychoanalytic conception of power and resistance is explicitly levied against Freud and Lacan as well. One of Foucault’s primary concerns is with the inability of the juridico-discursive model of power – a model that he claims is presupposed by both Freud and Lacan – to capture the specificity, plurality, and locality of relations of power and resistance. Foucault does not contend that sex is never repressed, nor does he deny that repression is a form that power sometimes takes (see *History of Sexuality* 12). Foucault characterizes the aim of his project this way:

rather than referring all the infinitesimal violences that are exerted on sex, all the anxious gazes that are directed at it, and all the hiding places whose discovery is made into an impossible task, to the unique form of a great Power, we must immerse the expanding production of discourses on sex in the field of multiple and mobile power relationships. (97–98)

In passages such as this one it seems clear that the primary target of Foucault’s critique is not so much the psychoanalytic concept of repression per se but rather the juridical model of power on which the repressive hypothesis rests. As Foucault puts the point in “The Mesh of Power”:

what troubles me, or at least what seems insufficient to me, is that, in this revision [of drive theory] proposed by psychoanalysts, they have perhaps altered the concept of desire, but they have in no way altered our concept of power.

And his primary reason for criticizing the juridical model that it is not so much incorrect as incomplete and thus misleading: it fails to capture the specificity, complexity, and multiplicity of power relations in modern societies.

However, one might think that Foucault's critique of the psychoanalytic conception of power has more bite than this. After all, his conception of power not only stresses the specificity, complexity, and multiplicity of power relations but also their productivity. One of the chief effects of power's productivity, for Foucault, is the individual subject (see *Society Must be Defended* 29–30), and Foucault's account of subjection seems clearly to be at odds with the psychoanalytic idea that the subject is formed through repression. However, even on this point, it isn't so clear that Foucault and psychoanalysis are as far apart as it might at first seem. As Deborah Cook has argued, Freud's account of the internalization of the superego and Foucault's analysis of the constitution of the subject through subjection to disciplinary norms have much in common at a descriptive level. Both offer accounts of how subjects are produced through the internalization of coercive structures of disciplinary authority. Mari Ruti has argued a similar point with respect to Lacan:

in the same way that Foucault sees power as both constraining and productive, Lacan views the symbolic as both oppressive and enabling, as a complex nexus of signification that both limits our options and – ideally at least – grants us the ability to transcend these limitations. (*Ethics of Opting Out* 133)

Even if Freud and Lacan don't explicitly characterize their views in quite these terms, the content of their views of subject formation implicitly bring together the intertwined repressive and productive features of subjection.

But what about resistance? Does Foucault's critique of the psychoanalytic conception of resistance point to a fundamental incompatibility between his conception of power and the one that can be gleaned from psychoanalysis? With respect to his critique of Lacan, if Foucault's claim that resistance is impossible on Lacan's conception of power is fair at all, it could only apply to Lacan's middle-period work on the symbolic, and not to his late work on the real, which, as I have already noted, deals extensively with the possibility of resistance to the big

Other in the form of the ethical act.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, several feminist scholars have argued recently that Lacan's account of resistance is preferable to Foucault's precisely because Lacan's notion of the real provides a point "outside" of power from which resistance can be launched and that there is no analogue for this in Foucault's work.<sup>27</sup> Although I don't have space to discuss this point fully here, I'm not convinced that there is no analogue for the Lacanian real in Foucault's work. It seems to me that his early account of unreason in the *History of Madness* can be read as analogous to the Lacanian real: as a figure of the outside that is formed through the exclusion that divides reason from unreason and that serves to open up lines of fragility and fracture within the present historical a priori.<sup>28</sup>

Foucault's critique of the Freudian account of resistance, on the other hand, seems to be based on the assumption that Freud held a rather simplistic understanding of drive.<sup>29</sup> If drives are conceptualized along the lines I discussed above as forces that are formed in response to basic features of the human condition, particularly the helpless dependence of infants on their primary caregivers, then they need not be understood as outside of power at all. Rather, they can be understood as historically and socially conditioned all the way down, including by relations of power. Not only would such a conceptualization of drives allow psychoanalysis to respond to Foucault's critique regarding resistance, it might also provide some support for Foucault's fundamental (but, as far as I know, unargued for) claim that power is omnipresent in human social relationships – a point that, as I suggested above, seems to function as a kind of anthropological universal in Foucault's work. The key here is the link between helpless dependence and infantile omnipotence. As Whitebook explains this point:

