Foucault’s Power: 
A History of Sexuality
Beyond the Desires of French Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the critical intersection between Michel Foucault’s history of sexuality and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis, played out in French intellectual discourse in the years from the 1950s to the 1980s. It attempts to extricate Foucault’s project from a general “French” reading of Freud, personified by Jacques Lacan’s return in the 1950s to Freud. It is argued that obscurity surrounding Foucault’s relationship to the Freudian movement has hampered a proper understanding of his distinct methodology, which presents itself as a positive non-science, and may be described as a critical ethnographic portrait of Western society.

In contrast to other accounts, the thesis interprets Foucault’s œuvre as a recuperation and transformation of the two fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis: “sexuality” and the “unconscious.” On the one hand, “bodies and pleasures” are freed from psychoanalytic theories of desire or sexuality, while, on the other hand, the “unconscious” becomes a vast archive of “conditions of possibility” of Western thought, not attached to a particular person or organization; not owned nor controlled by any class nor institution – and, importantly, lacking any sex, male or female. Amongst other benefits, its release from ahistorical “sexuality” gives the unconscious a philosophical prominence it potentially had but soon lost in Freudian and even Lacanian discourse.

The result of Foucault’s efforts is an ethnographic alternative to Freud’s psychoanalysis. Culture can be conceived as clusters of power and knowledge relations, largely “unknown,” which the cultural analyst sets out to illuminate. From a methodological perspective, “know thy culture” replaces the psychoanalytic imperative “know thyself.”
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An earlier version of this thesis contained a chapter on Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze that was subsequently published as a discreet paper. Material from the paper appears in chapters one, three and eight. On those occasions, reference will be made to this article:

Key to Abbreviations of Texts Frequently Cited

[Dates in square brackets refer to original date of Publication]


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Most of all I would like to thank my supervisor Rob Stuart for his advice, encouragement and loyalty. Without his guidance, I would still be chasing wild rabbits on any number of *fourvoieiments* not even vaguely connected to biological life. I would like to dedicate this thesis to him.
This thesis explores the critical intersection between Michel Foucault’s history of sexuality and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis, played out in French intellectual discourse in the years from the 1950s to the 1980s. France is generally celebrated for its philosophical readings of Freud, personified, rightly or wrongly, by Jacques Lacan’s return during the 1950s to the actual texts and concepts of Freud. The influence of Lacan’s reading of Freud has continued in many ways: for example, through various feminisms, of which Juliet Mitchell’s is exemplary,¹ and via the divergent post-Lacanian approaches of Jean Laplanche² and Jean Allouch,³ amongst others.

Cutting across these traditions is Foucault’s 1976 text *La volonté de savoir (The Will to Know)*,⁴ inspired by cultural and philosophical sources outside of Freudian assumptions. The text consolidated a critical relationship with psychoanalysis, retrieving themes from Foucault’s first major text, *History of Madness*, published in 1961.⁵ Beyond its literary merits, *La volonté de savoir* contains a stunning critique of Western conceptions of sexuality as a whole – but it targets especially the idea of desire developed by Lacan,

itself a reworking of Freud’s notion of the Oedipus complex and crucial to the whole “return” to Freud.

Proponents of psychoanalytic theory in France and elsewhere have remained largely impervious to Foucault’s arguments and challenges. Neither Lacan’s earlier formulations, nor Laplanche’s enhancements of Freudian theory, nor feminist reinterpretations, have led to a full encounter with Foucault’s work. According to Jean Allouch, who has gone the furthest in negotiating Foucault’s ideas from a psychoanalytic perspective, Freudians “have gone underground, in silence, pretending that Foucault has not taken them on.” Although difficult to substantiate, one could point to a recent conference on the topic of gender and sexuality, which brought together feminists and psychoanalysts from many different persuasions, including Juliet Mitchell and Julia Kristeva: any consideration of Foucault’s contributions to this field was absent.

Thus, the central aim of this thesis is to clarify Foucault’s position in relation to “French Freud” generally, all the while insisting on the radical originality of his critique. Critical appraisals of Freudian theory abound, going back to its inception – first there were dissidents within the psychoanalytic movement itself, followed by Marxists,

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8 One should consider, for example, Joan Copjec’s defence of Lacan in the face of what she calls Foucault’s “ascendancy” in academic discourse – though she, too, complains of a lack of confrontation between the two traditions. See Joan Copjec, *Read my Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, (Massachusetts, 1994). Other theorists have also presented Freudian critiques of “post-modern” ideas, including those held by Foucault and Lacan. See, for example, Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).
existentialists, feminists, anti-psychiatrists, deconstructionists and neo-
phenomenologists, and now joined by historicist critics associated with the recent *Le livre noir de la psychanalyse* [*The Black Book of Psychoanalysis*]. The argument of this thesis is that Foucault’s “resistance” to psychoanalysis is in a class of its own due to the introduction of “power,” and that his singular methodology stems from this radical exteriority to French Freud – a relationship never properly explicated.

The argument will be developed over three parts. Chapters one to four set the contextual parameters for Foucault’s engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis. First, we will consider secondary commentaries and critiques that, from this perspective, have not paid enough attention to “sexuality” as a recurring theme in Foucault’s work, and the critical relationship with psychoanalysis inevitably cultivated as a result. In an effort to advance understanding of Foucault’s critique, chapter two presents a historical excursus through the geo-political region known as “French Freud” to identify the central players and broad tendencies, dispel certain assumptions (that it is characterized by a “non-medical orientation,” for example), and place Foucault more accurately than hitherto amongst these theorists.

Chapter three will then explore an “anti-Oedipus” movement contemporaneous with French Freud. It included Georges Bataille’s *Eroticism*, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s “structuralism,” the “historical anthropology” of Jean-Pierre Vernant, as well as those names more commonly associated with the anti-Oedipus label – foremost Gilles

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10 Still unsurpassed is Juliet Mitchell’s excellent treatment of these various critiques of Freud – from Wilhelm Reich and R. D. Laing to Kate Millet, via Karen Horney, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan and many others. See *Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism*.

Deleuze. Presenting Foucault’s re-interpretation of the Sophoclean tragedy *Oedipus the King*, his methodological distinctness from French Freud will be demonstrated through a combination of two anti-Oedipal sources. Following Vernant, Foucault rescues *Oedipus* from the psychoanalyst’s couch and returns him to the Ancient Greek stage. But Foucault’s analysis also goes beyond “historical anthropology” in a strict sense due to his reformulation of power. Explicitly invoking Nietzsche, Foucault links “power” to varying forms of truth production, thereby presenting *Oedipus the King* as a pivotal episode in the history of the juridical form he calls the “inquiry.”

Chapter four attempts to isolate Foucault’s singular position in the confused area of post-war existentialism, psychoanalysis, structuralism and post-structuralism. As well as rejecting the usual divisions of his work into an early “structuralist” period superseded by a later “genealogical” phase, it will be argued that the Nietzschean subject advanced by Foucault in the 1950s, and never “abandoned” even in the 1980s, was not of the same order as existentialism, yet was different again to that of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss. The key distinction was Foucault’s particular “Nietzschean” exploitation of the “unconscious.” Foucault was one of the few philosophers of the period to take seriously the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious. But this interest was part of a *hostile* takeover, whereby Foucault recuperated the Lacanian version of the “subject,” complete with what we shall call the “structural” unconscious, not strictly “Freudian,” for his own non-psychoanalytic and philosophical (or Nietzschean) purposes.

Chapters five to eight aim to explain why such a recuperation was necessary, arguing that the Freudian heritage in the areas of the unconscious and sexuality has led to impasses. First, chapter five will demonstrate that Lacan’s analysis of the unconscious,
and his conception of the symbolic, did not really shed light on fundamental linguistic mysteries manifested by jokes and parapraxes. Contrary to the way his position is portrayed, Lacan ended up according the symbolic unconscious a very minor role in his teachings compared to issues of "desire." Ultimately, Lacan remains submissive theoretically to the original Freudian division of the unconscious into "primary" and "secondary" processes. Foucault by contrast turns the "structural" unconscious developed by the human sciences of that period away from Freud entirely and towards an ethnographic conception: broadly, clusters of power and knowledge relations.

Chapter six begins a comparison, to be completed in chapters seven and eight, of Lacan's conception of desire and Foucault's history of sexuality. Essential is Foucault's reformulation of power. It will be argued at many junctures that this aspect of Foucault's work has been seriously underestimated—explaining why his relationship to French Freud continues to be largely obscure. Through the concept of power, Foucault shows Freudian theory to be logically untenable, even in its Lacanian, "structuralist," feminist, or "enlarged" versions, because all leave the concept of power untheorized. Despite revisions of the "father" in his writings of the 1950s and 1960s, and taking into account his earlier claims of a historical "decline" in paternal power, Lacan, like Freud, assumed power to spring from unchanging law. But if psychoanalysis has no way of differentiating the cultures of ancient Greek, modern Japanese or contemporary Islamic social formations, this annuls their claim that sexuality and the neuroses are "acquired." Exposing the "powerlessness" of Freudian theory is the essential core of Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis—and not complaints about its "confessional" or "normative" practices, though these protests may have their place.
Related to this point, it will be seen at relevant junctures that enlisting Marxism as an ally attending to historical affairs while psychoanalysis looks after the psyche – the rationale for amalgamations of Marx and Freud common to the period – does not help, for these traditions too have left the concept of power untheorized and historically undifferentiated. The differences between feudal rituals, Greek *aphrodisia*, bourgeois family morality, and so on, become secondary reflections of different modes of production, or, implicitly, manifestations of universal biological “sexuality.”

Chapters seven and eight elucidate Foucault’s critical alternative to Lacan’s conception of desire. After detailing his reformulation of power, and showing how he differentiates certain versions – disciplinary, pastoral and biological – the main target is superficial readings of the “repressive hypothesis” and Foucault’s rejection of it. Commentators have not only overlooked the complexity of “repressive” accounts of the history of sexuality that Foucault actively engages with, but they have disregarded the subtle conceptual space he negotiates between the respective readings of Freud found in Herbert Marcuse and Lacan.

Chapter eight then goes into the details of Foucault’s “*dispositif* of sexuality.” Through an investigation of two “strategic unities” Foucault postulates – the “hysterization of women’s bodies” and the “pedagogization of children’s sex” – it will be argued that, far from “denying” gender and class as is often claimed, these categories were crucial to the argument and critical picture of sexuality he was constructing. Overall, the efforts are designed to show that Lacan’s “desire” is not the cornerstone of all human sexuality, but
is a modern Western fabrication excising a whole range of other possible understandings of eroticism and procreation.

Finally, chapters nine and ten leave the confines of France and broach the issue of Freud's position in the history of Western science. The differences between Foucault and the French Freudians derive in large measure from the question of whether, and how, Freud instituted an epistemological break with his nineteenth-century colleagues. After distancing Foucault's critical history of sexuality from recent historicist revisions of Freud, most notably the articles gathered in Le livre noir de la psychanalyse [The Black Book of Psychoanalysis], it will be argued that, although the early studies of Henri Ellenberger and follow-up investigations by Peter Swales and others are valuable, Foucault's analysis surpasses these by placing Freud within a comprehensive ethnographic landscape. Unlike other rejections of psychoanalysis, Foucault does not single out psychoanalysis for special critical treatment, but isolates a bourgeois heritage common to Freud, his contemporaries and "we Victorians" today.

Chapter ten will then explicate the "unconscious revolution" instigated by Freud. For Foucault, Freud's originality lies in overturning Jean-Martin Charcot's theory of degeneracy, encapsulated in the concept "famille névropathique." From Foucault's proposition, one can see that Freud—though "unconsciously"—used the "germ" theory then dominant in medicine to transpose a political philosophy—"democracy"—into a medical register: we are all equally vulnerable to cultural infection regardless of family history. The proof is the facts of everyday life: dreams, déjà vu, jokes, slips of the
tongue, and so on. Freud's move shows that the boundary between the "normal" and the "pathological" is as much political as medical. The most important theoretical tool enabling this move to take place, propelling psychoanalysis beyond Charcot's system and its attendant hereditary associations was, therefore, the "unconscious" – a non-medical concept.

However, the concluding chapter will also argue that Freud's unconscious revolution stalled, due to the concept of "sexuality" wedded to it. A final comparison of Foucault and psychoanalysis will be presented, through Jean Laplanche's revisions of both Freud and Lacan, in order to demonstrate the persistent limitations of the theory of sexuality, even in the revised form proposed by Laplanche, and notwithstanding Laplanche's recognition of the fourvoiement biologisant [the biologizing tendency] of psychoanalysis as a whole. Broadly, the political rupture Freud brought about in the field of the unconscious is constantly undermined by the dominance of the problem of "sexuality" in Western culture as a whole.

Overall, therefore, Foucault's critique is not an "anti-psychoanalysis," but an anti-scientific inflection of that tradition. Foucault does not deny the reality of the two fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis – "sexuality" and the "unconscious" – but he wrests them from all vestiges of "science" and transforms them into separate areas of philosophical investigation. On the one hand, "bodies and pleasures" are released from their imprisonment within theories of desire or sexuality, while, on the other hand, the "unconscious" is transformed into a vast archive of "conditions of possibility" of

12 Jean Allouch casually stretches the list to include "anxiety" and "orgasm" – events neither normal, nor pathological, "because they are both at the same time," Allouch, Freud, et puis Lacan, p. 79.
Western thought, not attached to a particular person or organization; not owned nor controlled by any class nor institution – and, importantly, lacking any sex, male or female. Although Foucault never characterised his own work as an attempt to correct the undervaluation of the "unconscious" within philosophy and the history of ideas, it will be argued that, by releasing the weight of ahistorical "sexuality," Foucault returns the unconscious to its proper philosophical bearings.

The result is an alternative ethnographic analysis to Freud's psychoanalysis. From a methodological perspective, "know thy culture" replaces the imperative "know thyself." This gives Foucault the armature to destabilize psychoanalysis in a very singular way: not to question the concepts or methods that these theorists see fit to use in their practices, but to demand the independence of "sexuality" and the "unconscious" from the imperialist control of psychoanalytic masters. After all, these concepts belong to everyone.
Part I

Foucault
Amongst
the Freudians:

1950-1980
Chapter One

Sexuality, Madness and Foucault's Relationship to Psychoanalysis

Elevating the critique of psychoanalysis to the forefront of Foucault's oeuvre may be surprising for those familiar with his work. It follows a small but significant sub-set of Foucauldian studies. In a comprehensive analysis, Jacques Lagrange showed that Foucault did not turn his attention to sexuality on a whim, but in the wake of several previous encounters with Freudian psychoanalysis dating back to the 1950s. This followed an important review in 1977, where Lagrange observed that Foucault’s critique of Freudian theory cannot be assimilated with the position presented in L'Anti-Œdipe [Anti-Oedipus] by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari because, not content merely to denounce a certain interpretation of desire, La volonté de savoir “questions the very category of desire” itself.

There has been growing interest in Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis, epitomized by Arnold Davidson's impressive contributions to this area. In his view, taken up in this thesis, Foucault’s prime concern was to “detach” the notion of the

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3 Jacques Lagrange, “La volonté de savoir de Michel Foucault ou une généalogie du sexe,” Psychanalyse à l'Université 7 (June 1977), pp. 541-553, p. 551.

unconscious from "the much more suspect psychoanalytic theory of sexuality."\textsuperscript{5} Echoing Georges Canguilhem, Davidson remarks that "much remains to be said about Foucault’s analysis of and attitude towards psychoanalysis."\textsuperscript{6} Recently, Joël Birman has reiterated Lagrange’s position that Foucault’s engagement with psychoanalysis traverses the whole of his œuvre and constitutes one of its essential themes.\textsuperscript{7}

Yet the ongoing task of pitting Foucault against French psychoanalytic traditions faces many obstacles. On the one hand, Foucault’s arguments in the area of sexuality have provoked a vast amount of secondary commentary – both enthusiastic and critical – covering history, philosophy, cultural and gender studies. Scholars have largely embraced the “ethical” dimension affected by Foucault’s rejection of psychoanalysis, and, especially, Foucault has acted as a positive inspiration for exploring same-sex relationships in the work of David Halperin,\textsuperscript{8} Ladelle McWhorter,\textsuperscript{9} Jana Sawicki,\textsuperscript{10} and

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\textsuperscript{5} Arnold Davidson, “Appendix: Foucault, Psychoanalysis and Pleasure,” Emergence of Sexuality, pp. 209-215, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{7} Joël Birman, Foucault et la psychanalyse (Lyon, 2007). Birman does not seem to be aware of other work in this field, however, especially that of Lagrange.
\textsuperscript{9} McWhorter eloquently describes the “transformative” effect Foucault provoked in her, all the while displaying great patience with his critics. Ladelle McWhorter, Bodies and Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization (Bloomington, 1999).
\textsuperscript{10} Sawicki has creatively bridged the divide between various feminist readings of Foucault, arguing that most perceived contradictions between the two traditions are tensions already existing within feminism itself. She concludes at one point that any “self-critical and historically inflected feminism will find Foucauldian genealogy indispensable.” See Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body (New York, 1991), p. 66. See also Jana Sawicki, “Queering Foucault and the Subject of Feminism,” The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, ed. Gary Gutting, 2nd ed (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 379-400.

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Didier Eribon. In addition, many feminists have consistently enlisted Foucault as a refreshing alternative in the area of women and resistance.

But psychoanalysis remains marginal in these discourses. It is unclear, for example, what happens to the “unconscious” as a result of this move into ethical territory, and all those psychopathologies—or, more correctly, “psycho-normalities”—of everyday irrational life that stand in the way of “self” creation. These are the phenomena Jean Allouch calls “symptoms” in the broadest sense of that term. “It seems,” he comments, “that gay and lesbian studies, at least up to now, ignore the symptom.” Humour is a good example, and it is interesting that Amy Richlin, although hardly a “Foucauldian,” falls into this post-Lacanian abyss in her account of Roman sexual humour. For she makes no mention of an “unconscious,” even when enlisting Freud’s views on the subject of jokes, and nor does she acknowledge Lacan’s highly significant linguistic developments of Freud’s examples.

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12 Along with the work of Sawicki, see especially Lois McNay, Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self (Oxford, 1992); and Margaret A. McLaren, Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity (Albany, 2002).


16 Richlin, Garden of Priapus, pp. 59-63 for a discussion of Freud.

17 Richlin considers humour to operate on both an individual psychological level and on the scale of social complicity. Humour is “a release of hostile or aggressive feelings” and jokes are also “a sort of group reassurance.” But where do these “feelings” come from, and why does the group need to be “reassured”? If the Freudian “unconscious” offers no ground to answer these questions, and Foucault, too, is rejected as both “gender blind” and incompetent in the area of Roman history, Richlin is surely obliged to present an alternative framework? For Lacan’s discussion of wit, which will feature in chapter five, see
Moreover, the unconscious may be more "repressed" than realized. According to Jean Laplanche, many analysts within the Freudian traditions, too, have dismissed Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* as "fairly wild psychoanalysis, applied to everyday life." ¹⁸ This is an uncanny confession for our purposes, and it will come back to haunt him later, when it is argued that psychoanalysts no less than historians of ideas have focussed too keenly on Freud's role in the discovery of the sexual cause of neuroses to the detriment of his place in the development of the concept of the unconscious. However, although it will be shown that Foucault and others provided an alternative "structural" unconscious, moving the Freudian meaning away from repression and towards an analytics of "positive" cultural forces, most Foucauldians, in turn, have shown little interest in this area.

It can only be confirmed, therefore, that much still "remains to be said" about Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis; this thesis places itself within the lacuna. Interpreting Foucault's work is notoriously difficult, as any commentator will testify, but his history of sexuality presents problems in addition. Above all, there is the biographical and historical puzzle surrounding the project, which affects any understanding of it. Let us deal with the major issues in this regard, before challenging the general interpretations of Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis.

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La volonté de savoir [The History of Sexuality: An Introduction] was intended to be a preliminary foray into a multi-volumed project. But it received a cool critical reception.\(^{19}\) Perhaps as a result of what Foucault perceived to be bland disinterest or misunderstanding, the subsequent volumes as originally planned were never made available to the public. Instead, two further studies were published somewhat hurriedly before his untimely death in 1984: *L’usage des plaisirs* (The Use of Pleasure)\(^{20}\) and *Le souci de soi* (The Care of the Self).\(^{21}\) These texts represent a departure from the original project, as the area of investigation is now male eroticism in ancient Greek and Roman societies, while certain continuities are also maintained – especially his argument that “sexuality” is a modern, scientific and bourgeois phenomenon. (*UP*, p. 3).

In addition to the published volumes, from early 1977 onwards, there are several interviews, debates, prefaces, lectures and short articles where Foucault tried to amplify and explain his views in the general area of “bodies and pleasures” – most of which can be found, amongst other statements he made on an extensive range of topics over a period of three decades, in the 1994 publication *Dits et écrits*.\(^{22}\) More recently, another vast portfolio has emerged, with the publication of the lectures Foucault delivered at the


\(^{22}\) Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald with Jacques Lagrange, 4 volumes, (Paris, 1994), hereafter abbreviated *DE*, followed by the number of the volume, and accompanied in a footnote by the given title for each discreet piece of writing when appearing for the first time. Many of these interviews and articles are available in English-language collections, and these will be used where possible. See, in particular, the excellent bibliography in O’Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, pp. 162-179.
Collège de France during the 1970s and 1980s. These are expected to comprise a total of 13 volumes, and many of the lectures deal with various themes relating to the history of sexuality or psychoanalysis.

How then are we to read the History of Sexuality project? Most commentators, perhaps influenced by Gilles Deleuze, have accepted the view that Foucault turned away from his original investigations because he realized the foundations were wrong; he now felt “trapped” in power relations he no longer believed in and suffered a crisis of confidence. This view is very misleading, for it does not consider the possibility that Foucault’s readers were trapped somewhere else, and that La volonté de savoir genuinely shocked people — even, or especially, intellectuals like Deleuze, who considered themselves at the vanguard of liberationist struggles. What Foucault’s text

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24 In relation to the editing and transcription of these lectures see Jacques Lagrange, “Mémoires de chaire” [interview with Jean-Baptiste Marongiu], Libération (19-20 June, 2004).

offers, perhaps for the first time in an academic or scientific context, is a critical homosexual perspective on mainstream sexuality. He overturns the relationship between sex and politics in an unprecedented way. Yet Deleuze for one was not prepared to go this far: in a series of “notes” passed on to Foucault privately at the end of 1976 and only published in 1994, Deleuze rejected both the account of sexuality presented in La volonté de savoir, as well as the underlying reformulation of the concept of power crucial to the text. Foucault did not respond directly to these notes, but soon published a veiled rebuke of Deleuze’s criticisms, in a short article where he passionately reinforced the importance of power for critical thought. The two philosophers broke off relations at that time.

Moreover, the suspicion that the broad intellectual public had not engaged properly with La volonté de savoir seemed to linger. In an interview with Gérard Raulet given in the spring of 1983, Foucault made the following comment:

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26 David Halperin has argued that commentators consider Foucault’s homosexuality invariably as a negative influence: it “overdetermines” shifts in his work, according to one critic. See Halperin, Saint Foucault, p. 131. The underlying view of this thesis is that La volonté de savoir is all the more insightful due to Foucault’s perspective as outsider to conventional heterosexual practices.


29 The mistaken tendency to conflate Foucault and Deleuze is explored in more detail in Wendy Grace, “Faux Amis: Foucault and Deleuze on Sexuality and Desire,” Critical Inquiry, 36:1 (Autumn, 2009): pp. 52-75. According to Deleuze: “I’m afraid I didn’t see [Foucault] in the last years of his life: after the first volume of The History of Sexuality he went through a general crisis, in his politics, his life, his thought. ... I got the impression that he wanted to be left alone, to go where none but his closest friends could follow him.” Gilles Deleuze, “Breaking things open, breaking words open” [interview with Robert Maggiori], Negotiations, trans. and ed. Martin Joughin (New York, 1995), pp. 83-93, p. 83. Daniel Defert similarly reports that Deleuze considered La volonté de savoir to have played a bigger part in the rift between the two philosophers than polemics about the “new philosophers,” at that time often linked by journalists and commentators to Foucault. See “Chronologie,” DE, I, 13-64, p. 50.
It took fifteen years to convert my book about madness into a slogan: all mad people were confined in the 18th century. But it did not even take 15 months—it only took three weeks—to convert my book on the will to know into the slogan “sexuality has never been repressed.” In my own experience, I have seen this entropy accelerate in a detestable way for philosophical thought. But it should be remembered that this means added responsibility for people who write.30

His decision to abandon the original project, therefore, may have been a strategic response to intellectual conditions not of his own choosing, rather than a simple free “choice.” One thing, however, is certain: there was no “long silence” following La volonté de savoir, contrary to Deleuze’s assertions.31 And while we can certainly sympathize with John Rajchman’s description of Foucault’s shorter writings during this period as an “unwieldy mass,” linked to different groups “within academia and without,” making it “difficult to grasp as a whole,”32 an opinion shared also by Deleuze, it will be argued that this had more to do with readers failing to grasp the true significance of Foucault’s critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis than a “crisis” on Foucault’s part. In addition, a distinct Foucauldian methodology running counter to psychoanalysis existed from the beginning, in History of Madness—to be examined shortly. Dits et écrits, no less than the lectures from the Collège of France, bolster this position, bringing to light important family resemblances between the works on sexuality and power, and the older and more recent texts.

The example that stands out above all in this “mass” is worth dwelling on momentarily before moving on to History of Madness. In 1977, in the wake of La volonté de savoir,

31 Deleuze, Foucault, p. 94.
a fascinating conversation took place between Foucault and a group of Lacanian theorists chaired by Alain Grosrichard.\textsuperscript{33} Available to English readers almost from the outset,\textsuperscript{34} the discussion provides crucial insight into Foucault’s quite different perspective on many long-standing issues associated with “bodies and pleasures.” It is obvious that Foucault’s views are “annoying”: at times, the discussion reads more like a police-state interrogation than a debate – only, in a nice twist of poetic justice, it is actually the interrogators who are tortured through the whole process, not Foucault.\textsuperscript{35} However, failing an open battle between Lacan and Foucault, this exchange is a precious source, and will crop up many times: topics included techniques of power, the concept of the \textit{dispositif} \textsuperscript{36} and its relationship to the \textit{episteme}, the place of Freud in the history of science, the difference between the sexes, hysteria, sexual liberation movements, parental attitudes towards girls’ and boys’ masturbation, breastfeeding, the wet-nursing business, sado-masochism, racism and anti-Semitism. In particular, Foucault explicitly states during the discussion that what is important about psychoanalysis is not its discovery of the sexual cause of neuroses, but the elaboration of a “logic” of the unconscious. (“CF,” p. 218).

\textsuperscript{33} Michel Foucault [1977], “Le Jeu de Michel Foucault,” [debate with Alain Grosrichard and others], \textit{DE}, III, pp. 298-329.


\textsuperscript{35} In the end, Foucault indulged their persistence and hard work by giving them what they had wanted all along, and something always guaranteed to please psychoanalysts: a confession. He jokingly renounced all his public functions - “shame overwhelms me” – with the admission that he did not know the date of the first treatise dealing with the bottle-feeding of infants. (“CF,” p. 228).

\textsuperscript{36} Significantly, no English equivalent for this term has yet been finalised. See O’Farrell, \textit{Michel Foucault}, p. 7; pp. 65-66; and Halperin, \textit{Saint Foucault}, pp. 189, note 6. At the very least, the term should be distanced from Jean-François Lyotard’s “libidinal dispositifs.” See “Glossary,” Jean-François Lyotard [1974], \textit{Lididinal economy}, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington, 1993), pp. x-xvi, p. x. At a conference dedicated to the legacy of Foucault’s work, Deleuze delivered a curious paper entitled “What is a \textit{dispositif}?" but he does not actually discuss the specific application Foucault used: the “dispositif of sexuality.” See Gilles Deleuze “What is a \textit{dispositif}?" trans. by Timothy Armstrong, \textit{Michel Foucault, Philosopher} (New York, 1992), pp. 159-168. See “Translator’s note,” Deleuze, “What is a \textit{dispositif}?" p. 159.
Moreover, if one can surmise that Foucault was disappointed by the lukewarm reception of *La volonté de savoir* and lack of support from friends such as Deleuze, he seemed to use the opportunity offered by the Lacanians from Vincennes to change tack: he stressed how delighted he was that, "for the first time," he was meeting people "really willing to join the game he was proposing to them in his book." *(DE, III, p. 298).* It was in the hope of having encounters like this that he wrote the book in the form he did. He conceded that he had compacted things too much, and threw stones that were "too heavy." *(DE, III, p. 298).* It was a "hypothetical discourse," only "skimming the surface," "full of holes." He welcomed their criticisms and reactions, for he was still not sure "what I will write in the following volumes." *(DE, III, p. 298).* But if Foucault was unsure how he should proceed in the wake of less than ideal circumstances, this by no means indicated his resignation from an *ethos* or "attitude" that colours the bulk of his studies. To insist on the recurrence of certain themes and problems in Foucault's work is not to deny his "marginality" on the French intellectual scene, as Gary Gutting and others have rightly identified, quite the contrary: it confirms Foucault as radically exterior to "French Freud" from beginning to end of his career. Let us examine how it unfolded in the case of the history of madness.

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In the original preface to *History of Madness* from 1961, subsequently dropped from other editions and now made available in the *Dits et écrits* collection, Foucault uses "sexuality," no less, to illustrate the historical method based on Nietzsche that he was

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37 These introductory comments were omitted in the English translation.
trying to develop and apply to the history of madness. In a manner identical to the case of madness, he writes, we should compose a history of “sexual prohibitions” not only in the usual anthropological sense of cross-cultural comparisons, but to expose the “continually shifting yet obstinate forms of repression” within “our culture itself.” (HM, p. xxx).

Thus, human phenomena like “madness” or “sexuality” are investigated in terms of the specific history of “Western culture” – and not by assuming universal properties of the mind or body in the manner of psychoanalysis or Marxism, or a combination of both. This is the first important point to note about Foucault’s method: the analysis proceeds by suspending all “universals.” To posit a universal mind or body immediately denies the primacy of historical specificities – Western cultural formations, for example. In a succinct methodological aperçu introducing the lecture series from 1978-1979, entitled The Birth of Biopower, Foucault challenged his audience to suppose that universals like “madness” do not exist: how would one write the history of those “different events” and “various practices” that “apparently organize themselves into something taken to be madness.” (BB, p. 5). This method of suspending universals is “exactly the inverse” of the historicism practiced by traditional histories: it is not a matter of “interrogating universals by using history as a critical method,” but proceeding “according to the choice that universals have no existence, in order to ask what type of history one can create.” (BB, p. 5).

39 Michel Foucault [1960], “Préface,” DE, I, 159-167. Luckily, this preface has been translated into English in the complete edition. See HM, pp. xxvii-xxxvi.
Later in *History of Madness*, Foucault says that his "archaeology of alienation" is writing against that form of analysis which "supposes an immutable continuity in madness ... equipped with its timeless, intricate psychological complexities." (*HM*, p. 79). For most historians of science, the object of knowledge "pre-exists the investigation," it is "shielded from history." One assumes "that madness was content to sit locked up in its immutable identity, waiting for psychiatry to perfect its art, before it emerged blinking from the shadows into the blinding light of truth." (*HM*, p. 79). What Foucault argues instead is that the understanding of madness in Western civilization was intimately linked to the practice of confinement – an "invention" both economic and moral, specific to these societies. The compulsion to confine social undesirables arose quite suddenly in the seventeenth century and was "truly European in its dimensions." (*HM*, pp. 52-55). This is the second major methodological criterion: confinement, like the *dispositif* of sexuality, cannot be understood by way of predetermined logical processes or historical exigencies, in the manner of Hegelian or Marxist traditions. Foucault is not investigating a "superstructure" that would be an ideal reflection of a real material process, but he treats historical conditions as "events" in their own right, comprising moral, scientific, political, and economic elements. The analysis must substitute invention and accident for teleology and necessity. Let us examine this interpretation more closely.

Fundamental to Foucault's argument in *History of Madness* is the claim that references to madness during the Medieval and Renaissance periods were numerous and varied. (*HM*, pp. 3-43). Certainly, locking mad people behind bars was not unknown, and madhouses existed in Spain and Italy in the fifteenth century. (*HM*, p. 117). But, in general, madness circulated freely throughout European society: it "formed part of the
background and language of everyday life," and one sought neither to "exalt" it nor "control" it.⁴⁰ Shakespeare and Cervantes, at the limits of this attitude, still "attest to the great prestige of madness." It was revelatory: Lady MacBeth, for example, "begins to tell the truth when she goes mad,"⁴¹ while books written by known madmen were appreciated by the cultivated public for this very reason, and so on.⁴²

Due to the practice of confinement, however, this liberal attitude changed. Beginning in the seventeenth century, "idleness" usurped both pride and avarice to became the quintessential vice to be banished: the dividing line between "work" and "idleness" now replaced "the exclusion of lepers in the medieval world." (HM, p. 71). By the middle of the seventeenth century, the new significance assigned to "poverty" — that is was simply a result of "idleness" — had solidified, impacting directly on the understanding of madness: "the importance accorded to the obligation to work, and the ethical values surrounding it were ultimately determining factors in the experience of madness, transforming its meaning." (HM, p. 77). Madness now became equivalent to moral deficiency or debauchery and was consequently reduced to silence for more than one hundred years: there are no literary equivalents of King Lear or Lady MacBeth during this time, roughly 1650-1750.

But, in a direct challenge to Marxism that will be repeated throughout Foucault's career, and vital for understanding his methodological approach, the new intolerance of poverty

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault [1962], Mental Illness and Psychology, trans. Alan Sheridan, foreword Hubert Dreyfus (Berkeley, 1976), p. 67. In chapter five of this book (pp. 64-75) Foucault gives an excellent summary of the arguments in History of Madness.
⁴² Foucault, Mental Illness, p. 67.
was not “solely” the result of economic exigencies reflecting the rise of capitalism, because a “moral perception” underpinned it. According to one edict of 1656, poverty was not the result of “food shortages nor unemployment,” but the “relaxation of discipline and the corruption of morals.” (*HM*, p. 72). If this is called a “bourgeois” ideology, then it was in existence prior to industrial capitalism and the bourgeois class proper. The moral imperative also explains why the houses of confinement were not simultaneously exploited as labour workshops – at least not at first. This idea only arose later, towards the end of the eighteenth century: why lock up ladies of the night, who, “if sent to workshops in the provinces, could become ladies of the loom?” (cited by Foucault, *HM*, p. 399). Eventually, too, by the latter half of the eighteenth century, people were invariably sent into confinement as a “prelude” to being shipped off to newly colonized lands. (*HM*, pp. 401-402). But Foucault’s point is that economic markers cannot explain the rationality of confinement. The institutions began their life in the middle of the seventeenth century as exclusively “moral” affairs, “destined to punish and castigate a certain ‘void’ of conscience, which was not serious enough to be brought before a human court, but which the severity of penance alone was insufficient to correct.” (*HM*, p. 73).

Hence, authorities spoke of the “libertinage of beggars,” (an oxymoron today), so that “moral shortcomings, even of the most private nature,” were now perceived as being “an attack on the tacit or written laws of the land.” (*HM*, p. 74). This was why “debauched,” “imbecile,” “prodigal,” “infirm,” “of unsound mind,” “libertine,” “ungrateful son,” and any number of other colourful labels found on the registers of the Salpêtrière, Bicêtre or Bethlam (Bedlam) in the late seventeenth century, were just so many ingredients to be included in a stew of correction. (*HM*, p. 81). Importantly,
classical medicine gained its rationality in this social and cultural space. Under the reign of confinement, there was no feeling of surprise that “the sick should be locked up together with the insane” and “that madmen and criminals should be confused.” (HM, p. 81).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the houses of correction began to be criticised. (HM, pp. 353-362). After 1770, the practice of confinement declined. (HM, p. 405). But, contrary to the fairy tales about early psychiatric pioneers “liberating” the insane from their chains, Foucault claims a new fear now conditioned the cultural response to madness at the end of the eighteenth century: “people were in dread of a mysterious sickness that apparently emanated from houses of confinement.” (HM, p. 355). The buildings were, in fact, breeding grounds for all kinds of diseases. There was a widespread belief that madness was multiplying; it was claimed that mad people were far more numerous now than in ancient times. (HM, p. 381). Moreover, while madness was made visible again in the general culture, evidenced by texts such as Diderot’s Rameau’s nephew, (HM, pp. 343-352), it was granted a purely negative status. Madness was an entity that haunted every aspect of life and potentially deformed it. As one contemporary and disciple of Rousseau expressed it:

Do not glory in your state, wise and civilized men: the so-called wisdom with which you flatter yourselves can be shattered in an instant. An unexpected event, or a sudden, intense emotion of the soul can send even the greatest or most reasonable man into a frenzy, or turn him into an idiot in a moment. (Cited by Foucault, HM, p. 363).

Madness therefore had to be controlled, nay “interned,” in a manner more extreme than any practices during the classical age of confinement, horrible though these certainly were. Insanity became linked to confinement “ever more strongly,” and by a “double
bind.” (HM, p. 400). That is, instead of merging the mad with criminals and the debauched and packing them all off together, it was now necessary to separate this experience as starkly as possible from all other aspects of life, lest its force invade vulnerable domains. Physical sickness or moral deficiency were bad enough in isolation; it was asking for more trouble to place them next to madness – any manner of unforeseen monsters could result. Enter nineteenth-century psychiatric medicine, which took charge of this field.

These kinds of statements pertaining to the social and cultural construction of true discourses make it valid to speak of a distinct “Foucauldian” methodology. It will inform our critical engagement with psychoanalysis throughout this thesis: Foucault provides an ontology of Western culture, not a metaphysics of the person. If “universals” do not exist – the “state,” “society,” “madness,” “homosexuals,” “women,” and so on – what remains are the specificities of a certain cultural formation. Just as the “Reason-Unreason” divide is interesting not because of what it reveals about the mind, but because it “constitutes for Western culture one of the dimensions of its originality,” so too does the discursive and institutional network Foucault later called the “dispositif of sexuality” demonstrate the specificities of modern Western reactions to “bodies and pleasures.”

It could even be suggested that, by extended his history of sexuality to Greek civilization as he did in his last writings, Foucault makes this ethnographic picture more coherent; otherwise, the historical nuances outlined in History of Madness and La volonté de savoir may be too quickly dissolved by superficial historical identifications. It is common, for example, to cite ancient Greek homoeroticism as proof that sexual
beliefs and practices are basically the same across all cultures; there is a universal body. That was certainly how Freud saw it: one must be "tolerant" because "perversion" was a biological fact, and he often referred to the Greeks as evidence of its ubiquity. 43

Foucault set out to dispel these easy assimilations in *The Use of Pleasure*; the fact that science no longer calls it "perversion" should alert us enough. Yes, certain acts may occur universally, but the words "homosexuality" and "toleration" were both inappropriate for the ancient context because, unlike today and amongst other differences, "the Greeks did not see love for one's own sex and love for the other sex as opposites, as two exclusive choices." (*UP*, p. 187).

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Foucault's departure from the original project set out in *La volonté de savoir* nevertheless gives weight to a general interpretative grid that views his oeuvre in terms of abrupt shifts. 44 This view must be addressed, as it acts as a barrier to a proper comparison of Foucault with psychoanalysis. Foucault's thought "always developed through crises," which were the very marks of its "creativity," and "consistency." 45

Another commentator claimed, "there is no methodological or theoretical unity of


44 This is not always the case. For an interesting interpretation that tries to come to terms with Foucault's work as a whole, and with a focus on "history," see Thomas Flynn, "Foucault's Mapping of History," *Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 29-48. But in general, as Colin Gordon has remarked, critics often apply the "thematic of discontinuity" unthinkingly to Foucault's work, while "the evidence of a strong continuity from *Histoire de la folie* through to the end of Foucault's output have generally been paid too little critical attention." See Colin Gordon, "*Histoire de la folie*: an Unknown Book by Michel Foucault," *History of the Human Sciences*, 3:1 (Feb, 1990), pp. 3-26, p. 5.

45 Deleuze, "Breaking things open," *Negotiations*, p. 83. For a discussion of the tendency to resort to biographical explanations in Foucault's case, see O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, pp. 21-23, and for a more extensive treatment, see Halperin, "The Describable Life of Michel Foucault," *Saint Foucault*, pp. 126-185.
Foucault’s thought that will support any single comprehensive interpretation.”

Basically, the view states that Foucault moved from an early period of “archaeology” which he then abandoned in favour of “genealogy,” shifting back finally to traditional history of ideas under the banner of “ethics.” While the first stage is characterised by apolitical “structuralism,” and even “nihilism,” the second by radical anarchism, the third stage is often celebrated as the sensible home-coming: Foucault “abandoned his hard structuralist position” and embraced “liberty, individualism, human rights and even the thinking subject.”

Commentators have varying reasons for stressing the breaks in Foucault’s body of works. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow are at pains to prove the “failure” of Foucault’s “archaeological” method so that they can distance his work of the “early period” from “all-out structuralists like Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss,” and argue for Foucault’s distinctive “interpretative” method that goes beyond both “structuralism and hermeneutics.” Certainly, Dreyfus and Rabinow are correct to reject these labels as inadequate. But part of their opposition to structuralism stems from poor understanding of the “unconscious” as it was formulated by the human sciences of the French context during those years, and Foucault’s particular exploitation of this concept. This issue will be fleshed out more thoroughly in chapter four, but the conclusions of Dreyfus and

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47 According to Peter Dews, while *History of Madness* and *Birth of the Clinic* reveal the implicit concern for “institutions of social control” made more explicit with the notion of power in *Discipline and Punish*, texts such as *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* were preoccupied with the “internal structure of scientific discourse” and therefore precluded “any form of politically orientated analysis.” See Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London, 1987), pp. 147-8.
Rabinow are symptomatic of the general lacuna identified in this thesis, whereby obscurity surrounding Foucault's critical relationship to the Freudian movement leads to misrepresentations of his theoretical trajectory, and vice versa. Meanwhile, Dreyfus and Rabinow forget that the history of sexuality as set out in *La volonté de savoir* ten years after *The Order of Things* was to act as an "archaeology" of psychoanalysis. (*HS*, p. 130). And, although Foucault claimed it would serve no purpose to "dwell" on it, he nevertheless calmly revives the *episteme* in the final section of this book, when discussing the importance of "life" to modern political regimes and "the manner in which the twofold problematic of life and man disrupted and redistributed the order of the classical *episteme*." (*HS*, p. 143).

The "archaeology" of the human sciences presented in *The Order of Things* repeatedly refers to "our thought," "Western knowledge," "European culture." There is absolutely nothing to indicate universal structures of the mind. In fact, contrary to the apprehensions of Dreyfus and Rabinow, one could argue for a shared theme uniting *The Order of Things* and *La volonté de savoir*: the historicity of the concept of life. For it would be difficult to understand Foucault's arguments about the entry of "life" into history — "an event bound up with the development of capitalism" (*HS*, p. 141) — without first knowing and accepting his version of the relationship between eighteenth-century natural history and nineteenth-century biology put forward in *The Order of Things*, which is very different to standard histories of the life sciences. In Foucault's view, the concept of "life" did not exist before the end of the eighteenth century,

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making it impossible to speak of biology until the nineteenth century: “All that existed was living beings, which were viewed through a grid of knowledge constituted by natural history.” (OT, pp. 127-128). He then argues later in La volonté de savoir that this development had wider implications beyond science, because taking charge of “life” simultaneously makes redundant the central principle through which monarchies had defined themselves: imposing the threat of death. That is, the concept of life gives modern political power its distinctive productive complexion: “Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself.” (HS, pp. 142-143).

Moreover, the discontinuity separating the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a recurring theme throughout Foucault’s work. A medical text from 1780 and a treatise of pathological anatomy written in 1820 “belong to two different worlds.” (“CF,” p. 211). It explains why The Order of Things occupies a curious position in Foucault’s oeuvre. On the one hand, it is the only text not to deal with knowledge as it functions in relation to institutions. Yet, on the other hand, it “holds all the other texts in checkmate” because they are forced to assume the history it scrutinizes: namely, the “passage from a certain type of empiricity to another” in the shift from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Along with the rise of the medical “clinic,” the same

historical period saw the birth of the prison, and Foucault devoted the third part of *History of Madness* to a detailed comparison of the asylum rationality with its previous classical forms. It can be summed up by different understandings of “silence,” the “medical gaze,” and “judgement,” along with the important addition of a new personage foreign to confinement: the medical man. (*HM*, pp. 495-511). Foucault resumed the history of psychiatric rationality in the lecture series of 1973-1974, entitled *Psychiatric Power*, this time focussing exclusively on the nineteenth century.

The mutation dividing the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is described by Foucault as “one of the most radical that ever occurred in Western culture.” (*OT*, p. 220). It is an event still “largely beyond our comprehension” ... “no doubt because we are still caught in its grips.” (*OT*, 221). One of its effects – and this is where the connection to sexuality comes in more directly – was a “completely new technology of sex” that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century (*HS*, p. 116). Doctors were now able to set apart the medicine of “sex” from that of the “body”: “it isolated a sexual instinct capable of presenting constitutive anomalies, acquired derivations, infirmities, or pathological processes.” (*HS*, p. 117). Thus, critics who accuse Foucault of gender blindness are themselves obliged to explain why a “gynaecology” arose in the nineteenth century, bearing little relation to midwifery or obstetrics, and having as its object the “sex,” not generative capacities, of women (we will return to the issue of gender blindness shortly).

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The final phase of Foucault's work is sometimes merged into a wider movement of French intellectuals now distancing themselves from moral relativism. In a contribution to the "largely unwritten history of what is known outside of France as 'French theory',' Julian Bourg argues that the late twentieth century witnessed an "ethical turn" generally, away from strict political reasoning.\textsuperscript{56} If politics in the twentieth century opened with Vladimir Lenin's dry observation that one must break eggs to make an omelette, "it ended with the assertion of the rights of chickens."\textsuperscript{57} Specifically, France required the upheavals of May '68 to dislodge the traditional views. "Ethics replaced revolution in French intellectual politics," and Foucault's career reflects this.

For Peter Dews, with a more narrow focus on the handful of French intellectuals well known in Anglo-American academic contexts, the late 1970s witnessed an "undermining of the dogmatic avant-garde consciousness of post-structuralism." This situation made possible a "fragmentation and pluralisation of philosophical activity in France" – a positive development.\textsuperscript{58} Henceforth, Foucault – along with other intellectuals including Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard – became free "to pose philosophical questions about the foundations of ethics, the nature of political principles, and the universal status of legal rights, in a manner that would have been unthinkable during the heady years of 'anti-humanist' and 'post-philosophical' experimentation."\textsuperscript{59}


\textsuperscript{57} Bourg, \textit{Revolution to Ethics}, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{58} Dews, \textit{Logics of Disintegration}, p. xii.

\textsuperscript{59} Dews, \textit{Logics of Disintegration}, p. xii.
There are many problems with this presentation and others like it – at least with regard to understanding Foucault’s work on sexuality. Firstly, “sexuality” for Foucault was a philosophical, political and ethical issue over the entire course of his career. In one of his first published works of the early 1950s, Foucault repudiated Freud’s interpretation of the dreams presented in the case history known as Dora.60 Foremost amongst Foucault’s objections was Freud’s misapprehension of Dora’s lesbianism, while the History of Madness shortly later makes references to increasing intolerance towards male homosexuality during the classical age that seemed to coincide with the new rationality surrounding confinement. On the one hand, there was a “new indulgence towards sodomy,” but this was accompanied by severe “moral condemnation” of homosexuality as a social and literary expression: “the moment when sodomites were being burnt for the last time was also the moment when ‘erudite libertinage,’ and a whole culture of lyrical homosexuality that the Renaissance had tolerated unquestioningly, began to disappear.” (HM, p. 88). He made the same point in the revised 1972 preface: “the 1808 code abolished the old penal laws against sodomy, but the language of the nineteenth century was far more intolerant of homosexuality (at least in its masculine form) than the languages of previous ages had been.” (HM, p. 545). Indeed, in the History of Madness, Foucault speaks of the Classical era as “the great confiscation of sexual ethics by family morality”:

Since time immemorial, and probably in all cultures, sexuality has been governed by systems of constraint; but it is a comparatively recent particularity of our own culture to have divided it so rigorously into Reason and Unreason. As a consequence and degradation of that, it was not long before it was also classified into healthy or sick, normal or abnormal. (HM, p. 89).

This hypothesis would be echoed later with equal militancy but with far more historical complexity, by replacing negative and vague “family morality” with the four great positive “strategic unities” of the dispositif of sexuality in La volonté de savoir.

Other examples of Foucault’s early preoccupation with sexuality are not hard to find, and they all reveal an innovative difference from mainstream political and philosophical consciousness. In a tribute to Georges Bataille from 1963, to be echoed later in La volonté de savoir, Foucault speaks of sexuality not as a private phenomenon, but as force that emerged “in our culture” constituting an “event of multiple values.”

Amongst other effects, its appearance marked the “transformation of a philosophy of man as worker to a philosophy of a being who speaks.” Then, in an interview from 1967, Foucault mentioned that “morality” had been superseded during the last “fifty years or so” – on the one hand, by “politics,” and on the other hand by “sexuality.”