As helpless children, we confronted the seemingly omnipotent Otherness of our physical and socio-familial environments, an Otherness that was beyond our control, and this drove us – and to one degree or another

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continues to drive us – to pursue omnipotent solutions that seek to deny that helplessness. (Freud 391)

On this view, the fact that our initial human condition is one of helpless dependence on our caregivers gives rise not only to drives for love and connection with others but *also to a drive for power*. Once formed, this drive becomes a permanent part of all of our relationships with others, including (perhaps especially) our love relationships.<sup>30</sup>

These considerations at least suggest, I think, that even when it comes to questions of power and resistance, we are not compelled to choose between Foucault and psychoanalysis. Even though I am inclined to agree with Foucault that psychoanalysis doesn't by itself offer a fully satisfactory analysis of social power – and thus that we ought to be cautious about any attempts to transpose psychoanalytic concepts directly into a critical analysis of society insofar as such attempts often implicitly presuppose that society can be thought of as a macro-subject that operates according to the same dynamics as the individual psyche – psychoanalysis does offer crucially important insights not only into the anchoring of power relations in the individual (on this point, see Butler) but also into the otherwise elusive source of the Foucaultian claim about the omnipresence of power relations. These insights are not only compatible with but also generative of a Foucaultian conception of critique.

### psychoanalysis and critique

Having dealt at length with the primary reasons why psychoanalysis seems to pose a problem for the Foucaultian conception of critique, I would like to turn, by way of conclusion, to the question of how psychoanalysis informs Foucault's own critical method. My argument here will pick up on Adrian Switzer's insightful (but not fully developed) suggestion that Freud, like Foucault, should be understood as a historian of the present (610). In contrast – though not in disagreement – with those who have emphasized the connection between Foucault's

late work on parrhesiastic technologies of the self and (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, I propose to connect the two through his early work on historical method.<sup>31</sup> Allow me to emphasize that I take this approach not because I find those readings unfruitful or unimportant, but rather because it seems to me that the connections between psychoanalysis and Foucault's early historical method have received considerably less scholarly attention, despite the fact that they are no less significant for understanding Foucault's project. This approach also allows me to connect Foucault's engagement with psychoanalysis to his understanding of critique in a way that is, I think, illuminating for the question of critique more generally.

Given that much of the opposition between Foucault and psychoanalysis turns precisely on the issue of historicization, it might be surprising to recall that in his early work Foucault not only praised the radical implications of the theory of the unconscious for our understanding of subjectivity, he also described his own approach to writing history in psychoanalytic terms. For example, in the foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, Foucault described the aim of archaeology as that of revealing a “positive unconscious of knowledge” (xi). As Foucault explains, this means that archaeology uncovers the “rules of formation, which were never formulated in their own right, but are to be found only in widely differing theories, concepts, and objects of study” (ibid.). In other words, the positive unconscious refers to the historically a priori conditions of possibility for thought in a given episteme.<sup>32</sup>

The reference to the positive unconscious suggests that, for Foucault, the rethinking of continuous history and the radical reconceptualization of the subject are two sides of the same coin. And indeed, this shouldn't be at all surprising, since Foucault also argued throughout his early work that the traditional philosophical conception of the meaning-constituting subject and the traditional conception of history as continuous and progressive are two tightly interwoven facets of a single system of thought. As he puts it in the introduction to the *Archaeology of Knowledge*:

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject – in the form of historical consciousness – will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought. (12)

By describing his archaeological project as the attempt to reveal the positive unconscious of knowledge, Foucault indicated that he sought not only to interrogate the connections between traditional theories of the subject and philosophies of history but also to model his own radical, critical-historical method on some sort of analogy with psychoanalytic method.

One might protest here that the idea of the positive or structural unconscious is a function of Foucault's early flirtation with structuralism – a position that he later (thankfully) repudiated. However, the fact that he makes this comparison between psychoanalysis and his approach to history as late as 1972, in the opening of his lectures "Truth and Juridical Forms" – as his genealogical turn was already underway – suggests that matters are more complicated (3). Indeed, my suggestion is that although Foucault rejected any analogy to psychoanalysis when it came to theorizing power, he embraced psychoanalysis as a model for his critical-historical method. This means that, like psychoanalysis, Foucault's critical-historical method seeks to disrupt the presumptions of continuity, unity, and progressive self-realization in traditional views of history. But the analogy goes further than this. As Switzer notes suggestively, but without developing the thought further, both psychoanalysis and Foucaultian critique can and should be seen as

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related ways of doing a history of the present, the one carried out at the level of the individual and the other at the level of the social or the historical a priori. Both attempt to bring to awareness those aspects of unconscious experience that structure our current self-understandings in ways of which we are not fully aware. As Foucault put it in a late description of his method:

The history of thought is the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and "silent", out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions. (*Fearless Speech* 74)

To be sure, Foucault doesn't refer explicitly here to the notion of the unconscious, but I would suggest that his reference to problems that are "silent," that is, not recognized as such, is what remains of his earlier notion of the positive unconscious, once that idea has been stripped of its structuralist baggage. Despite their silence, these problems can nonetheless give rise to crises that need to be problematized so that they can be worked on (and perhaps even worked through). Like psychoanalysis, the method that Foucaultian critique employs for working through these unconscious, silent problematizations is deeply historical, while its aim is that of opening up blockages or transforming crises in the present. In other words, both Foucaultian critique and psychoanalysis dynamically re-work the past with the aim of opening up or transforming problems and crises in the present in the direction of a non-teleological, open-ended future. Both are ways of doing the history of the present.

To be sure, psychoanalysis is often not understood in this way. Instead, it is often read as adhering to strict developmental trajectories that enforce a rigid, closed, and unified understanding of the telos of individual development. However, as I discussed above, this is far from the only available reading of Freud, and it is a serious misrepresentation of much post-

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Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Mark Kelly brings out this point well in his discussion of Foucault's and Lacan's anti-utopian stance toward the future. Neither Foucault nor Lacan understands the goal of critical (self or political) transformation as the realization of a positive vision or conception of the good life; both highlight what Kelly calls "immanent struggles aiming at the negation of certain features of the present" ("Against Prophecy and Utopia" 111). From the Lacanian point of view, Kelly explains, "utopianism means believing in a wonderland in which we actually understand and realize our real desire itself. For Lacan, this attempt is impossible [...]" (117). In other words, there is no cure. As Kelly argues, Foucault and Lacan reject utopias because of their "essential unreality" and instead favor "a more immanent form of practice" (ibid.). Extending Kelly's thought a bit further, I will close by suggesting that the goal, for Foucault as well as for psychoanalysis, of this immanent – and eminently historical – form of practice is to reveal the crises, problems, and blockages that emerge silently and unconsciously in the present and to work through them in the service of an open-ended process of becoming.<sup>33</sup>



### disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### notes

1 For a powerful and influential version of this interpretation, see Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud."

2 For a related assessment, see Lobb 228.

3 Allow me to emphasize that my primary interest is not the interpretive or hermeneutical question of how best to characterize Foucault's own position vis-à-vis psychoanalysis. Rather, I aim to pursue the more conceptual and systematic question of whether and how certain fundamental Foucaultian critical, theoretical, and methodological commitments are compatible with core

psychoanalytic ideas and concepts. As I hope will become clear in what follows, I don't think that there is any internal contradiction or conceptual incoherence involved in drawing on both Foucault and psychoanalysis for the project of critique, but, in my experience at least, this is a rather commonly held view, among philosophers, critical social theorists, and even some Foucaultians.

4 Given my aims in this paper, I won't be delving into detailed discussions of particular psychoanalytic theorists, but I am well aware of the fact that "psychoanalysis" is not a unified theoretical position. I readily acknowledge that there is a vigorous debate amongst psychoanalytic theorists over what assumptions and commitments count as "core" to the discipline. For my purposes, the two psychoanalytic concepts that are most central are the dynamic unconscious and the duality of libidinal and death drives. Thus, although I can't undertake this project here, the conception of psychoanalysis that is operative here is one that could be reconstructed through a reading of the late Freud, Melanie Klein, and Jacques Lacan.

5 On this point, see also "Confession of the Flesh" 211–13.

6 Derrida's "To Do Justice to Freud" reading of Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis famously takes this passage as its jumping-off point.

7 For a compelling argument to this effect, see Huffer (*Mad for Foucault* ch. 3).

8 For an interesting discussion of Lacan in relation to conservatism, see Badiou and Roudinesco 24–28.

9 Badiou makes a similar point with respect to Lacan: viewed from the point of view of his theory of the Symbolic as the Law of the Father, he is conservative, but read from the point of view of his account of the real and of refusing to give ground on one's desire, his work is emancipatory. See Badiou and Roudinesco 26–27.