The two domains had in fact collapsed into each other: the “moral” field is “political,” because human activity was at once both “individual” and “collective,” even though “humanist” philosophies had not yet woken up to this situation. He repeated this argument in an interview from 1968: “morality” as understood in terms of “sin, virtue, good or bad consciousness” is no longer appropriate “to cover the problems of our times.” He explained himself yet again in 1972 when asked to do so: “if certain aspects of our sexual lives (marriage, the family, the corruption of minors, etc.) raise

62 Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, p. 50.
64 Foucault, “Who are you?” Religion and Culture, p.100.
65 Michel Foucault [1968], “Interview avec Michel Foucault,” [interview with I. Lindung], DE, I, 651-662, p. 655.
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moral problems, that happens as a function of the particular political situation. ... certain acts have connections with the political relationships that define our societies." Yet these discussions took place well before his published writings on the history of sexuality – precisely during those “heady years” of “anti-humanism.”

So, not only is a significant part of Foucault’s work ignored, but, in the respective presentations of Dews and Bourg, and many others, the main imperative is to represent Foucault’s “late” move into ethical territory as necessarily contradicting his earlier analyses of power. This too is false. In one of his last interviews, Foucault claimed that, “for most of us,” we no longer believe in an ethics founded on religion and nor do we want a legal system intervening into our private lives; yet recent sexual liberation movements “suffer from the fact that they have not managed to find a principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics.” These comments are perfectly consistent with one of the main arguments of La volonté de savoir: “sexuality” was crucial for the rise and consolidation of the bourgeoisie as an economic class and political power, and this is why critical appeals to that same “sexuality,” the unquestioned war-cry until then, were inappropriate. Unlike other rejections of psychoanalysis, Foucault does not take the phenomenon of “sexuality” for granted and his critique was always allied to an alternative, ethical, domain of “bodies and pleasures”:

The fact that so many things were able to change in the sexual behaviour of Western societies without any of the promises or political conditions predicted by [Wilhelm] Reich being realized is sufficient proof that this whole sexual "revolution", this whole "antirepressive" struggle, represented nothing more, but nothing less - and its importance is undeniable - than a tactical shift and reversal in the great dispositif of sexuality. But it is also apparent why one could not expect this critique to be the grid for a history of that very dispositif. Nor the basis for a movement to dismantle it. (HS, p. 137).

Indeed, it is impossible to shift from "revolution" to "ethics" without first refusing the traditional view of power. Despite the appearance that "power" is at the forefront of critical analyses, "no theoretical system" - whether philosophy, history, or a general theory of society - "has ever managed to account" for power; it is that which "must be explained."68 Foucault’s position was prompted and confirmed by events going on around him: one of the classic slogans of the women’s liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s was that "the personal is political."69 A change of government, or socialist "revolution," matters little if issues such as abortion remain hidden. As Foucault put it during a lecture in Japan in 1978:

The feminist movement has developed just as well in Sweden as Italy, where the status of women, the status of sexual relations, the relations between husband and wife, between man and woman, are so different. This shows perfectly well that the objective of all of these movements is not the same as that of traditional political and revolutionary movements. It is absolutely not a question of targeting political power or the economic system.70

If neither Freud nor Lacan nor Melanie Klein nor Herbert Marcuse - or any other sexologist or psychoanalyst - was seen as representing an advance in this area, then

70 Michel Foucault [1978], "La philosophie analytique de la politique" [lecture delivered at Asahi Kodo, Tokyo, in 1978], DE, III, pp. 534-551, p. 545.
“everything had to be rethought.” ("CF," p. 212). This “rethinking” of the relationship between the “moral” and the “political” changed shape during the 1980s, with an emphasis on the former. But on at least one occasion from the lecture series entitled *Hermeneutics of the Self* delivered in 1982, Foucault made the link between the two domains explicit, saying that the ethical dimension, or “the relationship one has to oneself” may be none other than the “first or final point of resistance to political power.” That is:

> Power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics. (*HER*, p. 252).

As this was a particular feature of Foucault’s trajectory, the question of his position amongst contemporaries should be posed in these terms. Even if we restrict ourselves to the late 1970s and 1980s, both Dews and Bourg are silent on the many statements Foucault made, during precisely these years, on questions associated with the ethics of “bodies and pleasures.” One would have thought this was a perfect illustration of philosophy’s “pluralisation” and “fragmentation,” encapsulating the “ethical turn.” Issues included rape, homoeeroticism, female heterosexual pleasure, to name only a

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71 Michel Foucault [1977], “Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison” [debate with David Cooper and others], trans. by Alan Sheridan, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, pp. 178-210, p. 200. Here, Foucault challenged the dominant view of rape as a sexual crime by suggesting it was a form of “violence,” similar to being punched in the face. He readily acknowledged, though, that women probably would not agree. Later, when he felt that he had been portrayed unfairly as an “odious phallocrat” by people who, he regretted to say, understood “nothing, absolutely nothing,” he clarified that he was not suggesting the removal of rape from legal and criminal strictures. See Michel Foucault [1984], “Interview de Michel Foucault” [interview with J. François and J. de Witt conducted in 1981], *DE*, IV, pp. 656-667, p. 665. See also O’Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, p. 161.


73 Michel Foucault [1978], “Sexualité et politique” [interview with C. Memoto and M. Watanabe], *DE*, III, pp. 522-531, p. 524. In this exchange, Foucault draws attention to female pleasure portrayed more
few. The fact is, contrary to the presentations of Dews and Bourg, most of Foucault's philosophical contemporaries were content to leave these issues well alone; they did not cast power as a major theoretical problem, and did not show the same interest in the relationship between the political and moral fields. In what sense, then, can Foucault be seen to be part of a wider movement of philosophical pluralism? Where are the dialogues between him and the various philosophers of that period (Lyotard, Derrida, Deleuze, and so on) around questions of sexual ethics?

A final point relating to Dews' reading, though it is most important for the argument of this thesis and we find it repeated in other places as well, is that, while noting Foucault's criticism of "theories of sexual liberation," Dews does not seem to think that this applies to Jacques Lacan. For Dews, Lacanian psychoanalysis is different from other forms, being primarily a "method of interpretation." It does not engage "in a futile attempt to trace mental disorder back to physical causes," but "reverses the relation of mind and body to reveal the 'psychogenic meaning' not only of dreams and parapraxes, but even of organic reactions."  

Many feminist interpretations similarly stress Lacan's difference from other versions of psychoanalysis. According to Jacqueline Rose, Freud's theory affirms that "sexual difference is constructed at a price and that it involves subjection to a law which

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positively and actively in a Japanese film he had viewed compared to French versions. It should be noted, though, that the film in question is a male representation of that pleasure, even if Foucault's point relating to cultural differences is considered valid.

74 Dews, Logics of Disintegration, p. 165.
75 Dews, Logics of Disintegration, p. 51.
exceeds any natural or biological division.” Lacan goes further, she says, undercutting any “conception of language as mediation” of the law, and affirming the constant “failing of meaning” within both language and sexuality.

However, Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis shows that all social or psychological theories deriving in one way or another from the “nature-culture” divide are unacceptable, including the concept of desire developed by Lacan, and upon which his method and many feminist critiques depend. For one cannot claim that cultural “powers” produce the sexual drive if, simultaneously, those same forces are held responsible for “repressing” it. One must differentiate two types of powers – at the very least. As will be made clear throughout this thesis, Lacanian psychoanalysis, for all its self-proclaimed “philosophical” or “linguistic” leanings, has no way of challenging the political notion of power already operating in traditional Marxist-Freudian critiques and this was the central thrust of Foucault’s critique.

Feminist objections to Foucault can be answered in similar terms. Along with highlighting differences between women, a Foucauldian analysis differentiates forms of power – a first in critical thought. Most feminists have wanted to retain a global notion of masculine power; otherwise, the consistency of this form of domination throughout history is effaced. For Judith Butler, Foucault’s reformulation of power is all very well, but fails to address the universal unconscious valorisation of the phallus and

78 For example, Sandra Bartky, “Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston, 1988), pp. 61-86. See also Jana Sawicki’s cogent defence of Foucault and arguments against this tendency in the case of “mothering theory,” Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault, pp. 49-66.
subsequent deprecation of the feminine that psychoanalysis in conjunction with 
feminism has brought to the surface; it is therefore a "limitation" of Foucault's analysis 
not to recognise that only one bodily form qualifies as a true subject in our society.  
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Basing her views in this instance on the work of Luce Irigaray combined with Jacques 
Derrida, Butler claims that oppression works "not merely through the mechanism of 
regulation and production but ... through other means as well, through the exclusion and 
erasure effected by any discursive formation." The male term comes to extend its 
domination silently over all parties before any political struggle even begins "by 
foreclosing the very possibility of articulation." The feminine is precisely "what is 
erased and excluded in order for intelligible identities to be produced." 80

But if this exclusion exists, as a kind of blanket textual erasure, why has the feminist 
analyst now been miraculously incorporated? She is after all speaking. This would 
seem to be the fundamental problem with feminist reactions to Foucault: blindness to 
feminism as a historical and cultural movement. 81 Once feminism is acknowledged, the 
idea of universal phallocentrism becomes problematic. Again, it is necessary to 
differentiate powers – in the plural. While the patriarchal continuities within the history 
of sexuality are undeniable, what about the obvious discontinuities? For example, girls 
in ancient Greek society were married off at fifteen to men twice their age, whether they 
want to be or not. (UP, p. 154). How do we conceive this difference in "sexuality," 
not to mention the disparity in the operation of power, between modern and ancient

79 Judith Butler, "Sexual Inversions," Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault, ed. Susan J. Hekman 
(University Park, 1996), pp. 59-75. See also the critical discussion of Butler in Sawicki, "Queering 
81 Butler’s understanding of Foucault is in any case dubious, for she attributes to him a theory of desire 
which he does not have. One of the points of this thesis is to argue that “desire” had a specific meaning 
associated with Lacan that Foucault never endorsed at any stage of his career. See Judith Butler, Subjects 
societies? Foucault’s approach enables these kinds of questions to be posed – impossible in either exclusively feminist or psychoanalytic discourses, or any number of shotgun marriages between the two, because these analyses remain fixated on differences at the level of the “body” and not “culture.”

The theorist who most fully discusses Foucault’s relationship to psychoanalysis from a feminist perspective is Rosi Braidotti. She rightly recognised that the positions occupied by Foucault and Lacan, so far kept apart by various gentlemen’s agreements, potentially houses a very explosive encounter. However, Braidotti ignores those aspects of Foucault’s thesis that directly impinge on both psychoanalysis and women (the “hysterization of women’s bodies” and the “socialization of procreative pleasures,” to be explored later). And, like many feminists, she sees the “resistance” operating from Foucault’s side only. Symptomatic of his “blindness” to gender, and through a sort of timidity, Foucault could only “bypass the challenge that psychoanalysis throws to modernity.” It will be argued in due course that it is actually a Foucauldian methodology that is most cognizant of the true implications of Freud’s revolutionary concept of the unconscious.

But the very fact that bodily differences between men and women continue to be viewed as “sexual difference” within this wing of feminism proves that Braidotti is deaf

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84 Braidotti, Patterns of Dissonance, p. 91.
to Foucault’s arguments anyway. After all, why not conceive these distinctions as “generative” differences? Because there is an automatic slip equating “sex” and “body” – precisely the identity Foucault challenges. As he makes clear, the notion of “sex” at the heart of “sexual difference” is no more real than “organs, pleasures, kinship relations, interpersonal relations.” (“CF,” p. 210). Sex has become “the most speculative, the most ideal and most internal element” of modern Western constructs pertaining to bodies and pleasures. (HS, p. 155). But even if she pays no attention to Foucault, Braidotti should have got this message closer to home, for many feminists have recognised the importance of Foucault’s “inversion” of sex and sexuality.

David Macey, in his biographical study, dutifully repeats these and other feminist objections to Foucault on the question of rape, and concludes that both the “profoundly androcentric” character of Foucault’s writings and the “legalistic nature” of his comments conspire to indicate, “that he had little familiarity with the feminist politics of the day.” One could argue that at least Macey considers feminist critiques. But are we to conclude from Macey’s statement that the history of madness in the classical age, the birth of the clinic, the history of human sciences such as biology, the history of sexuality, a theory of knowledge beyond ideology, are not subjects that concern women,

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87 See, for example, Butler, “Sexual Inversions,” Feminist Interpretations, p. 70. As Lois McNay puts it: “Foucault’s radical idea of sex as a regulatory construct disrupts binary distinctions between the natural and the cultural contained in the sex/gender distinction. Gender is not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex, but rather, gender must also designate the apparatus of production whereby the sexes are themselves established,” McNay, Foucault and Feminism, p. 30.
88 Macey, Lives of Michel Foucault, p. 375. See also O’Farrell, Michel Foucault, p. 9, and Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault, p. 50 and pp. 102-109, who similarly address the problem of Foucault’s “androcentrism.”
least of all middle-class or bourgeois women? The opposite is in fact closer to the truth: by his choice of subject matter, and by his approach to it, Foucault is perhaps the least androcentric philosopher ever to have existed.

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In short, whatever other merits they may have, the presentations discussed so far have failed to grasp the depth of Foucault’s engagement with the issue of sexuality, and, without this appreciation, his relationship to psychoanalytic theory and practice is misunderstood. The common view is that Foucault ignored the theoretical side of psychoanalysis, and offered only a political critique of the prominent and conservative position it enjoys in the dispositif of sexuality. Like “Deleuze and Guattari,” Foucault did not investigate psychoanalysis as “a body of ideas;” he merely protested its role as “a social institution.”89 Psychoanalysis in Foucault’s hands is a “technology of sex” par excellence: “No simpler or purer method of making the subject speak could be found.”90 Foucault’s “hostility” is similar to other “désirant” opposition.91 Foucault naively imagines “bodies and pleasures” as “pure unformed matter that can be voluntarily shaped and reshaped” – hard-working Freudians at the coalface of sexuality gave up these utopian dreams long ago.92 Foucault moved, without any explanation, from being “sympathetic” towards psychoanalysis early in his career to seeing it now “as just one

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90 Forrester, "Foucault and history of psychoanalysis," *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, p. 301.
92 Joel Whitebook, “Against Interiority: Foucault’s Struggle with Psychoanalysis,” *Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, pp. 312-347, p. 337. As mentioned above, interpreting Foucault’s work in terms of “crises” is a common trope, and Whitebook “explains” the thesis presented in *History of Madness* in these terms.
more instrument of power at work in our panoptic society.” This was due to his “radical agenda of political activism of the period.” And so on.

Against this, it will be argued that Foucault in fact celebrated the political divergence of psychoanalysis, all the while exposing its philosophical naivety. He claimed in History of Madness, for example, that Freud restored to medical thought “the possibility of a dialogue with unreason,” systematically banished before him by nineteenth-century positivism (HM, p. 339) – even if the partnership ended up being more a “monologue of the surveyed” rather than dialogue (HM, p. 488). Then, in the 1970s, supposedly at the very height of his “radical” opposition, Foucault came to pinpoint Freud’s revolution as overturning the thematics of degeneracy (“CF,” p. 212; HS, pp. 118-119) – not unrelated, as will be seen, to opening a dialogue with unreason. This issue will be explored more fully in chapters ten and eleven, but, put briefly for the moment, it is actually Foucault who is most attuned to the full philosophical repercussions of Freud’s unconscious revolution, for both men and women.

A more subtle critique suggests that Foucault directed his hostilities only against Freud, and was kindly disposed towards the psychoanalysis developed by Lacan in the French context. Like the presentation of Dews, this view relies on the difference of a French reading of Freud. One should not speak of Freud “in general,” says Jacques Derrida, but of a “filial connection” between a certain “French heritage of Freud” and Foucault’s

95 Didier Eribon, Michel Foucault et ses contemporains (Paris, 1994), pp. 233-263.
project itself—even if the latter did not realize fully his indebtedness to it.\textsuperscript{96} In Derrida's view, one of the facets of the French reading was awareness that the “death drive” introduced by Freud in \textit{Beyond the Pleasure Principle} of 1920 had opened up the “horizon” against which “the whole economy of pleasure needs to be rethought.”\textsuperscript{97} The great “radicality” of the death drive problematizes the “agency of power and mastery.” But evidenced by Foucault’s ambivalence towards Freud throughout his career, says Derrida, the French difference is never properly acknowledged: “It is very difficult to know if this drive for power [as Foucault conceives it] is still dependent on the pleasure principle, indeed, upon sexuality as such.”\textsuperscript{98}

We will return to this criticism in a moment. Other recent studies, by Jean Allouch and John Rajchman, attempt to “reconcile” Foucault with Lacan on the basis of this shared heritage, all the better to explore a problematic common to both—namely, the relationship between \textit{eros} and truth. Rajchman views Lacan and Foucault—whom he labels respectively a “psychoanalyst” and a “historian”—as having contributed in their own fashions to creating a new intellectual climate. The ancient question of “truth and eros” can be raised anew: “each of them in different ways re-eroticised the activity of philosophical thought for our times.”\textsuperscript{99} While Lacan’s search for a new philosophical erotic led to an impasse, Foucault’s “new kind of history of sexuality” promises more, taking up from where Lacan left off.\textsuperscript{100} Foucault never lost sight of the “spiritual” dimension of psychoanalysis that Lacan embodied by his philosophical re-reading of


\textsuperscript{97} Derrida asks: “How would [Foucault] have read this drive, had he read it, in this extremely enigmatic text of Freud?” Derrida, “To Do Justice to Freud,” \textit{Foucault and his Interlocutors}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{98} Derrida, “To Do Justice to Freud,” \textit{Foucault and his Interlocutors}, p. 95.


\textsuperscript{100} Rajchman, \textit{Truth and Eros}, p. 85.
Freud: it was part of Foucault’s unresolved and unfinished search for “other rhetorical methods” that would not avoid “the question of the subject.”

This assessment seems credible due to Foucault’s general demeanour in his last years. According to Jacques Lagrange, Foucault appeared to “close down” his battle with psychoanalysis in the 1980s, and a certain detachment is indeed evident. He tended to highlight his own lack of understanding rather than lurch into criticisms of psychoanalysis. (DE, IV, p. 667). He also did not deny possible overlaps with Lacan, when questioned persistently on this score in a lecture from 1982. (HER, pp. 188-189).

In the view of Jacques-Alain Miller, Foucault the archaeologist may have “triumphed” in the cases of madness, clinical medicine and the human sciences, but he finally came to grief with sexuality: here, he had met a stubbornly “transhistorical thoroughfare which continually led beyond and outside itself.” It was why Foucault became dislodged from the terrain familiar to the “archaeologist,” and was “projected with irresistible force back to the Greeks and the Romans.” This “projection” back to the Greeks was no doubt connected, as Miller hinted elsewhere, to the disappearance of Foucault’s “anti-psychoanalytic polemic” in his last books — an absence with no explanation. When trickled down, the differences between Foucault and Lacan become even less important, especially given the need to compensate for the “gender blindness”

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101 Rajchman, Truth and Eros, p. 6.
103 Jacques-Alain Miller, “Michel Foucault and psychoanalysis,” Michel Foucault, Philosopher, pp. 58-64, p. 61.
104 Miller, “Michel Foucault and psychoanalysis,” Michel Foucault, p. 61.
of the former: “much of poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking is premised on the assumption that it is possible to draw simultaneously on both Foucault and Lacan.”

But while the philosophical points of contact between the two intellectuals are certainly important, and will be investigated in depth, the fact remains, when it comes to the meaning of *eros*, Lacan and Foucault completely and profoundly disagree, and that is the whole point of Foucault’s 1976 text. When the ground of Foucault’s “archaeology” was slipping away, it was not the Lacanian subject of desire that reached out to rescue him – a fact Miller neglects to mention. Even when paying tribute to Lacan, Foucault doubted that psychoanalysis was capable of posing the question of “the relations of the subject to truth” in the manner Foucault himself was trying to do. (*HER*, p. 30). It will be argued that Foucault’s critique dismantles the unquestioned French “exception” in psychoanalysis, and his disagreement is as much with French psychoanalytic versions of the unconscious and sexuality as with other readings of Freud – if not more so, simply due to proximity.

In Derrida’s presentation, he leaves aside the “huge concept of power,” but not before implying that there is nothing original about it anyway: “what Foucault announces and denounces about the relation between pleasure and power” would be found already in “Freud, to say nothing of those who followed, discussed, transformed and displaced him.”

This is one of the central points of contention in this thesis: what was brought to bear against psychoanalysis was, precisely, *power*. This concept had been duly

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107 Derrida, “To Do Justice to Freud,” *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 95. This is identical to Forrester’s assessment: “Foucault’s espousal of a positive concept of power does not seem so strikingly novel,” says Forrester, “Foucault and History of Psychoanalysis,” *Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, p. 301.
recognized, certainly, but left untheorized. Only Foucault's reformulation of power creates a truly productive cultural force to counter the psychoanalytic stress on drives – exposing even the most esoteric theories of this French tradition to be nothing more than home-spun recipes mixing a pinch of culture with a dash of nature. In resistance to the unquestioned assumption that sexuality consists of "drives," Foucault proposes no drive to power, only cultural ensembles of power and knowledge relations. What will become apparent in the course of this thesis is that, for Lacan and his followers, desire is the cornerstone of all human sexuality, while, for Foucault, the dispositif of sexuality is a modern Western fabrication that excises a whole range of other possible understandings of eros.

Jean Allouch will be the last critic to be considered in this chapter. Besides Jacques-Alain Miller, Allouch has been perhaps the only psychoanalyst prepared to engage with Foucault's work to any serious degree. His discussions are limited however because, again like Miller and Derrida, they do not address Foucault's retheorization of the concept of power – the aspect we argue is the most essential. Allouch's interpretation of the convergence between Lacan and Foucault is therefore similar to Rajchman's. Allouch rejects, however, the idea of a common "spiritual" domain, or even an ethical-philosophical joint venture between the two; rather, what is at stake is the very meaning of Lacanian (psycho-) analysis itself. Allouch would like to re-position this knowledge as a critical "erotology," or "sychanalyse" ["speak-analysis"] – a sort of non-medical analysis of the erotic, gaining its inspiration as much from Foucault as Lacan.

Foucault's critique as Allouch presents it consists therefore in exposing the "confessional" nature of psychoanalysis – concurring here with John Forrester and other
readings emphasising Foucault’s critique as “political.” But when Foucault was deploying this critique against confessional practices, adds Allouch, Lacan, at least, had “moved on.”\textsuperscript{108} The essence of the analytic relationship in Lacan’s terms is: “I do not force you to speak.” This is the very antithesis of confession, with its implied powers compelling the truth to be drawn from a subject. Allouch considers Lacan’s method to overlap Foucault’s in a fundamental way. Espousing the relativity of truth in both cases means that Lacan had been on Foucault’s side from the beginning; there can be no absolute truth, only “truth telling.” The two “warriors,” Foucault and Lacan, join together in confronting the problem of how a subject comes to tell the truth about him or herself.\textsuperscript{109}

Again, to amalgamate Foucault and Lacan is to ignore what is essential about Foucault’s whole project: finding an alternative analysis of sexuality and the unconscious as non-universal, \textit{cultural}, phenomena, which immediately banishes him from the clubhouses of French Freud; the reformulation of the notion of power was crucial to this endeavour. Moreover, the force of Foucault’s opposition to confessional practices in psychoanalysis becomes diminished if removed from its proper context of analysing the way power functions in contemporary society. After all, the similarities linking psychoanalytic practice to the confessional, as well as the general overlaps between all forms of psychotherapy and “religion” or “spirituality,” were already well known in Freud’s day. As Jacques Lagrange has noted, Freud recognised the resemblance himself, and light-heartedly compared his function to that of a priest in his

Studies on Hysteria in 1895.\footnote{Lagrange, “Versions de la psychanalyse,” Psychanalyse à l’Université, p. 118, note 88.} In the same text, Josef Breuer went further, and happily used the confessional to illustrate his cathartic method: the “normal appropriate reaction” to anxiety was “to communicate” it via “speech.”\footnote{Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud [1895], Studies on Hysteria, SE, 2, p. 211.} He went on to say:

> We meet the same urge as one of the basic factors of a major historical institution – the Roman Catholic confessional. Telling things is a relief; it discharges tension even when the person to whom they are told is not a priest and even if no absolution follows. If the excitation is denied this outlet it is sometimes converted into a somatic phenomenon, just as is the excitation belonging to traumatic effects. (SE, 2, p. 211).


Jung’s views were noticed by Sándor Ferenczi, and it played a minor role in the schism between Freud and Jung that erupted in 1912. By identifying the two, retorted an outraged Ferenczi in a letter to Freud, Jung “evidently doesn’t know that the confession
of sins is the lesser task of psychoanalytic therapy: the greater one is the demolition of the father *imago*, which is completely absent in confession.*\(^{116}\) Despite the climate of hostilities,\(^ {117}\) Jung’s intentions on this topic do not appear to have been provocative; the central purpose was merely to caution psychoanalysts against playing the role of “father and guide” in the manner of a priest, however tempting this may be; at most, the analyst’s task consisted in “educating the patients to become independent personalities.”\(^ {118}\)

At that time unmoved, Freud felt compelled later in his career to argue publicly against assimilating the two techniques. In the essay dealing with “lay analysis,” Freud posits an imaginary “impartial” person who protests that the “neurotic” telling his or her secrets to an analyst is no different in principle to what happens in confession – an instrument “which the Catholic Church has used from time immemorial in order to make secure its dominance over people’s minds.”\(^ {119}\) Freud replies, “yes and no,” and explains:

Confession no doubt plays a part in analysis – as an introduction to it, we might say. But it is very far from constituting the essence of analysis or from explaining its effects. In confession, the sinner tells what he knows; in analysis the neurotic has to tell more. Nor have we heard that Confession has ever developed enough power to get rid of actual pathological symptoms. (SE, 20, p. 189).

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Triggered recently by Foucault's work, other psychoanalysts, too, have tried to isolate the difference in the fact that the sinner knows he or she has committed the sin, while, in analysis, neither the analyst nor the analysand is aware of what the problem really is: "Isn't there a radical change at the point where it's assumed that the subject doesn't know the truth?" ("CF," p. 216). Foucault disagreed: "one of the fundamental points of the Christian method of direction of conscience is precisely that the subject doesn't know the truth." ("CF," p. 216). Alain Grosrichard revived views expressed in the 1961 paper on the unconscious by Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire. Is it really valid to compare the way a psychoanalyst listens to the methods of the "confessors?" ("CF," p. 215). Foucault replied that it was still to be determined in detail how confessional procedures "were often profoundly altered at certain moments, under conditions which are difficult to explain." ("CF," p. 215).

Foucault's originality vis-à-vis psychoanalysis does not reside therefore in exposing the confessional nature of psychoanalysis; this was an issue already debated from time to time. Rather, Foucault shows that secular and religious versions of the confessional are everywhere in contemporary life. This ethnographic fact needs to be explained: the "permanent existence in the West" of "regulated procedures for the confession of sex, sexuality and sexual pleasure." ("CF," p. 215). Foucault's insistence on power as a vital ingredient in any ontology of modern society makes visible these procedures. Whatever the specific techniques of listening in psychoanalysis may be, these

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practitioners are not equipped to see the wider ethnographic dimension, let alone understand it.

Indeed, in relation to the confession of "sexuality," Foucault never singled out psychoanalysis for special criticism. He consistently spoke of a tripod: "psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, sexologist." It matters little that psychoanalysis "has always been less influential" in the United States and Britain than in France, as Todd May and others have rightly pointed out.¹²¹ What is at stake are the mechanisms of power operating in similar ways in various contexts. One need only think of a favourite agony aunt to get the picture Foucault is painting:

Confession and freedom of expression face each other and complement each other. If we go to the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, or sexologist so frequently to consult them about our sexuality, and to confess the nature of our sexuality, it is precisely to the extent that all kinds of mechanisms everywhere – in advertising, books, novels, films, and widespread pornography – invite the individual to pass from this daily expression of sexuality to the institutional and expensive confession of his [or her] sexuality to the psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, or sexologist. (ABN, p. 170).

Not that the ethnographic angle is any less "annoying" to psychoanalysts for all that: "I can well see that the term [confession] may be a little annoying," he beams. ("CF," p. 215). But Foucault’s critical history of sexuality, and statements about psychoanalysis, lie within a comprehensive "ethnography" of contemporary society. Reading it as an "erotology," as Allouch does, or "theory" of subjectivity, loses its most vital, dare we say, powerful, component.

Roland Barthes first identified the ethnographic character of Foucault’s method in a review of *History of Madness* – even if he went on to spoil his own insight with the false claim that Foucault was seeking out the “transhistorical form of forms.”\(^{122}\) But writing in 1961 just after the book’s release, Barthes classed Foucault correctly, and with much perspicacity, within a “conquering movement of modern ethnology,” that took up from the histories of the everyday by Lucien Febvre, and reflected “the intrusion of an ethnographical viewpoint into civilized societies.”\(^{123}\)

Didier Eribon has drawn attention to Foucault’s early use of this analogy himself.\(^{124}\) In a letter from 1956, Foucault claimed that there was probably little above the value of “anecdote” that could be said by Western observers about the “Zulus or Nambikwaras,” while scrutinizing our own culture promised more, due to the “space opened up by Greek reflexion.”\(^{125}\) What if our own culture were treated as foreign or unknown to us in the manner of looking outwards at the Zulus?

In an interview from 1967, Foucault said that he was engaged in “an analysis of the cultural facts comprising our culture ... something like an ethnology of the culture to which we belong.”\(^{126}\) It was possible to have a “type of philosophical activity” that “allowed one to diagnosis what today consists of.”\(^{127}\) It would concern itself “with our culture, our present society, the ensemble of practical and theoretical relations that


\(^{125}\) Foucault, cited in Eribon, *Foucault et ses contemporains*, p. 214.

\(^{126}\) Foucault, “Who are you?” *Religion and Culture*, p. 91.

\(^{127}\) Michel Foucault [1968], “La philosophie structuraliste permet de diagnostiquer ce qu’est aujourd’hui,” *DE*, I, pp. 580-584, p. 581.

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define our modernity.” (DE, I, p. 581). Foucault made it clear that the meaning of “culture” should not be restricted to literary or artistic products only:

One could conceive of the philosopher as a sort of analyst of a cultural conjunction. Culture being understood here in the broad sense, not only the production of works of art but equally political institutions, forms of social life, prohibitions and various constraints. (DE, I, p. 582).

In the 1980s, Foucault called it an “ontology of the present,” or a “critical ontology of ourselves.”128 The methodology reflected an “attitude,” or “ethos,” where “the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”129

Therefore, contrary to those who would claim no methodological or theoretical unity of Foucault’s thought, it will be argued that Foucault provides an ontology of Western culture, based on detailed ethnographical study of that field, that can be set against the universal medical ontology of the person proposed by psychoanalysis. What is important for Foucault’s approach are those inherited systems of thought – that whole “archive” of Western values not owned or controlled by any one person or institution – rather than universal biological or psychological attributes of the body or mind. He asks: “what is Western culture?” not “what is man/woman?” In this, he develops an original project not derived in any way from “science.”

Moreover, whatever the ethnographic portrait given by Foucault, it can always be modified or challenged by a different picture, or made more complex by additional

129 Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” Foucault Reader, p. 50.
strokes. Foucault’s account is not the last word to be had: he provides “very general definitions,” “meant to be dissolved.” (“CF,” p. 216). But for meaningful disputations to occur, one must be sure, first, to be standing in the right gallery and not scrutinizing a forgery, and, second, to be prepared to present a different, equally plausible, account of Western culture as an alternative.
Chapter Two

French Freud and Friends

As evident in early texts like *History of Madness*, Foucault’s insistence on raising the problem of sexuality and madness in ways quite different to psychoanalysis indicates a radical distance from “French Freud.” Yet certain entrenched assumptions about the “French” reading of Freud have masked this difference, adversely influencing interpretations of Foucault’s history of sexuality. A historical excursus may therefore be useful to provide the necessary background. Without going too deeply into theoretical differences for the moment, the main task of this chapter is to identify the central players and broad tendencies, so as to place Foucault more accurately than hitherto amongst the dominant forms of psychoanalytic theory during these years: 1950s to 1980s.

For convenience, let us begin with Jacques Lacan. Jean Allouch divides Lacan’s “frayage” into three periods, each having its own distinctive “beacons.” Although

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comfortable old slippers everyone wears to negotiate Lacan's difficult (not to say “preposterous”) thought, certain dates in his career do stand out. These dates correspond to crises inextricably linked both to Lacan’s institutional disputes with the orthodox International Psychoanalytic Association, as well as to obstacles in his own work. For example, beginning his official career as an psychoanalyst in the 1930s via his affiliation with the Société Parisienne Psychanalytique (S.P.P.), Lacan’s distance from this group was already in evidence in 1936, because the speech he was supposed to have delivered at an international conference in Marienbad was interrupted and suppressed by the psychoanalytic authorities.

1953 was the major watershed for our purposes. Leaving aside unnecessary details, the French organization had set up a teaching centre, known as the Institut de Psychanalyse, to train analysts in a fairly doctrinaire fashion conforming to international practices. From that time forward, the S.P.P. had two wings: the psychoanalytic society proper and the Institute. Repelled by the type of leadership role he would be expected to fill in the Institute, Lacan and a group of supporters resigned and formed an independent...

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2 "Frayage" is a term deriving from Freud ["Bahnung"] meaning “affect.” Freud used it in his early neurological work to describe the excitation generated in the passage from one neuron to another. Allouch uses the term abundantly when writing of both Freud and Lacan as an equivalent of “body of works.” Lacan sometimes used the term in this way too. For example: "Certes, je ne m'identifie nullement à une certaine position. ... Ce n'est pas là ce que je vous demande, mais plutôt quelque chose qui est d'une mise en ordre que m'impose de devoir soumettre ce frayage à cette épreuve." See Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire, livre XVII: L'envers de la psychanalyse, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris, 1991), p. 46.


4 According to Juliet Mitchell, while Freud strove to be easily understood, the “preposterous difficulty” of Lacan’s style “is a challenge to easy comprehension,” designed to set distance between his work and “the popularisations and secularisation of psychoanalysis as it has occurred most notably in North America.” See Juliet Mitchell, “Introduction – 1,” Feminine Sexuality, pp. 1-26, p. 4.

5 Confusingly, this organization also seems to have gone by the name of Société Psychanalytique de Paris, but, luckily, the acronym S.P.P. can stand for either! It was founded in 1926 by loyal supporters of Freud and was always tied to the International Psychoanalytic Association; it was a small group and remained the gravitational centre of French psychoanalysis until the early 1950s.

group: the *Société Française de Psychanalyse* (S.F.P), under the presidency of Daniel Lagache, whose day job was professor of general psychology at the Sorbonne.\(^7\)

The period from 1953 until the mid-1970s therefore represents the main sparring field from which a contrast with Foucault will be drawn. As will become apparent, this was the time when issues of myth and symbolic paternal power infused Lacan’s discussions – and it was the context for the introduction of “Nom-du-Père,” or “paternal metaphor.” It was also the period when the question of psychoanalysis as science or non-science reached an impasse. Thus, let us say that the problems of “paternal power” and “science” during this period correspond roughly to the domains of “power” and “knowledge,” so that the respective imprints made by Lacan and Foucault can be contrasted via these terms.

Lacan made his views public to an audience of psychoanalysts in September 1953 with a defiant speech, which for convenience will be called the Rome Report.\(^8\) He declared that the “unconscious” was to be restored to its proper place: the field of speech and the symbol. What else can the terrain of psychoanalysis be besides the speech of the analysand – made possible by the particular and positive relationship of “transfer” existing between the speaker and the analyst? This perspective required a “return” to

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\(^7\) Lagache was part of that illustrious class entering the *École Normale Supérieure* in 1924 that included Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Nizan, Raymond Aron, and Georges Canguilhem. Lagache was the first university professor in France to give a course on the theory of psychoanalysis. See Didier Anzieu, “Foreword,” *The Works of Daniel Lagache: Selected Papers 1938-1964*, trans. Elisabeth Holder (London, 1993), pp. ix-xvi.

the letter of Freud, because the technique cannot be properly applied “if the concepts on which it is based are ignored.” (É/S, p. 39). Or, as he expressed it later in the speech:

If psychoanalysis can become a science (for it is not yet one) and if it is not to degenerate in its technique (and perhaps that has already happened), we must rediscover the sense of its experience. To this end, we can do no better than a return to the work of Freud. For an analyst to point out that he [or she] is a practitioner of the technique does not give him [or her] sufficient authority ...

Take up the work of Freud again at the Traumdeutung to remind yourself that the dream has the structure of a sentence, or rather, to stick to the letter of the work, a rebus; that is to say, it has the structure of a form of writing... . (É/S, p. 57).

For Lacan, it was indisputable that Freud had introduced a “radical revolution,” as this address to philosophy students in 1957 urged:

It is precisely [ ... ] that Freudianism, however misunderstood it has been, and however confused its consequences have been, to anyone capable of perceiving the changes we have lived through in our own lives, is seen to have founded an intangible but radical revolution. There is no point collecting witnesses to the fact: everything involving not just the human sciences, but the destiny of man, politics, metaphysics, literature, the arts, advertising, propaganda, and through these even economics, everything has been affected. ¹⁰

Freud’s revolutionary impetus has been stymied, however, first by post-Freudians – those people “busy remodelling psychoanalysis into a right-thinking movement whose crowning expression is the sociological poem of the autonomous ego” (É/S, p. 171) – and second by the naive conception of “science” reigning in Freud’s day. Lacan located Freud’s revolutionary contribution mainly in the area of the unconscious (we shall see in more detail that this concurs essentially with Foucault’s interpretation). The idea that thought makes itself heard “in the abyss” provoked resistance to psychoanalysis, and not, as is commonly assumed, the emphasis on sexuality. The latter has after all “been

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⁹ He continues: “It is our task to demonstrate that these concepts take on their full meaning only when orientated in a field of language, only when ordered in relation to the function of speech,” Lacan, “Function and Field,” (É/S, p. 39).

the dominant object in literature throughout the ages,” says Lacan. (É/S, p. 170). Due to the way psychoanalysis formulated the unconscious, it was the third scientific “wound” to humankind’s self-love behind Copernicus’ cosmology and Darwin’s evolutionary theory. To quote Freud’s famous maxim: “the ego is not master in its own house.”

No wonder “the ego does not look favourably upon psychoanalysis and obstinately refuses to believe in it.” (SE, 17, p. 143).

Lacan did not accept Freud’s version at face value, however. It was naive to imagine that heliocentric cosmology is any less of a “lure” than the Ptolemaic version, because, by still “exalting the centre,” this time as a sun rather than the earth, it cannot provide the model for a de-centred psyche. As Jean Laplanche pointed out, far from feeling “humiliated,” we still happily report that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, oblivious to the “self-centered” and earthy nature of this observation, as if the “sun” and its functions was somehow put there for our special benefit. The analogy with Darwin’s science is equally dubious, for evolution did nothing to shake the belief that humans are still, in Lacan’s words, “the top dogs in creation.” As for the third blow, even here Freud was wrong, or at least premature, for he was speaking of something that has not yet actually arrived: psychoanalysis maps out “an earthquake yet to come.” (É/S, p. 296).

In a sardonic “celebration” of the one hundred years since Freud’s birth, Lacan warned in 1956 that psychoanalysis today was sliding more and more towards “behaviourism,” due to conditions beyond “analytic knowledge as such.”\textsuperscript{15} For Lacan, psychoanalysis occupies a “truly particular” position in the range of sciences that has yet to be recognised. It was more fruitfully compared to the “liberal arts” of the Middle Ages, and not to sciences such as physics or chemistry. These liberal arts, unlike today, amalgamated all aspects of human life concerned “par excellence” with the usage of language: “you know the series, which extended from astronomy to dialectics by way of arithmetic, geometry, music and grammar.”\textsuperscript{16} To quote Lacan fully:

It is often said that psychoanalysis is not a science strictly speaking, which implies by contrast that it is simply an art. This is an error if one means that psychoanalysis is only a technique, an operational method, a collection of recipes. But it is not an error if you employ the word “art” in the way they used it in the Middle Ages when they spoke about “liberal arts”... It is, assuredly, difficult for us to apprehend today, from these so-called liberal arts, the function and meaning they carried in the life and thought of medieval masters. Nevertheless, it is certain that ... psychoanalysis is, perhaps, currently the only discipline that could be compared to these liberal arts, in so far as it preserves this measured relation of man to himself – an internal relation, closed on itself, inexhaustible, cyclic, and which is concerned par excellence with the usage of language.\textsuperscript{17}

But just as the liberal arts in the Middle Ages were deprived of a “true formalization,” psychoanalysis began in an “arid period of scientism” unable to furnish the proper epistemological understanding consistent with what Freud had discovered. (É/S, p. 76).

Linguistics held the key to this dilemma. That is, \textit{Traumdeutung} [The Interpretation of


Dreams] appeared “long before the formalization of linguistics for which one could no
doubt show that it paved the way by the sheer weight of its truth.” (É/S, p. 162). Only
now are we in a position “after Freud” to comprehend the formations of the unconscious
by way of structural analysis of language. (É/S, p. 73).

Thus, analytic communications, symptoms, lapses, neurosis and dreams are all, to use
the phrase that became famous, “structured like a language.”18 These phenomena
always reveal “the essential duality of signifier and signified” – providing we
understand, by “signifier,” the conceptual development given it by Ferdinand de
Saussure: that no object is being referred to, not even the “trace” of one.19 Signifiers
only refer to other signifiers. Language begins at “opposition”: entities such as “day”
and “night” cannot be defined “by experience,” but only in reference to each other.20

Or, as Lacan expressed the project comprehensively in the “Rome Discourse”:

Linguistics can serve us as a guide here, since that is the role it plays in the
vanguard of contemporary anthropology, and we cannot possibly remain
indifferent to it. The mathematicized form in which is inscribed the discovery of
the phoneme as the function of pairs of oppositions [...] puts within our reach a
precisely defined access to our own field. It is up to us to make use of these
advances to discover their effects in the domain of psychoanalysis, just as
ethnography – which is on a line parallel to our own – has already done for its
own by deciphering myths according to the synchrony of mythemes. Isn’t it
striking that Lévi-Strauss, in suggesting the implications of the structures of
language with that part of the social laws that regulate marriage ties and kinship,

18 As he put it: “Every analytic phenomenon, every phenomenon that comes from the analytic field, from
the analytic discovery, from what we are dealing with in symptoms and neurosis, is structured like a

19 In Lacan’s reading, the revolution introduced by Saussure consisted of asserting that the Signifier
(capital S) dominates the signified (lower case s): “no signification can be sustained other than by
reference to another signification.” See É/S, p. 150.

20 Lacan often used the example of day and night to illustrate the inessential quality of meaning, easily
likened to the impossibility of defining “male” and “female” outside of the signifying relation between
the two: “the very notion of day, the word day, the notion of the coming of the day, is something that is
properly speaking ungraspable in any reality. The opposition between day and night is a signifying
opposition, which goes infinitely beyond all the meanings it may ultimately cover, indeed beyond every
kind of meaning. If I took day and night as examples, it’s of course because our subject is man and
is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious. (ÉS, p. 73).

This “return” to the actual texts and concepts of Freud, and the consequent effort to wed psychoanalysis to linguistics and anthropology, serves as the undisputed flag of “French Freud.” Some Lacanians, Allouch for example, see his intervention as not so much a return to Freud as an overturn of him. Lacan’s emphasis on the “symbolic” during this period must be placed within the ternary system comprising the “Imaginary, Symbolic and Real,” unknown in classical Freudianism. Allouch claims it was brought forward at this time because institutional problems reflected theoretical impasses entrenched in the works of Freud; the two cannot be separated. Lacan’s first communication to the new Société, in fact, introduced the ternary system. It therefore represented a paradigmatic shift in the Freudian field that, for Allouch, has never been properly appreciated: “The invention of this paradigm, which is not ‘Freudian’ as such, propelled Lacan far from Freud.”

Others within the Lacanian tradition, Jacques-Alain Miller in particular, prefer to portray Lacan as more faithful to Freud’s ideas. For him, Freud was the one who made the “discovery,” not Lacan; the latter had never presented himself in this way and there is nothing in the Lacanian corpus corresponding to The Interpretation of Dreams.

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21 For explication of these and other Lacanian terms, see Alan Sheridan’s very helpful explanations: “Translator’s Note,” ÉS, pp. vii-xii.


23 Allouch, Freud, et puis Lacan, p. 30. Using Thomas Kuhn’s theory of the “structure of scientific revolutions” (though uncritically), Allouch dates Lacan’s change of “paradigm” with an exactitude historians of the hard sciences can only envy: 8 July 1953. Lacan had received the letter informing him of his expulsion from the international body; two days later, he introduced the ternary system. Allouch sees the two events as intimately connected. See Allouch, Freud, et puis Lacan, p. 31. For a critical exposition of Kuhn’s notion of “paradigm,” see A.F. Chalmers, What is this Thing Called Science, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia, 1982), pp. 80-112.

or *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life.*\(^{25}\) This is not to suggest of course that Lacan did not develop Freud: in Miller’s view, Lacan revitalizes the Freudian unconscious with the introduction of the concept of the “subject.”\(^{26}\) This point is relevant for our overall thesis, as it will be argued in chapter four that Foucault takes the Lacanian “subject” complete with unconscious as a departure point for his own Nietzschean genealogy of the modern Western individual.

Either way, Lacan won many adherents both in France and elsewhere. He was said to have given Freud’s theory a “philosophical” armature, removing it from its “biological foundations” without resorting to any kind of “spiritualism.”\(^{27}\) In her study of French psychoanalytic politics of the 1960s and 1970s, Sherry Turkle usefully presents Lacan’s role as threefold.\(^{28}\) First, Lacan insisted that psychoanalysis was not a question of “adapting people to the social status quo,” but was rather a form of “truth seeking,” or “political consciousness raising.” Secondly, Lacan turns the “coherent, autonomous ego” into an “illusion.” And third, Lacanian psychoanalysis is “militantly antibiological, shifting all descriptions from a biological-anatomical level to a symbolic one.”\(^{29}\)

Earlier, in a special edition of *Yale French Studies* from 1972, Jeffrey Mehlman had expressed a similar view: one of the key differences between the French and “American” perceptions of Freud derived from Lacan’s attempts to “de-biologize” the unconscious. Overlapping with what was noted previously in the case of Peter Dews, Mehlman described “the subject of the French unconscious” as “the loss of the natural

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\(^{29}\) Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics*, p. 17.
object and its replacement by an ideational representative ('memory trace,' 'significant') furnished in an intersubjective setting."

In the intervening years since Mehlman’s statements, however, the idea of “French” soil necessarily sprouting philosophical derivations of Freud in opposition to the “ego” versions rampant in the Anglo-American world has become something of a cliché. The difference is more often stated than explained or analysed. Fundamental to the critique Foucault launched against psychoanalysis was a strenuous denial that the unconscious had, in fact, been “de-biologized” in its French frameworks. This is tantamount to treason in French Freud, so one must tread carefully. Nevertheless, the point can be demonstrated through the issue of whether only medical doctors should be allowed to practice as psychoanalysts – a major factor precipitating the 1953 split. It enables us to highlight an ambiguity of Lacan’s position, colouring “French Freud” as a whole, through which a clear contrast with Foucault can be made.

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In general, psychoanalytic schools were hostile, or at least indifferent, to “lay” analysis. This was despite Freud’s tolerance and enthusiasm for it. Carl Jung claimed in a letter

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31 In a series of lectures dealing with the “powers and limits of psychoanalysis,” Julia Kristeva was quick to distance her discourse from “American” psychoanalysis, but she does not explain what this is, saying only: “I am not talking about American psychoanalysis, dominated by ego psychology.” See Julia Kristeva, Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York, 2002), p. 9. See also Pamela Tytell, “Lacune aux U.S.A.,” L’Arc 58 (1973), pp. 79-82. According to Marcelle Marini: “the Lacanian attacks against... ‘ego-psychology’ were taken globally and politically as attacks against American hegemony, but most of the students generally had not read a single line written by them and did not raise any questions about Soviet psychiatry,” Marini, Jacques Lacan, p. 127.


33 For Freud, if it were possible to establish a psychoanalytic “college,” instruction would include those branches of knowledge presently removed from it, such as “the history of civilization, mythology, the
of 1934 that Freud's public views in this regard were “heretical,” and that Freud was wrong to trust the competence of his “medically unqualified” daughter.\textsuperscript{34} Lacan's position, identical to Freud's, was more generous:

Psychoanalytic education as it is constituted today – that is, medical studies followed by a psycho-analysis, in a didactic form carried out by a qualified analyst – lacks something essential, without which I would deny that a psychoanalyst can be trained: an apprenticeship in linguistic and historical disciplines, in the history of religion, etc. To define his own thoughts concerning the training of analysts, Freud revives an old term that gives me pleasure to take up again: \textit{universitas litterarum}.\textsuperscript{35}

Furthermore, in 1954, Jean-Bertrand Lefebvre-Pontalis, a member of the new Société, took a strong stand in favour of non-medical analysis, which prompted a response.\textsuperscript{36} Pontalis had a background in both philosophy and psychoanalysis, having been a former student of Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as long-time member of the original Parisian society. Indeed, if we go back to the first issue of \textit{Les Temps Modernes} in 1945, it contained an article about mental illness and war, from a perspective labelled “existential psychoanalysis.”\textsuperscript{37} In this piece, Pontalis, under the name of “Pasche,” addressed the paradoxical question of why, during war and other social crises, there is a psychology of religion and the science of literature.” Similarly, much of what is taught in medical schools is of “no use” when it came to understanding or curing neuroses, and “nor does it contribute to a sharpening of those intellectual capacities on which his occupation makes the greatest demands.” (\textit{SE}, 20, p. 246).