10 See Foucault et al. 213. For helpful discussion of this point, see Grace.

11 In a similar vein, Foucault speaks of the "always-incomplete character of the regressive and analytic process in Freud" as central to the essential, structural incompleteness of psychoanalytic interpretation ("Nietzsche" 274).

12 For his trenchant, even polemical, critique of Lacan, see Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*.

13 Countertransference is not developed systematically in Freud's own work. Indeed, Lacan famously took Freud to task for failing to see how countertransference was operative in Freud's failed analysis of Dora (Lacan, "Intervention on Transference"), and Freud later wrote of countertransference solely as an obstacle to be overcome ("Future Prospects" 144–45). Although his later papers on analytic technique complicate this picture somewhat (see especially "Observations"), the topic does not receive systematic treatment until post-Freudian psychoanalysis. For an overview, see Abend.

14 Whitebook criticizes Foucault for not taking countertransference seriously; in Foucault's defense, although the discussions of countertransference began in the 1950s, they only gained prominence later in the twentieth century, long after he wrote the *History of Madness*. For an interesting discussion of transference in Foucault's work, see "Nietzsche" 274–75.

15 For helpful discussion of this point in Lacan, see Ruti, *Ethics of Opting Out* 69.

16 For related arguments with respect to the Lacanian conception of drive, see Grace; Huffer, "Freudo-Foucauldian Politics."

17 For a discussion of the importance of this idea in Freud's conception of human nature, see Whitebook (*Freud* ch. 11).

18 For a related claim about drives being historically constituted in Lacan's work, see Ruti, *Ethics of Opting Out* 65.

19 See also Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics* 2–3.

20 For helpful discussion of this point, and of Foucault's relationship to drive theory more generally, see Cook.

21 In the opening of his 1976 lecture "The Mesh of Power," Foucault acknowledges that the Freudian concept of drive

need not be interpreted as a simple natural given, a natural biological mechanism upon which suppression would come to posit its law of prohibition, but rather, according to the psychoanalysts, as something which is already profoundly penetrated by suppression [repression].

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He then goes on to make it clear that his critique of psychoanalysis has more to do with its negative and juridical conceptualization of power than it does with its account of drives per se. Thanks to Daniel Rodriguez-Navas for alerting me to this passage.

22 I discuss the relation between socialization and subjection more fully in Allen, *Politics of Our Selves*.

23 Significantly, Foucault cites denunciations of "Freud's conformism" and "the normalizing functions of psychoanalysis" as instances or functions of the repressive hypothesis – which strongly suggests, I think, that he would be hesitant to endorse such criticisms (*History of Sexuality* 5).

24 Whether this is a fair criticism of Lacan or not is another story. I will return to this point below.

25 For discussion of the differences between the Foucaultian and psychoanalytic conceptions of power, see Grace.

26 See, for example, Lacan's discussion of Antigone in *Seminar VII*; for helpful critical discussion, see Ruti, *Ethics of Opting Out*.

27 See Leeb; Ruti, *Ethics of Opting Out*. "Outside" is in scare quotes here because the real is formed through the cut of the signifier, thus it refers not to a metaphysical or absolute outside of power but rather to an as it were "internal" outside.

28 Thus, unreason would also be an "internal" outside. Although Foucault himself seems to have later given up this idea – perhaps in response to Derrida's famous critique, which had accused Foucault of metaphysics (Derrida, "Cogito") – I'm not so convinced that he needed to do so. I discuss the critical potential of Foucault's conception of unreason more fully in Allen, *End of Progress* chapter 5.

29 In "The Mesh of Power," Foucault acknowledges that the Freudian conception of drive need not be interpreted in this way, and even that Freud's own understanding of drive is more complicated and subtle than he often makes it out to be.

30 Although she tends to talk of drives as innate instincts, Melanie Klein nonetheless offers a sophisticated account of this dynamic. Klein's account of drives can, however, be taken up in a more relational and thus socially and historically conditioned way, as I have argued more fully in Allen, "Are We Driven?"



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31 For interesting discussions of the relationship between Foucault's late work and psychoanalysis, see Lobb; Ruti, *Ethics of Opting Out* 162–64; and Sjöholm. As Ruti discusses, Foucault notes the connection between his notion of care of the self and Lacanian analysis in several passages in *Hermeneutics of the Subject* 29–30 and 187–89.

32 I discuss this aspect of Foucault's work more fully in Allen, "Psychoanalysis and Ethnology' Reconsidered."

33 For a beautiful and compelling reconstruction of Lacan's work along these lines, see Ruti, *World of Fragile Things*.

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