\textsuperscript{37} Dr. F. Pasche [Pontalis], “Les psychoses affectives et la guerre”, \textit{Les Temps Modernes}, 1 (Oct., 1945), pp. 145-152. This was the first of many contributions Pontalis was to make to \textit{Les Temps Modernes} on subjects related to psychoanalysis. By 1962, he became a member of the editorial committee. According to Roudinesco, he settled on the name “Pontalis” at some point in the 1950s, Roudinesco, \textit{Jacques Lacan & Co}, p. 289.
marked and progressive decrease in the number of psychiatric patients in hospitals, sometimes by as much as a third, when the opposite would be expected to occur. Freud’s texts were not explicitly appealed to, in favour of Sartre and Kierkegaard, but Pontalis claimed that “philosophers” had joined forces with “psychoanalysts” to place “anxiety” at the very heart of the modern personality.

As a result, it has become commonplace to portray the “second” and “third” generations of French psychoanalysts (Lacan, Lagache, and the younger members of the Société like Pontalis) as those who “struggled against the medical attitude” prevalent in the original society. The reality is more complicated. Most theorists of “French Freud,” Jacques Lacan above all, had been trained as medical doctors and psychiatrists. By the 1980s, analysts with medical qualifications continued to outweigh other members numerically in all leading French psychoanalytic schools. Commentators have generally regarded this as unimportant. In Lacan’s case, it confirms his “inspired autodidact” style: with stethoscope poised, Lacan could detect beating life in ideas long discarded as dead by incompetent philosophers. There were also practical considerations: Lacan, along with some disciples, wanted to study psychoses firsthand—an underdeveloped field in psychoanalysis. This was impossible without a medical degree. Hence Lacan’s leanings in this direction and his advice to students to study medicine also.

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However, according to Jean Laplanche, Lacan never renounced an “orientation” that was “very medical,”\textsuperscript{42} and we will come to explore the implications of this in due course. The attitude is confirmed by views Lacan expressed in an interview with Gilles Lapouge in 1966. Here, Lacan scoffed at Jean-Paul Sartre’s attempt at a “phenomenology of sadistic passion.”\textsuperscript{43} Certainly, Sartre’s analysis was extraordinarily insightful and “seductive,” stresses Lacan, make no mistake about that. But any basic “doctor” familiar with sadism would know that “it doesn’t happen in the manner of Sartre’s exposé.” Lacan went on to say that psychoanalysts are “not philosophers, but clinicians.”\textsuperscript{44}

Thus, we will see throughout that Lacan’s arguments for the importance of “language,” as well as his advocacy of a humanities-style education in addition to medicine, did not necessarily translate into an independent field, offering a truly alternative analysis of the “unconscious” or “bodies and pleasures.” For Lacan, it was simply that medical studies on their own were “insufficient” for the “range of symbols” and the “presence of myths,” and even for a proper interpretation of the “meaning” that the analysand’s discourse conveys to the analyst. But, in the view of this thesis, without a fully-fledged migration into philosophical territory – the last thing Lacan would have wanted to do – the “unconscious” remains clouded by bio-medical understandings of sexuality, and, therefore, cannot be the concept Lacan claimed he was developing. By contrast, and put simply for now, Foucault treats the unconscious and sexuality (or knowledge and power to use his terms), as philosophical constructs only.


It is necessary to note in this context also that analysts who chose to align themselves with the original Parisian society of psychoanalysts, such as Julia Kristeva, and André Green, were more than happy to retain, if not strengthen, the bio-medical overtones of psychoanalytic concepts. In the wake of Lacan's international renown, Kristeva was one of a handful of "French Feminists" said to offer a unique perspective on the issue of gender difference, revealing the many shortcomings and "phallacies" in Freudian and Lacanian theory. But, for Kristeva, "female sexuality" is something that concerns the development of female bodies and female beings only. It has nothing to do with male subjects nor how an adult woman relates sexually to another adult, man or woman, and vice versa. What sense does it make, then, to say that the unconscious was "de-biologized" generally in these French milieux?

Moreover, although Lacan's conception of science is quite complex, this is another opportunity for contrast with Foucault, for the idea of Freud forecasting a scientific paradigm against the immaturity of his times is unacceptable in Foucauldian terms. It exploits the same "virus of the precursor" contaminating the historiography of science identified by Georges Canguilhem: "the eagerness to search for, to find and to celebrate precursors is the clearest symptom of an inaptitude for epistemological criticism." The virus of the precursor turns the flesh and blood scientist into a ghost capable of haunting everything, but belonging nowhere:

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46 For the range of writings covered by this term see, in particular, New French Feminisms: An anthology, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton, 1981).
47 See, for example, Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists (Sydney, 1989).
The precursor is a thinker, a researcher whose work previously paved the way for another to complete. ... The precursor is supposed to be a thinker of several periods, his own and that, or those, assigned to him by his followers, as the executors of his incomplete enterprise. The precursor is therefore a thinker that the historian believes he can extract from his proper cultural context and insert him into another. This amounts to considering concepts, discourses, speculative or experimental gestures, as being able to be displaced and replaced within an intellectual space where this reversibility of relations is obtained by forgetting the historical aspect of the object in question.  

Certainly, Lacan’s epistemology highlights the méconnaissance of conceptual history that often takes place. What we thought was the family tree of psychoanalysis composed mostly of medical doctors turns out to be only one branch; equally important was the paternal line inaugurated by Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic revolution as well as the various maternal influences of twentieth-century American cultural anthropology that nurtured Claude Lévi-Strauss. But it remains an internal “family” history and fails to elucidate why Freud’s “ego” was fascinated at the news of its de-centering, when everybody is supposed to be pained and shocked to learn this. In 1960, Lacan simply commanded that his listeners see the difference between Havelock Ellis and Freud, without offering a rationale himself. Ellis represented “a futile mode of investigation” compared with “Freud’s thought and experience”; if Lacan recommends reading Ellis, “it is simply in order to show you the difference.” Various toe-pokes into psychoanalytic history carried out by theorists within, or adjacent to, Lacan’s milieu do not overly trouble Lacan’s version; they are designed to clarify Freud’s role as figurehead of a new science – not challenge it in any fundamental way. Moreover, Lacan’s insistence on reading Freud’s position in an ideal way, “extracting him from his

proper cultural context” and “inserting” him into a later linguistic one, was motivated by the dubious ambition of founding psychoanalysis as a “science” come what may — an obsession documented convincingly by François Roustang.53

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These important questions will “return.” For the moment, let us establish that, in the decade 1953-1963, flanked by the Société française de psychanalyse, Lacan propagated a novel and distinctive style of psychoanalytic theory and practice. At first, the seminars took place in the intimate surroundings of his home apartment, attended by a handful of analysts. Shortly afterwards, he moved to the hospital Sainte-Anne, presenting psychiatric cases on Fridays and public seminars on Wednesdays, sometimes graced by distinguished guests from the world of philosophy.54 His audience at this stage was composed almost exclusively of “clinicians,” numbering fifty to one hundred people.

The Société launched its own journal in 1956, the centenary of Freud’s birth, which was to last for eight issues up to 1964, titled La Psychanalyse. The first volume was devoted, fittingly, to “speech and language,” reviewed in friendly terms by the journal Critique.55 The linguist Emile Benveniste contributed an article about the role of language in psychoanalytic theory.56 He congratulated Lacan for realizing the importance of both “speech” and “discourse,” and then he contrasted this modern approach with the original Freudian attempt to establish an homology between the


55 Jean-Paul Valabrega, “Aux sources de la psychanalyse,” Critique, 108 (May, 1956), pp. 446-456. Valabrega was at that time a member of the new Société and one of the directors of La Psychanalyse; later he aligned himself with the non-Lacanian Quatrième Groupe [Fourth Group].

dream-work and the processes of a “primitive language.”

Freud’s views were based on the same evolutionary assumptions in a linguistic guise as those Claude Lévi-Strauss was busy obliterating in the neighbouring field of anthropology (as we will see in the following chapter). According to Benveniste, and reflecting the cultural relativism essential to this wing of critical thought that also informed Foucault: “each language is specific and shapes the world in its own way. ... Ancient or archaic languages are neither more nor less strange than those we speak.”

The inclusion of Benveniste’s article was a prime example of the “openness” towards the “human sciences” displayed in the pages of *La Psychanalyse* – the term “les sciences humaines” having been introduced into French intellectual discourse only a short time before. This was a refreshing change to the stolid reports from the “English” schools of psychoanalysis (a polite code-word for the type of weather they get over there), which dominated the publications on the international scene.

What is called the “third generation” of French psychoanalysts was nurtured in this context. Foremost amongst this group is Jean Laplanche. Like Pontalis, Laplanche


60 Valabrega, “Sources de la psychanalyse,” *Critique*, p. 446.


62 A seemingly banal difference between Laplanche and Lacan resides in the fact that the former had a background in philosophy, having been a student of both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Hyppolyte. Laplanche entered the *École Normale Supérieure* in 1945. He began analysis with Lacan in 1947. Meanwhile, he gained his *agrégation de philosophie* in 1951. On Lacan’s advice, Laplanche turned then to medical studies – with a view to becoming a psychoanalyst himself. See “Jean Laplanche talks,” *Free
always considered himself “as much a philosopher as an analyst,” reiterating in 1992 that the “indissolubly clinical and theoretical experience” inaugurated by Freud was, for him, resolutely “philosophical.” The topic of Laplanche’s doctoral thesis from the late 1950s already reflects this amalgamation of philosophy and psychoanalysis, for it presented a psycho-biographical study of the German poet Hölderin. Interestingly, Foucault noted the dual approach when critically reviewing Laplanche’s text. It is because of his “double grounding in philosophy and psychoanalysis,” says Foucault, “that Laplanche was able to direct his study of Hölderin to a profound questioning of the negative,” drawing on, from one side, Jean Hyppolyte’s “repetition” of Hegel, and, on the other, from Lacan’s “repetition” of Freud.

Attention to the Freudian “concept” and the problem of “translation” were quintessential features of the third generation of French psychoanalysts, both parallel to, and overlapping, Lacan’s work. Here, we can trace the beginnings of the “French exception” in psychoanalysis. It is necessary to pause briefly on this idea, not least because any “French” characteristic superficially indicates a point of overlap between

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66 Foucault, “Father’s ‘No’,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 80-81. Laplanche’s itinerary further demonstrates his dual formation. As well as practising as a psychoanalyst, Laplanche has held academic positions since 1962, teaching courses at both the École Normale Supérieure and, from 1969, at the Department of Clinical Human Sciences at the University Paris VII (part of the Sorbonne). Through what he called *Problématiques* [Problematics], Laplanche has pursued “certain major axes of psychoanalytic theory”, including “Anxiety,” and, importantly for our purposes, “The Unconscious,” and “Sexuality.” The former series has been translated into English. See Jean Laplanche [1981], *The Unconscious and the Id: A volume of Laplanche’s Problématiques*, trans. Luke Thurston with Lindsay Watson (London, 1999).
Foucault and the psychoanalysts. In particular, the recognition of a conceptual distinction between "Instinkt" (instinct) and "Trieb" (drive), to be explained shortly, seems consistent with the position presented in *La volonté de savoir* when Foucault maintains that sexuality is "historical." But as we shall explain in a preliminary fashion now, with a view to expanding this important argument in later chapters, the tendency to assimilate all French theorists misses the way Foucault ingeniously radicalised the whole problematic and moved beyond its impasses.

From the time of the inception of the *Société*, it was often said that schools of psychoanalysis in other parts of the world had never adequately questioned the "fundamental concepts" and "original notions" of psychoanalysis, restricting themselves to "clinical problems."67 In 1954, Pontalis wrote an interesting critique of the psychoanalyst Karen Homey, whose works had recently been translated into French.68 Homey had emigrated from Europe to the United States before the war; for Pontalis, her "naturalised" status as an "American" accorded perfectly with her revisions of Freud.69 Like "many other authors," he said, Homey believed neuroses originated in "disturbances" of social relations, and that anxiety derived not from "drives" themselves that constantly undermined the formation of an "ego," but from conflicts between an already-constituted "ego" and the "environment." This changed the very nature of psychoanalysis, he said, for the analytical method is replaced by a counselling service directed at the "character" of the person and his or her current concerns.70

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In 1956, Pontalis followed this with an examination of the question of “Freud today.”

He claimed that while psychoanalysis enjoyed prestige and Freud’s works were gradually being diffused and translated, he feared this recognition might be more a sign of “misunderstanding.” He painted a disparaging picture of psychoanalysis outside of Europe: the “Anglo-Saxons,” he said, cherished mechanistic terms such as “adjustment.” While it was still possible in France to distinguish “true” psychoanalysis from all its mythical representations, this was not so simple in the United States, with its barrage of “experts in human relations, counsellors, and managers of souls.”

The general tone had been set in 1955 by Lacan, when he reported a joke Freud had made when sailing into New York harbour in 1909: the Americans were as yet blissfully unaware, he quipped, that the “plague” (in the form of psychoanalysis) was about to be unleashed. In the assessment of Élisabeth Roudinesco, Freud never made the joke. Regardless, the idea was to spread like wildfire in French psychoanalytic circles, and cemented French beliefs that the “true” Freud was European only. So, far from psychoanalytic ideas “contaminating” America, Pontalis protested, Freud had no

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75 See Jacques Lacan [1957], “The Freudian thing, or the meaning of the return to Freud in psychoanalysis,” É/S, pp. 114-145, p. 116. Lacan claims he heard the story “from Jung’s own mouth.” Freud was in the United States accompanied by Jung and Sándor Ferenczi to deliver a series of lectures at the invitation of Stanley Hall, president of Clark University.
idea that the reverse was going to happen in reality: America would poison psychoanalysis, and fatally, through too much love.\(^{78}\)

Thus, as a consequence of perceived "misunderstandings" and a distaste for popularisations, Daniel Lagache commissioned Laplanche and Pontalis in 1959 to compose a dictionary of Freudian terms. It was eventually published in 1967 as *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*.\(^{79}\) The aim was to restore a core set of privileged Freudian concepts to their original radical value, to grasp what psychoanalysis actually is and says.\(^{80}\) To Freud's credit, he rarely invented neologisms and resisted the temptation to use Greek or Latin terms (*id*, *ego*, and *superego* reflect a translation decision; Freud had used the everyday pronouns *Es*, *Ich*, inventing only *Überich*).

However, this predilection has also produced ambiguities. Freud often used two ordinary German terms in different ways that are both rendered into other European languages by a single word: for example, "*Verdrängung*" and "*Unterdrückung*" both became "repression" in English.\(^{81}\) Although Lacan's knowledge of German has been questioned,\(^{82}\) he, too, had introduced the "dual" term problem in his seminars, drawing attention to Freud's use of "*Sache*" and "*Ding*." These were translated into French and English by one word only: "*chose*" in the case of French, "*thing*" in English; for Lacan, this misses the true significance of the term "*Ding*."\(^{83}\) Other lapses came to light: Freud

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81 Laplanche and Pontalis, *Vocabulaire*, p. 419.
82 According to Laplanche: "I don’t think [Lacan] knew German so well... I don’t think he read an entire paper of Freud’s in German." See Jean Laplanche, "The Other within: Rethinking psychoanalysis," Interview with John Fletcher and Peter Osborne, *Radical Philosophy*, 102 (July/August, 2000), pp. 31-41, p. 33. This is confirmed by the report of Lacan’s meeting with Martin Heidegger at a philosophical colloquium at Cerisy-la-Salle in August 1955: the two intellectuals conversed only through the medium of a translator. See Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.*, p. 299.
had left the important concept "Anlehnung" ("propping") undeveloped, leading to the false assumption that the sexual drive found its support from "survival" instincts. Laplanche argues in many places that these conceptual failures have adversely affected the whole course of psychoanalysis.  

It was in this context that Laplanche and Pontalis made a momentous discovery, exposing something previously unnoticed: Freud had used two terms, "Instinkt" and "Trieb," in different ways — yet both were translated in the *Standard Edition* by a single word: "instinct." Freud failed to explain the various usages properly, which justified the amalgamation by translators. More controversially, it opened the way for Lacan to go to the other extreme and state categorically — but erroneously — that Freud had never used the term "instinct." Like it or not, a significant difference between "Instinkt" (instinct) and "Trieb" (drive) was apparent in the original German editions. According to Laplanche, "it has been insufficiently noted that the term Instinkt is used to designate something entirely different from what is described elsewhere as sexuality."  

The recognition of a conceptual distinction between "Instinkt" (instinct) and "Trieb" (drive), allied with the insistence that "drive" cannot be reduced to "instinct," has subsequently become a fundamental trope of "French Freud" — crucial for maintaining the argument that French readings reflect an "anti-biological" understanding of the psyche. But the central argument of this thesis, related to what was discussed above

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84 See, for example, Laplanche, *Sexual*, p. 32.
concerning Lacan’s attachment to “medicine,” is that the difference between instinct and drive is only relevant if one wants to remain faithful to the philosophical problematic of person – “what is man/woman?” Conforming to this problematic immediately diminishes any vast “exception” of French psychoanalysis because, in both cases, instinct or drive, one is dealing with forces deriving, ultimately, from the body.

In contrast to this and other “generations” of psychoanalysts, Foucault does not propagate any theory of, either, “instincts” or “drives,” because to enter into these debates is to remain subservient to terms already set by medical psychology. Foucault proposes instead an ontology of culture – a problematic found in no other science or discipline. What is thus important for the (Foucauldian) genealogist is how one defines “culture” if certain psychoanalytic concepts, such as the “unconscious,” and “sexuality,” are acknowledged to be valid.

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Meanwhile, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, political tensions mounted in the wings of the Société française de psychanalyse and overshadowed these theoretical concerns. The members of the Société did not realize at first that the 1953 “scission” would doom them to isolation on the international scene. They made several attempts during these years, unsuccessfully, to be admitted to the international body as an autonomous group; the main stumbling block was the refusal to grant certain members the status of “trainer” of other analysts. Lacan was the main target. This impasse eventually split the Société between those who accepted the international ruling and those who gathered around Lacan.
The former group became the *Association Psychanalytique de France (A.P.F.*) and affiliated itself with the International organization in 1965. The members of the new group included Laplanche, Lagache, Pontalis and Didier Anzieu.\(^{87}\) Laplanche, however, never displayed any hostility towards Lacan (nor vice versa), and always remained interested in the latter’s teachings.\(^{88}\) The *Association* was responsible for publishing the most prestigious psychoanalytic journals: *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, in existence since 1970; and *Psychanalyse à l’Université*, launched in 1975 and discontinued in 1994.\(^{89}\) Neither was or is the direct product of the *Association*: the journals refuse to confine themselves too narrowly to psychoanalysis and have a reputation for openness to all approaches.\(^{90}\) Many analysts of this association are university academics.

On the other side of the cleavage, Lacan founded the *École Freudienne de Paris*.\(^{91}\) With the institutional support of intellectuals outside of the psychoanalytic movement, Lacan was appointed lecturer at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in 1964. This enabled him to deliver seminars in the Dussane room at the famous *École Normale Supérieure* (otherwise known as “rue d’Ulm”) until 1969.\(^{92}\) Louis Althusser chose this juncture to argue in favour of Lacan, suggesting that the latter’s struggle against “humanism and psychologism” made Lacanian psychoanalysis an indispensable addition to Marxism.\(^{93}\) Althusser’s intervention was important because, previously, the

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\(^{88}\) As Laplanche reports it: “I became more distanced from Lacan as I disagreed with some of his thought and practice. I was in analysis with him for a long time, in fact up to 1963, at the time of the schism. ... He has never said anything to harm me, and I have never said anything to harm him,” Laplanche, “Jean Laplanche,” *Free Associations*, p. 326.


\(^{92}\) According to Dosse: “This institutional link allowed him to broaden his public considerably and, thanks to the philosophers, he found himself in an important strategic position on the intellectual playing field,” Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, p. 240.

French Communist Party had regarded psychoanalysis as little more than a joke – with or without the "unconscious," preferably without.\(^94\) Althusser's role has a further significance, for his interest in the history and philosophy of science led him to chose psychoanalysis as the main teaching topic for his philosophy classes of 1964. He encouraged one of his students in particular, Jacques-Alain Miller, who had just finished his philosophy degree, to read Lacan and present an *exposé* for others.\(^95\) Spending three months on this task in the winter of 1963, Miller was hooked. The effect was to be mutual: Lacan only began to realize his positive influence as a "teacher" after the interest shown by Miller and other "gars" [boys] from the *École normale*.\(^96\)

Lacan's seminar series of 1964 began with the prologue: "Excommunication." After thanking individuals whose valuable support had enabled him to continue his teaching, Lacan claimed he was the target of a "censure" from the "Executive Committee" of the international body of psychoanalysts.\(^97\) People in London were even trying to entice members of the alternative French *Association*, currently skiing in the Alps, to come over and "discuss ways of warding off the effects" of his teaching.\(^98\) Well, let them try. This was the period when Lacan's audience and power "increased year after year," only dying down in the mid-1970s. The listeners numbered in their several hundreds,

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\(^95\) It is important to point out that, at this stage, Lacan's writings were scattered in various journals. According to Miller: "My understanding of Lacan is based on what I did in those three months, from those writings, without any seminars, without having ever listened to Lacan, without having ever seen him," Miller, *Entretien*, p. 36.

\(^96\) Miller, *Entretien*, p. 46.


and included well-known Parisian intellectuals as well as psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. It was necessary to arrive one or two hours before the commencement of the seminar to have a reasonable chance “to get through the door” – forget seats. Excerpts from the seminars, in addition to lectures he delivered at conferences going back to the 1930s, formed the basis of the monumental Écrits of 1966 – Lacan’s only “book.” The title was ironic, as one reviewer noticed, because Lacan’s medium of communication was almost exclusively speech. Now with the appearance of Écrits, one could approach Lacan’s teachings beyond the “Socratic form” of Dits that he had inadvertently established. Moreover, from 1964 onwards, the nature of Lacan’s seminars changed. He no longer focussed on a particular text of Freud, preferring to base his talks on concepts of his own creation, none of which could be found, strictly speaking, “in Freud’s work.”

During this seminar series, Lacan returned to the “four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis”: “the unconscious, repetition, the transference and the drive.” Lacan structured his discourse around the question of whether psychoanalysis could be classed as a “science.” Contemptuous of “behaviourism,” Lacan was equally adamant that “hermeneutics” in no way captured Freud’s work, despite the chimerical common interest in “interpretation.” Paul Ricoeur’s study of Freud created a stir when it appeared in 1965, for he argued, in direct opposition to Lacan, that Freudian psychoanalysis was a method of “interpretation” not compatible with the premises of

100 Chapsal, Envoyez la petite musique..., p. 31.
103 Miller, “Context and Concepts,” Reading Seminar XI, p. 8. According to Miller, Freud’s texts cropped up, but, henceforth, “Lacan does not build his whole seminar around one of Freud’s articles or books.”
"structuralism." For Lacan, access to "desire" placed psychoanalysis in a unique position vis-a-vis all other systems of knowledge – both behaviourism and hermeneutics were inadequate. Rather than model itself according to the "science" or "religion" of others, psychoanalysis may instead "enlighten us as to what we should understand by science, and even by religion."107

The problem of science was sparked not only by Lacan's own "unqualified" status, but also by the burning effort in neighbouring quarters to prove that Marx's discourse was "scientific" – a heated issue in French intellectual life at that time.108 Foucault would pour water over it later with the argument that power gets its power from truth, not ideology, so it is surely necessary to question ourselves about "the kind of power that is presumed to accompany such a science." ("TL," p. 84; SMD, p. 10.) In contrast to some psychoanalysts and many Marxists, Foucault was not fazed by the taint of "non-science" or "philosophy." On the contrary, he inevitably demands the unconscious and sexuality back from science, and reinvigorates philosophy as a result. In the lecture series entitled Society Must be Defended delivered in the winter of 1975-1976, Foucault


described genealogical researches as those which draw attention to “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory,” if anything, they are “precisely anti-sciences.” (“TL,” p. 83; SMD, p. 9).

But this was not the fashionable position in France in the mid-1960s. Indeed, an important off-shoot of Lacan’s teachings at this time was Miller’s determination to expand the linguistic model into a wider logical science of the “concept.” Due to the Lacanian inflection, a group of students including Miller, known as the *Cercle d’Epistémologie*, defined themselves as going beyond both Georges Canguilhem’s historical epistemology and Althusser’s narrow focus on Marx. The group published their own journal, *Cahiers pour l’Analyse*. In the first issue in 1966, Miller described the “logic of the signifier” as that which could dissociate the signifier from “linguistics” as such and “prepare the way for it importation into other discourses.”

Based on Lacan’s 1964 seminar, Miller seemed to suggest that psychoanalysis was able to dissect the very nature of “science” and therefore prescribe its conditions of its existence. The relationship between political power and science remained vague. The group did attempt to come to terms with Foucault’s work, however, and it was in response to their questions that Foucault produced *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

During this period, Lacan scoffed at his earlier efforts to confine psychoanalysis within linguistics. In 1965, he referred to his “eternal repugnance” for the appellation “human

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110 The ninth issue of *Cahiers pour l’Analyse* was devoted to the “genealogy of science.” It included questions put to Foucault about his archaeological method as well as the philosopher’s responses. See *Cahiers pour l’Analyse*, 9 (Summer, 1968) [Généalogie des sciences].

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sciences,” which now represented for him the very calling to “servitude.” He declared: “There is no science of man because the man of science does not exist, only its subject does.” (É, p. 859). By 1970, Lacan preferred to speak of “discourses,” introducing his intriguing “four discourses” as the centrepiece of his seminar of 1969-1970, entitled L’envers de la psychanalyse [The other side of psychoanalysis].

According to Jean Allouch, Lacan’s move was in direct response to Foucault’s work, especially the paper delivered at a conference organized by the Société française de philosophie in 1969, and known in English as “What is an author?” Accepting leadership from someone like Foucault, exterior to the “inner sanctum” of psychoanalysis, had “never been seen before,” according to Allouch. It indicated the shared critical approach common to both Foucault and Lacan.

But as will be explicated later, Lacan’s conception of “discourses” was still trapped within a network of “desire” derived essentially from a medical ontology of the person. It cannot therefore be equated with Foucault’s ontology of Western culture. Foucault’s object of analysis was not language, or even “discourse,” so much as “the archive,” which he described on one occasion as the “accumulated existence of discourses.” Moreover, he always insisted that these discourses were “events” in their own right.

Linguistics offered no model in this respect, quite the contrary:

I have never been particularly attracted by the formal possibilities offered by linguistics. Personally, I have been haunted, rather, by the existence of discourses, by the fact that words have taken place. These events have

112 The four discourses referred to the discourse of the master, the university, the hysteric and the (psycho)analyst. See Lacan, Séminaire XVII, L’Envers, pp. 9-24 for the introduction.
113 Michel Foucault [1969], “Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?” [Conference and debate with M. de Gandillac and others], DE, I, pp. 789-821.
114 Allouch, Réponse à Michel Foucault, p. 6.
functioned in relation to their original historical situation, they have left traces behind them, they subsist and exert a certain number of manifest or secret functions in this very subsistence inside of history. (DE, I, p. 595).

So, while Foucault would agree with Lacan’s assessment that “Freud’s unconscious is not at all the romantic unconscious of imaginative creation,”\(^\text{116}\) he would disagree strongly on the question of universal signifiers and repudiate utterly the claims to scientific status based on this. Besides, in rejecting “science,” this did not mean Lacan was now ready to warm towards “philosophy” instead. On the contrary, he stated that his concept of structure had “nothing to do with philosophy” and nor could he said to be “doing” philosophy: the psychoanalyst was not in the business of engaging in dialogues of “wisdom” with the philosopher.\(^\text{117}\) His favoured label was always “clinician,” or “doctor,” precisely to distance psychoanalysis from philosophy, as seen above. Foucault, on the other hand, would prefer to widen the category of “philosophy” so it now includes activities such as sexual ethics, the modern manifestations of which remained implicitly or explicitly subservient to “scientific” concepts (“drives, “development” as so on) – Lacanian psychoanalysis and its offshoots being prime examples of this tendency.

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As a final discussion point for this chapter, Lacan’s impact on the surrounding intellectual milieu will be examined briefly. By believing that the analysis of sexuality could cope without Freud, Foucault was swimming against a strong current, for the pro-Freudian posture in France extended well beyond psychoanalysis proper. Philippe Sollers is a good example. As a writer and founder of the influential journal Tel Quel in


1960, Sollers was at the centre of intellectual life in France during the 1960s and 1970s\(^{118}\) – even prepared to put his body on the line in 1969 to defend Lacan’s right to deliver his seminars at the *École Normale Supérieure*.\(^{119}\) Sollers was also a promoter of the “Marx-Freud” syntheses common at that time, a methodological principle Foucault adamantly rejected.\(^{120}\) During five popular radio conversations with the philosopher and journalist Maurice Clavel, broadcast in July 1976,\(^ {121}\) Sollers claimed that psychoanalysis was without question a discourse of liberation on a par with Marxism.\(^ {122}\)

Sollers stressed, though, that he was not talking about American “ego psychology,” any more than “Stalinism.” France in the 1970s was caught between the “plague” that was Soviet-style Marxism and the “cholera” of American-style psychoanalysis – the latter being an “insipid” form of Freudian psychoanalysis “absolutely deprived of its truth.”\(^ {123}\) And to be crystal clear, Clavel quickly intercepted Sollers to remind their listeners that this “normalised” and “normalising” version of psychoanalysis “applied in the United States” was precisely the form that Jacques Lacan in France reacted against “soundly and vigorously.”\(^ {124}\)

In 1979, Sollers was again admiring Freud,\(^ {125}\) arguing that no other ideology, doctrine or institution could claim to have a more pristine political pedigree than psychoanalysis, having seen out all the horrors of the twentieth century with an attitude as

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\(^{118}\) Amongst other intellectual encounters with Sollers, Foucault wrote an analysis of the “new novel.” See Michel Foucault [1963], “Distance, aspect, origine,” *DE*, I, pp. 272-285.


\(^{120}\) One of the reasons to celebrate the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, Foucault claimed, was that he resisted this fashionable temptation to combine Marx and Freud. See Michel Foucault [1970], “Theatrum Philosophicum,” trans. by Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 165-196. [« Theatrum Philosophicum », *DE*, II, pp. 75-99].

\(^{121}\) Luckily, due to public demand, these conversations were published; they give invaluable insight into the critical issues of the day: Maurice Clavel and Philippe Sollers, *Délivrance: Face à face* (Paris, 1977).


\(^{123}\) Sollers, *Délivrance*, p. 27.

\(^{124}\) Clavel, *Délivrance*, p. 27.

uncompromising towards Nazism, Stalinism and all forms of religion as these had been derogatory towards it. Critical appraisals had only reinforced its prestige and showed just how pervasive Lacanian thought had become. For Foucault, this view ignores an issue that will be made prominent in this thesis: the proper epistemological history linking psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

The dominance psychoanalysis enjoyed in the area of sexuality is seen also by its capacity to shake off feminist criticism – or absorb it. Feminists had generally regarded psychoanalysis as a conservative force against women, a view initiated by Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s and taken up in 1963 by Betty Friedan, an early leader in the women’s liberation movements in the United States. But, beginning in the 1970s, France led the way in overturning this negative view of Freud. Feminist activists such as Antoinette Fouque, central to the *Psych et Po* movement (“Psychoanalysis and Politics”), wholeheartedly supported Lacan even though she was critical of his uncompromising endorsement of Freud’s position on difference and his effacement of the maternal body.

In an Althusserian vein, Fouque saw psychoanalysis as a crucial adjunct to Marxism, where the notion of ideology could be extended into the area of sexuality; once women analysts became more involved in building the theory, its radical evolution would be

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128 On this point, see especially Michel Foucault [1974], “Folie, une question de pouvoir” [interview with S.H.V. Rodrigues], *DE*, II, pp. 660-664, p. 662.
129 This was the dominant view Juliet Mitchell struggled against in her decisive text *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*: “Psychoanalysis is seen [by feminists] as a justification for the status-quo, bourgeois and patriarchal, and Freud in his own person exemplifies these qualities. I would agree that popularised Freudianism must answer to this description; but the argument of this book is that a rejection of psychoanalysis and of Freud’s work is fatal for feminism.” Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. XV.
complete. Juliet Mitchell supported this position but always had her doubts about *Psych et Po*,¹³¹ and never placed much faith in the amalgamation between Freud and Marx: “Although both struggles have to take place on the political level, the two situations do not have parity.”¹³² For Mitchell, those feminists who oppose Freud and argue for an isomorphism between the body and its forms of sexual expression, no matter from what inspiration, merely repeat earlier biological explanations of sexual difference from the 1920s and 1930s¹³³ and trivialize women’s oppression. Moreover, their conception of “ideology” suffers if the unconscious is reduced in any way to sensations derived from already-gendered bodily forms; it becomes identical to Wilhelm Reich’s “pool of instincts.”¹³⁴ In contrast to Mitchell’s reading of Freud, theorists of femininity in Anglo-American academic contexts turned either to Melanie Klein and “mothering theory,”¹³⁵ or to other post-Lacanian theorists equally soothing to feminist sensibilities, Luce Irigaray foremost amongst them.¹³⁶ Through various articles and essays attacking Lacan, beginning in 1974,¹³⁷ Irigaray became the primary advocate of “difference” in all its feminine guises.¹³⁸ As noted in the case of Kristeva, femininity in these formulations is conceived as irreducibly separate from masculinity.

¹³³ In Mitchell’s description, “To [Ernest] Jones and [Karen] Horney there is an innate biological disposition to femininity which expresses itself in females (and is only secondarily disturbed by society): the woman and the man are created in nature. To Freud society demands of the psychological bisexuality of both sexes that one sex attain a preponderance of femininity, the other of masculinity: man and woman are made in culture,” Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 131.
¹³⁵ For a critical discussion of this tradition see Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault*, 49-66.
However, unlike Foucault, none of these women analysts—whether Fouque, Mitchell, Kristeva or Irigaray—ever questioned the concept of “sex” at the heart of their treasured “sexual difference.” Nor did they have cause to upset the pre-eminent position enjoyed by psychoanalysis in the pyramidal hierarchy of what Foucault called “discourses on sex,” doubtless because they actually benefited from it. Freud was still the leader for these traditions of feminism; the task was to develop the ideas further, or construct a feminine version of its theory and accompanying therapy. As will be explicated in later chapters, Foucault has an entirely original reading of Freud’s place in the history of science, completely ignored by feminists, which changes the shape of the “pyramid” and the meaning of the concepts within it. The failings of psychoanalysis cannot therefore be attributed solely to its “phallocentrism,” although Foucault acknowledged briefly on one occasion that this critique was important.\(^{139}\)

On a political plane, women analysts had little to say about the relationship between feminism and male homosexuality. Yet, while Freud encouraged the recruitment of women from the very beginning, against some colleagues,\(^ {140}\) and Lacan almost wept with exasperation that women analysts were still too coy on the subject of feminine heterosexuality,\(^ {141}\) the same welcome mat was not extended to gays and lesbians. These individuals had been banned from practising psychoanalysis until very recently, and France was no exception in this regard.\(^ {142}\) This history gives weight to Foucault’s


defiant position: “Why this holy credulity that insists on denying that psychoanalysis has anything to do with normalisation?”

As for psychoanalysts who attended Lacan’s seminars, certain of them, André Green for example, were not members of Lacan’s school, nor the alternative group — “I had friends on both sides of that controversy” — but preferred to dismiss raised eyebrows and juggle loyalty to the orthodox organization founded in 1926 with active enthusiasm for Lacan and his theories. Trained as a psychiatrist while studying the family environment of schizophrenics, Green met Lacan in 1953, and began attending the seminars regularly after 1960, collaborating with him until 1967. He claimed his relationship with Lacan was a privileged one: “I was close to him ... and at the same time totally free because I belonged to a different association.” In the view of François Roustang, also a one-time disciple, what was offered by Lacan was a rare and original mixture “of philosophy, mathematics, linguistics, ethnology, theology” — fields of knowledge “often boring” on their own, but taking on a completely different and exciting complexion when “reworked under the banner of a rejuvenated psychoanalysis, which seemed to respond to questions most current and pressing.”

144 André Green, “Against Lacanianism: A conversation of André Green and Sergio Benvenuto,” Journal of European Psychoanalysis, 2 (Fall, 1995-Winter, 1996), JEP Articles, retrieved 01/10/08.
145 Green, “Against Lacanianism,” JEP Articles, p. 7.
146 François Roustang, “L’Illusion Lacanienne,” Critique, 456 (May, 1985), pp. 470-477, p. 473. He continues: “Nothing like it had ever been heard before, and if you didn’t understand much about the synthesis Lacan was offering, you had the conviction that he, at least, held onto all the threads of knowledge at the same time, and that you would sooner or later participate in this understanding if you took the trouble to listen to him and study his speeches.” Roustang was a former Jesuit priest and a disciple of Lacan’s until the mid 1970s. See Patron, Critique: Une encyclopédie, p. 171; Dosse, History of Structuralism, p. 117.
However, as has been well documented, Green, Roustang and many other solid “ambassadors” of Freudian thought were eventually alienated by Lacan’s style. In the years after Lacan’s death, there were as many as fifteen different organizations in France, all professing orthodox allegiance to Freud.\textsuperscript{148} Essential to Laplanche’s alternative psychoanalysis, and quite different to Lacan, is the view that post-Freudians cannot be blamed for a betrayal Freud himself committed: a \textit{fourvoiement biologisant} [biologicizing tendency], a misguided straying into biological terrain, like a toddler who cannot help wandering off from its carer’s side. In an important essay, Laplanche interrogates Freud’s dubious comparison of himself with Copernicus and Darwin, and comes up with a distinctive reading of the whole Freudian moment.\textsuperscript{149} Psychoanalysis has a double history of innovation and going-astray: “a sort of braid in which at times one strand of the plait lies uppermost, at times the other.”\textsuperscript{150}

In the decade following 1900, says Laplanche, “psychoanalysis underwent a change which was as important as it was disastrous, with the appearance of reading codes whose names are symbolism and typicality.”\textsuperscript{151} The process began with the idea of “typical dreams,” whereby the manifest content of any dream came to correspond to “quasi-universal” scenarios. Subsequently, “the great schemas of the typical ensue – the great complexes, foremost among them the castration complex.”\textsuperscript{152} For Laplanche, this detracted from the “strictly individual method” of psychoanalytic investigation, where the analytic encounter is not a matter of deciphering meaning, but of \textit{de-}

\textsuperscript{148} Marini, Jacques Lacan, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{151} Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics,” \textit{Radical Philosophy,} p. 8.
\textsuperscript{152} Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics,” \textit{Radical Philosophy,} p. 10.
constructing a particular subject’s constructions; what Laplanche calls “de-translating.” 153 Freud’s discovery was therefore “masked, concealed, by the return of synthesis, of ‘reading’, of hermeneutics.”

Other critical assessments of Lacan’s psychoanalysis see it as too focussed on “language” or “theory” to the detriment of the “patient” relationship. 154 A consensus has also developed around the criticism that when Lacan spoke of the “unconscious” as “structured like a language,” he was too influenced by Lévi-Strauss and erroneously attributed the mechanisms of what psychoanalysts call the “secondary processes” to that of the unconscious as a whole. 155 The distinction between primary and secondary processes will be interrogated critically in chapter five. Another view suggests that Lacan’s fame was the result of contingent circumstances and not to any original re-working of Freud. In this vein, André Green warned against seeing flourishing gender departments in universities around the world as a sign of acceptance of Freud’s theories; Lacan only became popular internationally because he watered down the “shocking aspects of psychoanalysis” by his linguistic turn; intellectuals are always “deeply offended when psychoanalysis tells them that they are indelibly marked by their childhood obsessions, their bodily and animal-like instincts.” 156

Be that as it may, it will be argued throughout this thesis that however “linguistic” Lacan’s move may have been portrayed, he continued to enlist a non-ethnographic conception of the unconscious in harmony with a medical view of sexuality. Post-

153 Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics,” Radical Philosophy, p. 10.
155 See Dosse, History of Structuralism, pp. 116-118.
156 Green, “Against Lacanianism,” JEP Articles, p. 7.
Lacanian analysts remain confined to psychoanalytic conceptions of the unconscious and sexuality. In the following chapters, every opportunity to contrast Lacan with fellow psychoanalysts (Laplanche, Green, and so on) and with Foucault will be endeavoured, arguing that only the latter offers an ethnographic unconscious beyond the individual and his or her "drives," and a historical "sexuality" able to be transformed into an ethical discourse of "bodies and pleasures." An ontology of culture – not a metaphysics of the person. Let us begin by examining an anti-Oedipal current in French thought contemporaneous with Lacan – and with which Foucault unequivocally identified.
Chapter Three

*Oedipus Complicated:*
*The Other Side of French Freud*

The account just presented showed psychoanalysis as a formidable force in French intellectual life from the 1950s onwards, due mainly to the personality and teachings of Jacques Lacan. But it would be wrong to assume that the Freudians had it all their own way during these years. Resistance was not unknown on French soil and, besides, anti-Freudians could always find plenty of support across the channel: Ludwig Wittgenstein had long deemed the unconscious a "myth" and nobody in the Anglo-American philosophical traditions really bothered to challenge him.¹

This chapter will attempt therefore to trace an “anti-Oedipus” axis contemporaneous with French Freud. One of the ways “sexuality” became established in psychoanalysis was through Freud’s pronouncements about the “eternal” themes in the ancient Greek play *Oedipus the King*. But due to a general focus on myth during this period, personified by Claude Lévi-Strauss, various scholars began to question the standard psychoanalytic interpretation of the tragedy and, by implication, the Freudian account of human sexuality that goes with it. These culturalist stirrings behind the psychoanalytic scenes had little power to dislodge the Oedipus complex from the centre stage of French

Freud. Through the interventions of André Green most notably, who will feature in this chapter, Freud’s Oedipus resisted calls to bow out gracefully. But the interrogation of Oedipus no doubt informed a “cultural” reading of sexuality and civilization pursued by Lacan and his followers in this period, producing analyses of texts like Hamlet in far more detail than Freud had provided, and now in terms of the subject of desire (we will return to this topic in chapter six).

The culturalist posture is also vital, of course, for understanding the trajectory that would eventually lead to Foucault’s La volonté de savoir. In a series of five lectures delivered in Brazil in 1973 under the general theme of “Psychiatry and anti-psychiatry,” Foucault too presented a re-interpretation of Oedipus the King. By detailing Foucault’s account towards the end of this chapter, we aim to achieve two objectives relating to his methodological approach. First, our reading demonstrates his distance from “French Freud.” If Sartre and Lacan were “alternate contemporaries” throughout their careers as Élisabeth Roudinesco identifies, Foucault was something else again. By situating Oedipus firmly on the ethnographic stage of Western culture, neither Lacan nor Sartre could be called upon as role models. Rather, Foucault was more likely to find echoes in the “historical anthropology” of specialists like Jean-Pierre Vernant and George Dumézil, both of whom, like Foucault, found themselves related to Lévi-Strauss’s “structuralism” – more by arranged marriage than by blood.


3 Michel Foucault [1974], “La vérité et les formes juridiques” [conference held at the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, May 1973, discussion with M.T. Amaral and others], DE, II, pp. 538-646. The five lectures have been translated into English, but the long and fascinating discussion that followed is unfortunately omitted. See Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, vol. 3, trans Robert Hurley and others, ed. J.D. Faubion (New York, 2000), pp. 1-89, hereafter abbreviated “TJF.” For the purpose of explicating Foucault’s account, reference to the English version will be used, while reference to the French discussion will be footnoted.

Secondly, Foucault's Brazil lectures are an important part of his reformulation of the notion of power—a topic that, although important, was treated in the standard political way by both "historical anthropologists," and psychoanalysts like Green. We will see the beginnings of Foucault's retheorization of power: Foucault invokes Nietzsche as a radical alternative within the history of philosophy, enabling power to be related to the history of truth rituals in the West. In this respect, the analysis could be called "genealogical," since Foucault treats the "inquiry" as a movement over many centuries beyond the Greek landscape. This combination of methodologies—historical anthropology (often labelled "structuralist"), plus Nietzsche—positions Foucault more accurately against French Freud. Before tackling the saga of Oedipus, however, let us examine briefly other anti-Oedipal forces in this French context.

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As previously stated, fundamental to Foucault's critique was the view that French reformulations had not shifted the Freudian unconscious from its bio-medical bearings. One source essential to this opposition was Georges Bataille, an "anti-Oedipal" figure whose importance for Foucault's trajectory and career cannot be underestimated. At the very least, the journal Bataille founded in 1947, Critique, would enrol Foucault as part of the editorial board after Bataille's death in 1962. The journal is sometimes viewed as the "cultural" alternative to Les Temps Modernes. Furthermore, unlike Les Temps Modernes, Critique always had a reputation, rightly or wrongly, for being hostile

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5 As one example of many references, Foucault claimed he read Nietzsche "because of Bataille, and Bataille because of Blanchot." See Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p. 24. [ « Structuralisme et poststructuralisme », DE, IV, p. 437].
7 Patron, Critique: Une encyclopédie, p. 29.
to psychoanalysis— even though it regularly published articles by psychoanalysts such as André Green, as well as two major pieces by Jacques Lacan.

Bataille’s study reflects this hostility by quietly ignoring psychoanalysis. First published in 1957, Bataille’s *Eroticism* explicitly sought to create a “subjective” space at odds with approaches such as Freud’s. For Bataille, eroticism was an “inner experience,” analogous to religion. Instead of seeing it as the most animal of all expressions, as the “scientists” do, Bataille claims it is actually what separates humans and animals most deeply. No matter how degraded history has made “man” – slavery for example – a human is never an object to another human in the way an animal or a thing is an object. Eroticism cannot therefore be captured by “objective” criteria: “the scientist speaks from outside, like an anatomist busy on the brain.”

The Kinsey Report on male sexuality in the United States, first published in the late 1940s, represented this attitude pushed to ridiculous lengths, Bataille complained, where “numbers, measurements, classifications according to age and colour of the eyes,” combined with “statistics, weekly frequencies, averages,” nevertheless failed dismally to capture what was essential about sexual life: “These mechanical classifications, usually applied to things like tons of steel or copper, are profoundly incompatible with the realities of inner life.”

Bataille’s distinct brand of opposition to scientific imperialism in the area of sexuality would find an echo later in Foucault. However, Bataille also expressed a fairly standard

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9 *Patron, Critique: Une encyclopédie*, p. 414; psychoanalysis is discussed on pp. 168-172.
view of the history of sexuality that Foucault would come to dispute. Writing in 1948, Bataille argued that the so-called “sexual revolution” produced by World War II, given numerical evidence by the Kinsey Report in the case of white males at least (and Bataille points to this nuance himself), was not actually felt as such by men of his generation, and was more accurately seen as a modest “recuperation of a domain recently lost.”\(^{13}\) The “licence” of the Elizabethan theatre of the sixteenth century was well-known, he said. It was only under the “dominant influence of the bourgeoisie” that an “asexual, prudish, arrogant world” was installed, encapsulated by the word “Victorian.”\(^ {14}\) He insists that this prudishness did not arise from Christianity, contrary to common preconceptions, because the medieval period had never known a denial of the body in this way, “even within churches themselves.” Rather, an economy devoted to the accumulation of wealth had put an end to “the festivities and exuberance of medieval life” and produced a negation instead.\(^ {15}\)

This view will be repeated later in slightly different tones by other cultural theorists – Norbert Elias and Jos Van Ussel – and formed the basis of Foucault’s rejection of the repressive hypothesis. Moreover, again like Elias and Van Ussel, Bataille assumed that eroticism necessarily housed a secret truth about human existence; he therefore accorded Freud the usual place in this history. What characterised today’s “sexual revolution,” Bataille said, or at least relative openness compared to earlier decades in the century (more liberal dress standards, for example), was a liberation not only in body, but in the “mind that reflects on the body.” Sade was certainly important in his


own time, but “Freud, and the epoque he lived in,” which Proust also gives evidence of, has accomplished “a clear conscience towards sexual liberty as object.”\textsuperscript{16} The term “sexual revolution,” then, refers not so much to a “wave of debauchery,” as the “recognition ... of a fundamental truth of mankind.”

Bataille was thus no exception when it came to paying Freud his rightful dues in the Western history of the relationship between truth and sex. When questioned in 1977 by Jacques-Alain Miller on whether the evaluation of psychoanalysis presented in \textit{La volonté de savoir} “is only conceivable in the French context,” and therefore not relevant elsewhere, Foucault turns the implication back on itself, revealing French intellectuals as, in general, too hypnotized by Freud’s “sexuality”:

> It’s true that there are countries where, owing to the way the cultural domain is institutionalised and functions, discourses on sex don’t perhaps have that position of subordination, derivation and fascination \textit{vis-à-vis} psychoanalysis which they have here in France, where the intelligentsia, because of its place in the pyramidal hierarchy of values, accords psychoanalysis a privileged position that no-one can escape, not even Méné Grégoire. ("CF," p. 219).\textsuperscript{17}

On an earlier occasion, Foucault was asked to comment on the “prevalence” of psychoanalysis in France, and here, too, he referred to the submissive attitude displayed by French intellectuals towards the claims of psychoanalytic knowledge. Whoever was in the process of writing a book on any subject whatsoever while not simultaneously “chatting” to their psychoanalyst – well, these frauds had “no place on the Parisian scene.” (\textit{DE}, II, p. 777). He had succumbed to the trend himself on two separate occasions, undergoing “the most traditional Freudian-style analysis” possible – giving up both times through “complete boredom.” (\textit{DE}, II, pp. 776-777).


\textsuperscript{17} According to Colin Gordon’s note, Méné Grégoire was a “celebrated family agony-columnist on French radio” at that time. ("CF," p. 228).

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In Foucault’s view, it was only after the publication of *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in 1972 that “sanity” was restored to the French scene. (*DE*, II, p. 777). Deleuze and Guattari argued that, while Freud made the “great discovery” of desire as production, he and subsequent psychoanalysts covered over the potentially threatening implications of “desiring production” with the ordered story of eternal Oedipus: “mummy, daddy, me.” The proper model for the unconscious is not a theatre, but a *factory*, because “desire is part of the infrastructure.” Until the unconscious was cleansed of Oedipus, proper analysis was not possible, they asserted. For this to happen, bodily organs, usually classified as part of the “natural world,” should be brought into the domain of the production process – following Marx’s objection to the false division between nature and industry. In this, Deleuze and Guattari claim to be returning to the real, original, and *materialist* conception of the unconscious that erupted brutally in the social conditions of *fin de siècle* European society:

> [O]nce Oedipus entered the picture, this discovery [of the materialist unconscious] was soon buried beneath a new brand of idealism: a classical theatre was substituted for the unconscious as a factory; representation was substituted for the units of production of the unconscious; and an unconscious that was capable of nothing but expressing itself – in myth, tragedy, dreams – was substituted for the productive unconscious.

So, never mind cosy “normalization;” Deleuze and Guattari portrayed psychoanalysis as a force of power allied to “cops”: “Oedipus is one of those things that becomes all the more dangerous the less people believe in it; then the cops are there to replace the high

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priests." That Lacan and his school were "developing another conception of psychoanalysis," does not mean taking no notice of "the dominant tone in most respected associations." After all, the analyst was perfectly within his or her rights to call on "the asylum" or "the police" for help with those recalcitrants who cannot be made to fit into the Oedipal triangle.

As Foucault presents it, no intellectual had dared to make claims so radically at odds with the dominant view that psychoanalysis was an "instrument of liberation" – no doubt "imperfect" and certainly "incomplete," but nevertheless on the side of emancipation. (DE, II, p. 779). Perhaps emboldened by Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault upped the ante of his own anti-Oedipal comments. Speaking for a Brazilian publication in 1974, Foucault reported on his current research aimed at establishing the relationship between nineteenth-century psychiatry and psychoanalysis. (DE, II, pp. 661). He went on to make the point that internment was still today the overwhelming solution for the vast majority of mental patients; psychoanalysts were content to "co-exist" with this oppressive system, when they knew very well that only a tiny section of society, the most "intellectual and cultivated" at that, had access to analysis. (DE, II, p. 662). Later, in the preface to the English translation published in 1977, Foucault contended that Anti-Oedipus was "the first book of ethics to be written in France in quite a long time." By this statement, he meant that Anti-Oedipus represented something beyond the content of the book, demanding change in the treatment of oppressed groups of all kinds. Being anti-Oedipal was "a life style, a way of thinking and living."  

21 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. 81.  
22 Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. 81.  
However, *Anti-Oedipus* did not address questions of sexuality, power and inherited pre-conceptions of the body in the way that feminists and Foucault himself would go on to do. Substituting a factory and productive units for the “theatre” and actors is no less “bourgeois” than Freud; it is simply the left wing of the same stage. André Green was one of the very few psychoanalysts to dispute the arguments of Deleuze and Guattari and he made a similar point. Green contended that the authors were not so much anti-Oedipus as *ante*-Oedipus. Deleuze and Guattari were resurrecting the Freud of the *Project for a scientific psychology* of 1895 and therefore ignoring Freud’s own contestation with that psycho-biological model in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of 1900. As such, they resembled those socialists attracted to the “primitive communism” of young Marx before the mature Marx problematised these views in *Capital.*

A central point related to the argument of this thesis is that vitalist and phenomenological critiques of psychoanalysis merely privilege a body somehow divorced from foreign “representation” as the basis of their true “subjects.” But the unconscious returns to bodily derivations, and this is not at all Foucault’s response to psychoanalysis. It will be argued in the following chapter that Foucault’s take-up of the unconscious follows a “logical” understanding quite different to Deleuze and Guattari, and that Foucault re-formulated the concept further as an ethnographic force in its own right – transindividual and more like a vast archive, external and ontologically prior to the body. Furthermore, it is not quite true that no intellectual had dared to challenge psychoanalysis before this time – even leaving aside existentialist critiques from Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir (to be touched on in the following chapter), and without going into the complexities of literary accounts of eroticism like those of

Bataille. Let us now explore the main “anti-Oedipal” focus for this chapter: a line of resistant points including Foucault that all challenged the Freudian interpretation of *Oedipus the King.*

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In 1955, Claude Lévi-Strauss published a paper entitled “The Structural Study of Myth” where he dutifully incorporated the content of Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* into his world symphony of mythical elements. Lévi-Strauss first rose to prominence with his anti-travelogue, *Tristes Tropiques,* also of 1955. It opened with the line least expected of an ethnographer: “I hate travelling and explorers.” Although not a bestseller (at least, not at first), it was immediately acclaimed from all quarters of the French intellectual stage. Georges Bataille, in particular, congratulated Lévi-Strauss for establishing a new rapport between *écriture* and science — merging, as it did, autobiography, ethnology, history, journalism and philosophy.

Crucial to Lévi-Strauss’ approach was the notion of the “unconscious.” But, although he valued Freud highly, Lévi-Strauss had been inclined to mock psychoanalytic practice. Mere intellectual snobbery, he claimed, prevented psychoanalysts from seeing that “abreaction” (or “catharsis”) is the same process as the shamanistic cure

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practised every day in non-industrial societies: “In both cases the purpose is to bring to a conscious level conflicts and resistances which have remained unconscious.” More generally, Lévi-Strauss considered Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* an unacceptable hangover of the kinds of evolutionist anthropology it was imperative to repudiate – after all, the subtitle of *Totem and Taboo* was “Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Life of Savages and Neurotics.” As time went on, Lévi-Strauss became more strident in his criticisms of psychoanalysis. Unlike Foucault, however, these objections did not lead to any alternative to the Freudian conceptions of “sexuality” or the “unconscious.” These remained universal properties of the body and mind – as they had been in Freud.

Most importantly, however, Lévi-Strauss changed the meaning of “prohibition” central to the incest taboo – and this represents a point in common with Foucault. Instead of a negative interdiction preventing marriage with close kin, as Freud and the early sociologists had assumed, Lévi-Strauss argues in his *Elementary Structures of Kinship* that there is actually a positive arrangement whereby one group gives family members to another group. In this way, the drive to exchange and to communicate with other human groups becomes a force in and of itself, rather than a secondary effect of pre-existing sexual instincts. This tendency to view cultural forces as “positive” and

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34 Instead of “savage” mentality coinciding with “neurotics”, says Lévi-Strauss, it is the theories of psychoanalysts that are reflective of both: “At almost every step we have encountered perfectly explicit notions and categories – such as oral and anal character – that psychoanalysts will no longer be able to claim they have discovered,” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, trans. Bénédicte Chorier (Chicago, 1988), p. 185.
“productive” is one of the features rightly identified as “structuralist,” and, certainly, Foucault adopts and applies this principle to the history of ideas (this point will return in the following chapter).

To understand how Lévi-Strauss’s “structural study” of *Oedipus the King* implicated psychoanalysis critically, it is necessary to recall Freud briefly. An indispensable part of Freud’s recognition of the role of fantasy in psychoanalytic theory was his own “self-analysis” – in particular, the so-called “discovery” of the Oedipus complex, recounted in a famous letter to Wilhelm Fliess in October 1897. The editors of the *Standard Edition* claim that Freud’s self-analysis wedded “the clinical and theoretical significance of sexuality” left apart in earlier texts such as the *Project for a scientific psychology* composed in 1895. The content of his letter to Fliess becomes a well-known passage of *The Interpretation of Dreams* of 1900, where *Oedipus The King* is identified as a fundamental hallmark of Western culture. The story shows the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes and we shrink back from Oedipus “with the whole force of the repression by which those wishes have since that time been held down within us.” Thus, in the view of the *Standard Edition*, with the introduction of Oedipus, Freud could now give due recognition to the weight of “infantile sexuality” and general instinctual impulses; without this development, psychoanalysis would not have been possible. (*SE*, 1, p. 291).

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37 Sigmund Freud [1895], “Project for a scientific psychology,” *SE*, 1, pp. 283-397. Freud worked feverishly on this “project” throughout 1895, abandoning it at the end of the year. However, a long and detailed draft had been sent to Fliess and this was the version published later. Freud would have been surprised to learn how much buzz this text was to generate amongst Lacan and his followers in the 1950s. Its importance is still stressed by Lacanian theorists today. See Allouch *Freud, et puis Lacan*, p. 100.
38 Sigmund Freud [1900], *The Interpretation of Dreams, SE*, 4, p. 262.
For Lévi-Strauss, however, myths are "logical tools" all cultures enlist to try to negotiate paradoxical questions and Freud's attraction to the character of Oedipus needs further explanation. In Lévi-Strauss's interpretation, the myth of Oedipus is part of a series trying to reconcile the human mind to the truth of generation: instead of reproducing spontaneously from the earth like plants, human beings are actually born from union of man and woman.\(^{40}\) The same problem is evident in the myths of indigenous Americans as well.\(^{41}\) The story itself is only the surface dimension; to understand myth accurately and meaningfully, one has to read it like an orchestra score, both "diachronically" — page after page, and from left to right, the telling of the actual story — and "synchronically", or vertically, where "bundles" of meaningful relations of ideas can be equated to the rows of notes making up "one gross constituent unit" of music.\(^{42}\) When analysed in this way, Levi-Strauss was able to isolate four distinct columns of meaning, each exhibiting common features.\(^{43}\)

Thus, according to Lévi-Strauss, Freud's insistence on defining the nucleus of neuroses in terms of this Greek tragedy reveals a determination to keep the same themes alive and well in modern times. The Freudian problem is still that of understanding how "one" can be born from "two." Freud therefore becomes a plaything of deeper psychic forces he only dimly perceived: "not only Sophocles, but Freud himself, should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth on par with earlier or


\(^{43}\) The first column contains the idea of "overrating" blood relations (Oedipus marrying his mother). The second presents the opposite theme: an "underrating" of blood relations (Oedipus killing his father). The third concerns slaying monsters (Oedipus kills the Sphinx), interpreted as "denial of the autochthonous origin of man", while, finally, bundles belonging to the forth column, all referring to "difficulties in walking straight and standing upright" — the name Oedipus means "swollen-footed" — stresses the opposite idea: insistence on the autochthonous origin of man. See Lévi-Strauss, "Structural Study of Myth," *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 215-216.
seemingly more ‘authentic’ versions.”

This was part of Lévi-Strauss’s general argument that the “alleged” differences between the “so-called primitive mind” and “scientific thought” were illusory; in fact, “the kind of logic in mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied.”

No doubt, Freud would have chalked this up as banal “resistance” to psychoanalytic truths before moving on to more pressing matters. But, in 1963, André Green explicitly disputed Lévi-Strauss while reaffirming the importance of Freud’s theorization of Oedipus. The context for his statements was the debate between “structure” and “history.” The conflict pitted Lévi-Strauss primarily against Jean-Paul Sartre, as this was prior to the scandal of the “death of man” generated by Foucault’s *Les Mots et les Choses* [*The Order of Things*] that would whip the debate into greater frenzy. For Green, psychoanalytic theory renders the opposition between history and structure meaningless because the Oedipus complex demonstrates that structures of the present can constantly reproduce those of the past. According to Green, “the Freudian discovery is not one version of the Oedipus myth, but the model which allows the understanding of the variants of it.”

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But who, exactly, was Oedipus anyway? Psychoanalysts had occasionally revived discussion of the content and characters of the drama.\textsuperscript{49} In proposing his new interpretation, Lévi-Strauss made it clear that he was not offering any explanation "acceptable" to the ancient Greek specialist. Rather, his aim had been to demonstrate a certain "technique," and he cheerfully compared himself a "street peddler," whose job it is to explain the functioning of "the mechanical toy" he is trying to sell to curious "onlookers."\textsuperscript{50} But perhaps with an eye to the domain of ancient history, Lévi-Strauss made the interesting and valid point that the study of myth had been hampered up to that time by a futile search for the "earliest" one, believing this would necessarily reveal the "true" version.

Jean-Pierre Vernant was a contemporary and acquaintance of Lévi-Strauss, and a philosopher specializing in ancient Greek tragedy and myth. For him, Lévi-Strauss's analysis became a "classic."\textsuperscript{51} Not that Vernant agreed with it: he called the analysis "debatable," to put it "mildly."\textsuperscript{52} Particularly dubious was the attempt to connect the elements of the Greek tragedy to Amerindian myths of autochthonous man, which Vernant called "gratuitous and arbitrary."\textsuperscript{53} But while Freud's comments about Oedipus the King had not influenced Greek historians in the slightest, Lévi-Strauss brought about such a "radical change in the study of myth," according to Vernant, that "reflection on the Oedipus legend has, ever since, been diverted into new and

\textsuperscript{49} Georges Devereux, "Why Oedipus killed Laius. A note on the complementary Oedipus complex in Greek drama," \textit{International Journal of Psychoanalysis}, 34:2 (1953): 132-141. Devereux's reading attempted to show that Oedipus' actions were the result of having been sexually abused by his homosexual father.

\textsuperscript{50} Lévi-Strauss, "Structural Study of Myth," \textit{Structural Anthropology} 1, p. 213.


\textsuperscript{52} Vernant, "The Lame Tyrant," \textit{Myth and Tragedy}, p. 207.

\textsuperscript{53} According to Vernant, Lévi-Strauss took these criticisms on the chin, "dropped the early hypothesis and proceeded to expand and modify his interpretation on a number of essential points," Vernant, "The Lame Tyrant," \textit{Myth and Tragedy}, p. 208.
productive channels.”\textsuperscript{54} One significant consequence for our purposes was Vernant’s own article of 1967 to be considered shortly – titled, appropriately, “Oedipus Without the Complex.”\textsuperscript{55}

Another fruitful side-effect was that the various texts comprising the corpus of the tragedy were now dusted off, to emerge under a different type of spotlight – what may be called “philosophical” or “interdisciplinary.” Foucault’s re-interpretation of \textit{Oedipus the King} falls into this category. Before rushing to call this approach “structuralist,” however, it is important to note that Foucault’s presentation is restricted to the place of the play in \textit{Western} culture only and he makes no attempt to confirm Lévi-Strauss’s “bundles of meaning” or universal structures of the mind. Rather, Foucault presents \textit{Oedipus the King} as one episode in the longer history of the juridical form called the “inquiry” [“enquête”]. He began his lectures with the ironic remark that the story of Oedipus “has lost much of its appeal over the last year,” a situation he attributed primarily to the event that was \textit{Anti-Oedipus} by Deleuze and Guattari (the book had appeared the previous year). But in the discussion that took place in the wake of the five lectures, Foucault made reference to a wider tradition that included Vernant and Georges Dumézil.\textsuperscript{56} These historians had developed a reading of Western civilization that impressed Foucault and had converged in a productive way with his own Nietzschean interests. As he detailed:

\textsuperscript{54} One element that impressed Vernant was the idea of “a defect in one foot”, a lopsided gait, “a characteristic feature of all three generations of the Labdacid lineage,” exposed by Lévi-Strauss. See Vernant, “The Lame Tyrant,” \textit{Myth and Tragedy}, p. 207.


\textsuperscript{56} According to Foucault, “There is in Europe a whole tradition of discourse analysis according to judicial and political practices. In France, there is Glotz, Gernet, Dumézil and recently Vernant, who have been the most significant figures for me.” (DE, II, p. 636). We cannot hope to replicate fully Dumézil’s work, either in terms of methodology or content. For a study of the intellectual relationship between Foucault and Dumézil, see Didier Eribon, \textit{Michel Foucault et ses contemporains} (Paris, 1994), pp. 105-161.
There is a research tradition moving in this direction that has already produced very significant results. ... It is customary to classify Dumézil amongst the precursors of structuralism, to say that he was a structuralist without being fully conscious of it, ... [but] Dumézil is not at all happy seeing his historical analyses interpreted in this way, and he has become more and more hostile to Lévi-Strauss' work. Dumézil himself was not the first in this area, nor will he be the last. There is today in France a group associated with Jean-Pierre Vernant who have taken up Dumézil's ideas and have tried to apply them. ... I think that Dumézil, far from identifying or projecting all social structures, social practices, rites, on to a universe of discourse, essentially returns the practice of discourse to the interior of social practices. This is the fundamental difference between Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss. (DE, II, p. 636).

Foucault's statements here give vital evidence of the "ethnographic" perspective we are trying to elucidate: to return discourse to the interior of social practices cannot help but limit the analysis to a particular geo-political or cultural space - "the Greek city state" - which simultaneously cancels out universal generalizations in the manner of Lévi-Strauss. The question then opens anew: if "universals" do not exist, what is the relationship between the Greek city and us today? Put very crudely, a general "Foucauldian" response would say that what is important are the differences between the two cultural formations, not the similarities, and that these differences and specificities are as yet largely unknown. Dumézil described his own approach on one occasion as "ultra historical" - not really Foucault's "critical ontology of ourselves" but, for the moment at least, it points to a culturalist perspective he shares with Foucault in opposition to "French Freud" that terms like "structuralism" obscure. 57

We will return to Foucault shortly. Meanwhile, in an article published in Les Temps Modernes in 1966, entitled "Oedipus Before the Complex," Didier Anzieu turned his psychoanalytic attention to the myth of Oedipus. 58 Like Green, he rejected Lévi-

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57 In a manner similar to Foucault, Dumézil had once reported: "I am not, I do not have to be or not to be, a structuralist," Georges Dumézil, cited in Dosse, History of Structuralism, p. 32.

Strauss’s too limited focus on autochthonous origins. Enlisting Marie Delcourt’s analysis instead, Anzieu claimed that there are five “mythemes” operating throughout the story and these five, in turn, can all be reduced to variations on the Oedipal theme. He thus set out to prove that all Greek myths chronologically prior to the advent of tragedy, as well as those tragedies contemporaneous with *Oedipus the King*, had identical themes: one encounters the Oedipal fantasy [*“la fantasmatique oédipienne”*] on “almost every page.”

As stated, specialists in Ancient Greek culture had ignored Freud’s assertions about *Oedipus the King*; they were “beside the point” for they did tackle problems that impose themselves “as soon as one seeks to understand [the text] fully and accurately.” Anzieu’s contribution transformed Vernant’s latent aloofness into manifest resistance. His departure point against Anzieu was the following question: “In what respects is it possible that a literary work belonging to the culture of fifth-century Athens, itself a very free transposition of a much more ancient Theban legend dating from before the institution of the city-state, should confirm the observations of a doctor on the patients who thronged his consulting rooms at the beginning of the twentieth century?”

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59 Delcourt had written a book earlier, in the 1940s, disputing the centrality of incest themes in the Oedipus legends. See Marie Delcourt, *Oedipe ou la légende du conquérant* (Liège and Paris, 1944).

60 The five mythemes were: a child being put to death, murder of the father, victory over the Sphinx, marriage with a princess, and union with the mother. See Anzieu, “Oedipe avant le complexe,” pp. 698-708.


For Vernant, tragedy has very precise historical parameters: it "is born, flourishes, and disappears in Athens within the space of a hundred years."\(^{64}\) Tragedy succeeded epic and lyric at the end of the sixth century B.C. but was then overshadowed in turn by a triumphant "philosophy." When Aristotle came to write his *Poetics* in the fourth century, for example, the tragic "man"\(^{65}\) had already become a "stranger" to Greek life; Plato, too, displayed a "deep hostility" towards tragedy.\(^{66}\) It belongs to a different logic, because, unlike philosophy, tragedy did not aim to establish "any cut-and-dry cleavage between the true and the false," but gave pride of place to ambiguity and indecision: "to act or not to act" is one essential feature Vernant identifies.\(^{67}\) "No literary genre of antiquity made such full use of the double entendre as did tragedy," he says, and scholars had long recognized *Oedipus the King* as "exceptional" in this regard: "*Oedipus the King* contains more than twice as many ambiguous expressions as Sophocles' other plays."\(^{68}\) Moreover, tragedy was not just an art form, but also a "social institution in the city." Competitions to determine the best tragedies were established, and the spectacles were judged by citizens in accordance with "the same institutional norms as the popular assemblies or courts."\(^{69}\)

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64 Vernant, "Oedipus Without the Complex," *Myth and Tragedy*, p. 89.  
65 Vernant notes in many places that women were excluded from the polis, did not take part in any performances of the tragedies (the female characters were performed by male actors) and were not qualified to judge the outcomes of the competitions in the urban space.  
68 Jean-Pierre Vernant [1970], "Ambiguity and Reversal: On the Enigmatic Structure of Oedipus Rex," *Myth and Tragedy*, pp. 113-140, p. 113. He continues: "By seeing the protagonists on the stage clinging exclusively to one meaning and thus, in their blindness, bringing about their own destruction or tearing each other to pieces, the spectator is brought to realize that in reality there are two or even more possible meanings. The tragic message becomes intelligible to the extent that, abandoning his former certainty and limitations, he becomes aware of the ambiguity of words, of meanings, and of the human condition."  
From this angle, Vernant had two main objections to Anzieu’s psychoanalytic study of Greek myths as presented in Les Temps Modernes. The first concerned the collapse of all tragic themes into a general Oedipal quagmire where the specialist had no place and from which it was no longer possible, he claimed, to recognise any myth’s distinctive features. Struggles for sovereignty or succession, children being exposed, falling, or being hurled from a great height, being swallowed or engulfed – these are all “telescopéd together and amalgamated into a universal castration.”

Vernant’s second point of contention is Anzieu’s assumptions about the character of Oedipus himself and what motivates his actions. It would take us too far to recount the whole story, but, basically, in Anzieu’s interpretation, if Oedipus had stayed in Corinth with his adoptive parents Polybus and Merope, there would have been no “tragedy.” But, not being able to help himself, driven according to his unconscious fantasy for incest and parricide, Oedipus sets forth from Corinth and unleashes the train of events. For Vernant, this interpretation would only be valid if Oedipus knew that his adoptive parents were not his real parents. Yet Oedipus was unaware of the facts; he did not know that he had been handed over as a baby to a shepherd and ordered to be exposed to death. Doubts were stirred only after hearing comments from a drunkard; despite reassurances from his “foster parents,” his suspicions lingered. Up until then, however, the only maternal figure in Oedipus’ emotional life was Merope; she was the only “mother” he knew; he had never cast eyes on Jocasta, his “real” mother.

So, if he had in fact been driven by Freudian motivations, it would have made more sense for Oedipus to snuggle down where he was and turn his aggression against

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Polybus. Instead, and the whole point of the drama for Vernant, Oedipus’ pride was offended by the suspicion that he may not in fact be the first amongst citizens of Corinth and heir to that throne. His determination to prove his royal blood was all the more reinforced by mistrust of his brother-in-law, Creon, whom Oedipus suspected quite falsely of having had a hand in his fate somehow, and to whom he attributes envy and a desire to usurp the position rightfully occupied by Oedipus himself. This is because, according to Vernant, Oedipus judges Creon by what is in fact his own insatiable lust for power and popularity – an observation Foucault will reiterate. By setting himself to leave Corinth and to get to the bottom of the mystery, Oedipus is therefore motivated by hubris, the “characteristic of a tyrant,” and this is the name the Chorus gives him.71 In the process, crucial for Foucault’s interpretation as well, Oedipus ignores all advice, whether from the Gods or Jocasta, always believing that his own judgement and his interpretation of the facts are infallible.

One of the criticisms Green was to make later of Vernant’s account was that it ignores the issue of why Oedipus the King and other tragedies continue to fascinate us centuries later. Vernant of course does not deny that powerful “human” themes persist even though social life has been “transformed at every level and the conditions necessary for their production have disappeared.”72 At the very least, the material of tragedy is not original but derives from the earlier heroic legends; tragedy invents “neither the characters nor the plots of the plays.”73 However, in Vernant’s account, this art form is inextricably bound to the advent of “law” and the new institutions of the city-state in

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72 Jean-Pierre Vernant [1979], “The Tragic Subject: Historicity and Transhistoricity,” Myth and Tragedy, pp. 237-247, p. 237. He anticipates a possible objection in the following terms: “How can one claim that the tragic works and genre are historical if one also recognizes their transhistoricity, the fact that they have survived across the centuries?”
fifth century Greece: “Tragedy poses the problems of law, and the question of what justice is.”

This is why there is “an almost obsessive use of a technical legal terminology in the language of the tragic writers,” as well as a “preference for themes connected with crimes of bloodshed that fall within the competence of one court or another.” The overall purpose was to question the traditional religious and moral values lying at the heart of epic.

So, to sum up Vernant’s position: the form and content of tragedy must refer to the “social thought peculiar to the fifth-century city.” Like Foucault and Dumézil, Vernant was identified during these years as a “structuralist.” In an interview with François Dosse in the late 1980s, Vernant revealed: “Social life only functions through symbolic systems, and in this respect I am profoundly structuralist.” But as Dosse pointed out, and consistent our presentation, Vernant, no less than Dumézil, always referred myth to a “concrete geopolitical situation.” Vernant himself described his approach as “psycho-historical,” modifying this later with the preferred term “historical anthropology.” It derived in large measure from Marxism.

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74 He continues: “Greek law, which had just been formulated, unlike Roman law, is not systematized, not founded on axiomatic principles, but is made up tentatively of different levels, some of which call into question the great religious powers, the order of the world, Zeus, dikê, and at the other extreme raise the problems of human responsibility, such as the philosophers are already discussing. Between the nascent philosophical morality of Socrates and the old religious concepts, the law hardly knows its place,” Vernant, “Greek Tragedy,” Languages of Criticism, p. 279.


78 Dosse, History of Structuralism, p. 183.


81 Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Preface to Volume II,” Myth and Tragedy, p. 18. The dual intellectual sources Vernant explicitly appealed to were the “discontinuist” psychology of Ignace Meyerson and the Hellenist anthropology of Louis Gernet. For an autobiographical account of Vernant’s
For Vernant, psychoanalytic knowledge has distorted, "tragically," both the richness of the story as well as the problem of how to account historically for the rise and fall of tragedy.\(^{82}\) At a famous conference devoted to "structuralism" which took place in the United States in 1966,\(^{83}\) Vernant rehearsed some of the arguments we have presented and also responded to questions. If the Greeks invented Oedipus because they wanted to express this complex, well, "you must show me other symptoms" from the texts, because what has been put forward as "evidence" so far can only be classed as such if one is already dreaming in Freudian images. Most importantly, Oedipus only married Jocasta because, on solving the riddle of the Sphinx, his royal blood was confirmed and he was therefore entitled to have a "queen"; yet "there is not a word in the text to indicate that he had any feeling at all for Jocasta."\(^{84}\) Likewise, Oedipus had no idea that the man he killed was his father: "When he kills Laius it is in legitimate defence against a stranger who struck him first."\(^{85}\) Thus, Vernant's challenge to the general Freudian perspective can be summarized by repeating the question he posed to Anzieu: why did tragedy arise only here in this Greek context if it responds to universal emotions?

If tragedy draws its material from a type of dream that has universal significance, if the impact of tragedy depends upon stimulating an emotional complex that we all carry within us, then why was tragedy born in the Greek world at the turn of the fifth and sixth centuries? Why did other civilizations know nothing of tragedy? And why was the tragic seam so rapidly exhausted in Greece itself and its place taken by a philosophical type of thought that did away


\(^{83}\) The speakers included Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Lucien Goldmann, Jacques Derrida and many others – though, not Foucault – and, as in the Greek polis, women were scarce.

\(^{84}\) Vernant, "Greek Tragedy," \textit{Languages of Criticism}, p. 293. On this point, Jacques Derrida protested that Vernant's reading was too "literal." For Derrida's question and Vernant's response, see Vernant, "Greek Tragedy," \textit{Languages of Criticism}, p. 294.

\(^{85}\) Vernant, "Ambiguity and Reversal," \textit{Myth and Tragedy}, p. 121.
with the contradictions upon which tragedy constructed its dramatic universe, by accounting for them rationally.\(^86\)

Miriam Leonard rightfully elevates Vernant to a prominent position in post-war French thought: “Vernant remains the most obvious point of contact between classics and French philosophy.”\(^87\) His two major readings of *Oedipus the King* became “canonical” and “have changed the direction of Sophoclean studies.”\(^88\) Its implications go wider than classical studies: Freud’s appeal to this story now looked opportunistic, and his interpretation quite amateurish.

We could mention in this context that, since the 1970s, it has become increasingly evident that Freud’s *Oedipus* is as much a creation of German idealist philosophy of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as anything composed in Ancient times. Jean-François Lyotard argued that the “theatre” had an exaggerated importance in psychoanalysis,\(^89\) an idea Deleuze and Guattari would take further: Freud’s Goethean classical education and bourgeois prejudices blinded him to any other cultural metaphors besides those pertaining to the “theatre.”\(^90\) Thus, before Oedipus became a “structure” in psychoanalysis, writes Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, he was an established “figure,” one of the two figures that have dominated the critical landscape since the

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\(^87\) Miriam Leonard, *Athens in Paris. Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-War French Thought* (Oxford, 2005), p. 15. More questionable is her claim that “post-war Paris placed the Greeks at the centre of the formulation of a radical rethinking of political philosophy,” as it would be difficult to situate figures like Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, neither of whom displayed any interest whatsoever in the “Greeks.” In any case, Leonard’s discussion of Vernant’s intellectual relationship to Lévi-Strauss and Foucault (to be treated shortly), although very useful, is marred by a superficial understanding of Foucault’s work, especially in regard to psychoanalysis, which affects her conclusions.


\(^89\) Jean-François Lyotard [1970], “Jewish Oedipus,” trans. Susan Hanson, *Genre* 10 (Fall, 1970): 395-411. Originally published “Oedipe Juif,” *Critique*, 277 (June, 1970). According to Lyotard, the Freudian revolution is better understood as a *departure* from Sophocles and Shakespeare because a Hebraic ethics wins out over Greek tragedy. In the Jewish tradition, “representation is forbidden, the eye closes, the ear opens in order to hear the father’s spoken word,” and Freud attempts to *say* on the basis of hearing what tragedy *shows*. It is curious therefore that Freud should struggle to identify himself with tragedians, says Lyotard.

\(^90\) Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 54-55.
nineteenth century – the other being the “worker.” That Freud picked Oedipus to represent universal desiring “man” is far from accidental: Schelling, Hölderin (who translated the text into German), and especially Hegel, all contributed to elevate Oedipus into a central tragic figure. Oedipus “appears to have been recognised as the initial or tutelary hero of our history and our civilization.” And it is surely no coincidence either, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, that Oedipus appears in the wake of Kant’s critique of metaphysics: a myth is enlisted to resolve a crisis in philosophy (equally needed to assuage the political crises of the time).

Be all that as it may, Vernant’s critique, and others that followed, had limited impact on “French Freud.” One important question rarely posed by critics of psychoanalysis is what conception of “sexuality” should replace that proposed by Freud. Fundamental to the view of this thesis, Foucault surpasses other anti-Oedipal protests because he developed an alternative historical account of power and sexuality as essential components of his critique, and it was allied to the recommendation for an ethical approach to “bodies and pleasures.” Thus, against the universal bodily “drives” proposed by psychoanalysis, Foucault will locate a historical “drive” to know sexuality, a process going back to the early centuries of Christianity. The formation of hundreds of scientific concepts, including those of Freud, was the logical consequence of an

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“over-production” of knowledge about sexuality, leading to distinctly modern Western types of sexual understanding, orientation and difference.

These important issues will “return.” Meanwhile, the “Oedipus complex” continued to flourish as a concept in the 1970s and beyond. In 1969, André Green defended Freud’s interpretation of Oedipus the King once more, this time campaigning against recent attacks, with Vernant as one of his targets. Green accepted that Anzieu had made inappropriate comparisons between the characters in Oedipus the King and other mythical and tragic figures. Green also conceded that Freud’s reading, though “revealing and prophetic”, is “capable of development.” Nevertheless, theorists of culture have played a considerable role in limiting all that is “disturbing or scandalous in the revelation of the unconscious,” he argues. Explicitly disputing Lévi-Strauss and Marie Delcourt along with Vernant, Green claims all three critiques have in common a denial of “sexuality.” Delcourt replaces Freud’s version with an “Adlerian thesis of the conflict of generations;” Lévi-Strauss adopts the “chthonian solution,” ignoring “the complexity of the problem of sexuality,” while Vernant generalizes sexual conflict through “political” analysis.

96 A colleague noted that, although “devastating,” the strength of Vernant’s arguments “stemmed in part from the weakness of Freud’s case” when it was misrepresented or mishandled by Freudian enthusiasts. See Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Oedipus in Vicenza and in Paris: Two Turning points in the History of Oedipus,” Myth and Tragedy, pp. 361-380, p. 363. Vidal-Naquet’s career is treated in Leonard, Athens in Paris, and, for a brief discussion of Vidal-Naquet’s collaboration with Foucault in the GIP movement, see Bourg, Revolution to Ethics, pp. 80-81.
97 Green, “Oedipus, Myth or Truth?” Tragic Effect, pp. 188-244.
98 Green, Tragic Effect, p. 251, note 2.
100 Green, “Oedipus, Myth or Truth?” Tragic Effect, p. 231.
101 He continues: “What [Levi-Strauss] does not seem to consider is that the kinship system might correspond to a contradiction between organic bisexuality, which has as its consequence sexual reproduction by the union of two single-sexed progenitors, and psychical bisexuality, which implies that the ‘psycho-sexual’ organization of each of the two single-sexed progenitors involves, at least in a recessive way, the sexual characteristics of the sex to which he does not belong. This is what Freud calls ‘double identification,’ a result of the Oedipus complex ..., “ Green, “Oedipus, Myth or Truth?” Tragic Effect, p. 207.
102 Green, “Oedipus, Myth or Truth?” Tragic Effect, p. 211.
For Green, everyone carries within them an “Oedipus complex.” Each of us, “and our whole Western civilization,” has “committed parricide and incest” — in desire if not in act. What follows is a “fierce determination to deny it after childhood.” This is why tragedies like *Oedipus the King* still speak to us. Nor should we be fooled by variations on the theme. Here, it is worth quoting Green at length, because he makes an important distinction between “primary” and “secondary” determinations — a nuance that crop up again in discussions of French psychoanalysis, and the naiveties of which are fundamental to Foucault’s critique. Historical suppression in a political sense [*répression*] is secondary to psychic repression at a psychological level [*refoulement*]. Thus, only secondary political determinations are susceptible to the influence of “time” and “the socio-historical context,” he says. These determinations play a fundamental role in the formations of “ego-ideals,” but, although important, they are only ever that: secondary. As Green expresses it:

As soon as there was a family, there was an Oedipus complex. As long as there is a family there will be an Oedipus complex. This does not mean that modifications were not brought to it at various periods in history or that social systems did not influence the form it took. But one may well have reservations concerning this relativist attitude. The determining factors that affect the complex are of two kinds. The first is primary; they derive from the prematuration of the infant and its dependence on its parents, which is a biological and social fact. The others are secondary; they depend on the way in which the images of maternal and paternal identification are transmitted and on the way in which parental roles are assumed and by those who perform them in a given culture and period. ... But the constituents of the complex — the opposition of Eros and the destructive drives, psychical bisexuality, the duality of the pleasure and reality principles, the tension between desire and identification — derive from the primary determinations. Their structuring makes the Oedipus complex a symbolic system. This structuring is the primary nucleus articulated

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104 Comparing Oedipus with another Greek tragedy, Aeschylus’ *Orestes*, superficially quite different because the former commits parricide and incest while the latter commits matricide and champions the cause of the father, Green claims the two tragedies can properly be considered “complements”, as both focus on “the study of triangular relationships, of the subject’s relation to his progenitors”. See Green, *Tragic Effect*, p. 38.
according to an unconscious logic that the entire secondarization will envelop: obeying, in part, a conscious logic.\textsuperscript{105}

In short, confronted by the myth of Oedipus, he concludes, “three contemporary specialists were unable to take cognisance of the epistemological break operated by Freud’s discourse.”\textsuperscript{106}

Let us now consider Foucault’s interpretation of \textit{Oedipus the King}. He makes no reference to Green’s reply to Vernant, although it appeared before Foucault’s lectures, and the latter were only published in 1994 as part of the \textit{Dits et écrits} collection. Thus, there was no dialogue between the two and it would be false to present it in that way. However, to all intents and purposes, the “political” label used by Green to describe Vernant would also apply to Foucault’s analysis. It should be pointed out that Miriam Leonard, from a classicist viewpoint, disputes Foucault’s interpretation, claiming he proceeds from “an under-reading of the classical material he engages in.”\textsuperscript{107} But non-specialist interpretations have their place as well, and Foucault’s purpose is not to question classical scholars, but to repudiate the generalist Freudian meaning of the text, which has come to be the only “interpretation” outside of ancient history and classics.

Leonard also calls Foucault’s analysis “an appropriation of Vernant’s insight.”\textsuperscript{108} But symptomatic of the superficial grasp of Foucault’s work repeated in so many commentaries, she misunderstands the reformulation of the concept of power that is crucial both for this analysis and for the critique of psychoanalysis: political machinations will no longer be viewed as separate spheres of activity to truth

\textsuperscript{105} Green, “Oedipus, Myth or Truth?” \textit{Tragic Effect}, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{106} Green, \textit{Tragic Effect}, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{107} See Leonard, \textit{Athens in Paris}, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{108} Leonard, \textit{Athens in Paris}, p. 83.
production, but inextricably enmeshed in it. Not that Vernant ignored issues of power of course, far from it. But he presents it in that traditional sense, the widespread acceptance of which Foucault made it his purpose in the 1970s to criticise: that power can be identified adequately with "law" and its ideologies – what he called later the "juridico-discursive" conception of power.

For example, in order to make a distinction between primary and secondary processes, it is necessary to specify at least two types of power, yet Green nowhere addresses this. As will be seen in more detail in chapters six and seven, this is the essence of Foucault's critique of psychoanalysis: he shows that a political conception of power is used indiscriminately in analyses of the human sciences, whether sociological, psychoanalytic, historical and whether speaking of individual repression at a psychological level [refoulement], or historical suppression in a political sense [répression]. Thus, "power" for Green is "patriarchal," but he does not actually define what he means by this, nor how it differs from other types of power – all are understood in a uniformly political and juridical way. Therefore, the power of the mother, the sibling, the bureaucrat, the teacher, the friend, the lover (the list is endless) can all be subsumed under the power of the mythical father, said to be represented, in turn, wholly by his unwritten political "law." Not so with Foucault.

Nor does Foucault make any apologies for refusing "sexuality" as the psychoanalysts have construed it. In the conference taking place after the Brazil lectures, Foucault marvelled that the issue of "sex" had been absent from the discussion, subordinated to "power": "we've been talking for fifteen minutes about psychoanalysis, and the words sexuality, libido, and desire have hardly been mentioned." (DE, II, p. 639). This was
quite different to the situation sixty years before, he said: in 1913, Brazilian and German psychoanalysts had met at the same location; on that occasion, the discussion was dominated by “sexuality.” Foucault said he had been trying “for a number of years” to effect a similar purge in his own analyses: to place sexuality as “marginal” in relation to the more pressing problem of “power.” (DE, II, p. 639).

As an illustration of how the Sophoclean text is tied to “political” rather than “sexual” themes, Foucault draws attention to the title of the play: literally, “Oedipus the Ty rant.” Notwithstanding Green’s claim that psychoanalytic readings never set out to reduce “the full scope of the tragedy” to the “Oedipal situation,” they have ignored at the very least the significance of the title. Although “turannos” is difficult to translate, Foucault says, because “tyrant” does not capture “the exact significance of the word,” and does not carry the negative connotations it has for us today, “tyrant” as part of the title would certainly convey the meaning of the play more accurately than “Oedipus the Incestuous or Oedipus the Killer of his Father.” (“TJF,” p. 25). Yet these would be the kinds of titles demanded as soon as one remains faithful to the Freudian interpretation.

Foucault’s interpretation of Oedipus the King, “neither completely a myth nor entirely a tragedy,” presents the drama as a “rather curious episode” in the history of truth rituals in the West, demonstrating the emergence of the juridical form Foucault calls the “inquiry” [“enquête”]. The inquiry did not cease when the curtains came down on Ancient Greek civilization but flourished again in the legal structures of societies during the Middle Ages, where it came into conflict with another system, the “examination” [“l’epreuve”]. The examination and the inquiry, in turn, were to play major roles in

109 Green, Tragic Effect, p. 254, note 15.
modern capitalist societies also. Foucault’s presentation is therefore an analysis of the historical trajectory of the “inquiry” over many centuries. But *Oedipus the King* is important in this history because it establishes a particular view of the “inquiry” that became entrenched: namely, it criticises the idea that a tyrant can conduct an inquiry, that he can be both all-knowing and all-powerful at the same time. It promotes a divorce between power and knowledge, a belief from which “our civilization has not yet freed itself.” ("TJF," p. 17).

Foucault begins by clarifying Nietzsche’s distinction between “origin” [*Ursprung*] and “invention” [*Erfindung*]. It is one of the few times in his career that Foucault explicitly invoked Nietzsche as a guiding thread. It also reflects the subject matter of Foucault’s research at the *Collège de France* at that time.¹¹⁰ He makes it clear that he is motivated by his own interests and not the purpose of demonstrating “the Nietzschean conception of knowledge” – something other philosophers may find unacceptable ("TJF," p. 13).

From this angle, Foucault asserts that when Nietzsche speaks of “invention,” it is always in opposition to “origin.” Basically, the mother of all invention – hatred, difficulties, problems, struggle, and the desire for domination – is masked by stories of “origins.” Hidden is “the sequence of mean and little things” that “pure and obscure power relations” threw together by chance. This critical awareness on Nietzsche’s part represents a radical counter force within the history of philosophy.

In contrast to Nietzsche, Western philosophy posits the desire for knowledge as a natural instinct of humankind. So, if one wants to ascertain what knowledge really is, says Nietzsche, the philosopher with his ascetic existence is just about the last person

who would really know. Instead, one must seek out the “politicians,” for their actions will broadcast the underlying relations of power and struggle that are making it all happen: “One can understand what knowledge consists of only by examining these relations of struggle and power, the manner in which things and humans hate one another, fight one another, and try to dominate one another, to exercise power over one another.” (“TJF,” p. 12).

Oedipus is one such “politician.” As reported, Greek tragedy in Vernant’s view primarily explores issues of “law” posed by the advent of the new institutions of the city-state in the fifth century. For Foucault, too, and relying on the work of Georges Dumézil, Oedipus the King is situated at the point in history when the “unity of a magico-religious power which had existed in the great Assyrian empires” was being dismantled. (“TJF,” p. 31). In this archaic system, holding power entailed possessing privileged access to truth, exclusive to the rulers only:

> [T]he king and those around him held a knowledge that could not and must not be communicated to the other social groups. Knowledge and power were exactly reciprocal, correlative, superimposed. There couldn’t be any knowledge without power; and there couldn’t be any political power without the possession of a certain special knowledge. (“TJF,” p. 31).

Certain Greek tyrants, “impregnated with Oriental civilization”, were determined to restore for their own purposes this unity of power and knowledge that had existed in the past. Oedipus represents this old form of tyrant. He is ruthless, possessing an insatiable lust for power, popularity and sexual excess; what frightens him above all is the thought of “losing his own power”, and what obsesses him is hanging on to that power. (“TJF,” p. 25). He replaces laws with his “whims and his orders.” (“TJF,” p. 28). But – and a
crucial point for Foucault – Oedipus also has a thirst for knowledge. He is “the knowing tyrant, the man of tekhnē, of gnome.” He brags, for example, that he solved the riddle of the Sphinx all by himself. (“TJF,” p. 29).

What Oedipus possesses is a solitary kind of knowledge, deemed “superior in its efficacy to that of others.” Like the knowledge of the Oriental kings, Oedipus thinks he possesses insight and technical capacity that cannot be transferred in any way, nor communicated to social inferiors. According to Foucault, this exclusivity is being attacked in the play. (“TJF,” p. 28). King Oedipus harks back to the “famous Assyrian king,” at once both legendary and historical, who ruled simultaneously by “the power he exercised and by the knowledge he possessed.” (“TJF,” p. 31).

What occurred ... was the dismantling of that great unity of political power that was, at the same time, a knowledge ... We witness that long decomposition during the five or six centuries of archaic Greece. And when classical Greece appeared – Sophocles represents its starting date, its sunrise – what had to disappear in order for this society to exist was the union of power and knowledge. From this time onward, the man of power would be the man of ignorance. (“TJF,” p. 32).

Let us say for the sake of simplicity that clusters of power and knowledge relations are the jigsaw pieces making up any “culture” – the object of Foucault’s analyses. For Foucault, Oedipus the King is a point of emergence of the “inquiry” and is therefore “representative, and in a sense the founding instance of a definite type of relation between power and knowledge.” (“TJF,” p. 17). This process did not cease when tragedy came to an end. Since the Middle Ages, confession has been the primary form that Western societies rely on for the production of truth. (HS, p. 58). But the

111 Vernant of course acknowledges this as well: there is nothing that actually obliges Oedipus to pursue the inquiry to the end, except “for his own obstinate determination to unmask the guilty party, ... and his passionate desire to learn the truth at all costs,” Vernant, “Ambiguity and Reversal,” Myth and Tragedy, p. 116.
confession did not always enjoy this pre-eminence. Various tests to prove guilt have been known, such as "duels" and "judgements of God," while one of the surprising juridical forms that existed in Ancient Greece was the *sumbolon*. This procedure consisted of breaking a ceramic object in two, keeping one half and entrusting the other to that individual who has witnessed some event and can later certify the authenticity of the knowledge by matching the two halves. ("TJF," p. 22). Foucault claims that the "inquiry" unfolds in *Oedipus the King* through this mechanism of *sumbolon*, the rule of two halves. ("TJF," p. 19). What had been said at the beginning of the play in terms of "prophecy" by the gods, will return at the end in the form of witness statements by two shepherds: "the entire Oedipus play is a way of shifting the enunciation of the truth from a prophetic and prescriptive type of discourse to a retrospective one that is no longer characterised by prophecy but, rather, by evidence." ("TJF," p. 33).112

As for the moral of the story in Foucault’s terms, it goes something like this: by needing neither the shepherds nor the prophets, brushing them all aside, Oedipus falls into the trap of thinking that he alone has the means to investigate the truth. He becomes obsessed with finding out the truth about his origins and his father’s death. We see therefore the tyrant’s stubborn determination to know everything because this is a way to confirm his power and rule everybody to excess. At one point, Jocasta implores Oedipus to drop the “inquiry” for he will not be able to stand the terrible truth. Oedipus thinks this is all part of undermining his “power”: only he has special knowledge due to his royal blood that will lead to the truth. Inevitably, then, the truth slaps him in the face: he discovers that he, Oedipus, is the criminal.

112 Foucault gives other examples of how the story proceeds by the “rule of two halves.” ("TJF," pp. 19-22).

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Furthermore, whereas power, post-Oedipus, was to be burdened with ignorance and obscurity, on the opposing side two figures would henceforth embody understanding and comprehension: the prophet and the shepherd. Each possesses a particular privileged access to knowledge: the first is capable of foretelling, the other of remembering. First we have "the eternal and omnipotent gaze of the sun god", while at the opposite side of the spectrum, at the "humblest level", witnesses will come forward remembering what they had seen with their own eyes. "Beyond a power that had become monumentally blind like Oedipus, there were the shepherds who remembered and the prophets who spoke the truth." ("TJF," p. 32).

Foucault then links this didactic principle to Plato’s philosophy. Like Vernant, who constantly refers to the "invention" of tragedy, Foucault considers the rise of Greek philosophy, situated chronologically after the demise of tragedy, as neither inevitable nor necessary; it was an "invention." The philosopher was made possible by the same conditions that produced the criticism of the tyrant in Oedipus the King. Uncontaminated by power, the wise scholar, whose only interest is pure truth, will join forces with the people, similarly stripped of all power but possessing collective memory, able to provide evidence whenever requested to do so. This is Plato’s ideal ruler for his Republic: a philosopher uncontaminated by the lust for power, who is in concert with the people. Do not laugh, he says, it may happen one day. Certainly, as it is now, the “true philosopher” has no time “to look at the affairs of men, or to take part in their quarrels”; but one day, “in the future,” in some foreign country beyond our

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113 "Greek tragedy can be understood only when considered as an invention, in the full sense of the word, as a human invention under certain specific conditions, as something radically new in every respect," Vernant, "Greek Tragedy," Languages of Criticism, p. 278.
horizons, the paradoxical philosopher-ruler may just exist: “admittedly difficult, but it is not impossible.”

This hope persists: that there will come a time when calm reason devoid of power controls human affairs. “Domination differs from the rational exercise of authority,” asserts Herbert Marcuse. For Foucault, if there is an “Oedipus complex” in our civilization, it operates at this “collective level” expressed by Marcuse, and says something, not about relations of desire and incest, but about relations of knowledge and power:

The West would be dominated by the great myth according to which truth never belongs to political power: political power is blind – real knowledge is what one possesses when in contact with the gods or when one remembers things, when one looks at the great eternal Sun or one opens one’s eyes to what has come to pass. With Plato there began a great Western myth: that there is an antinomy between knowledge and power. Where knowledge and science are found in their pure truth, there can no longer be any political power. (“TJF,” p. 32).

Interestingly, Vernant described the Sophocles tragedy as “a detective story that Oedipus takes it upon himself to disentangle.” What is the essence of a detective story, in today’s terms? A lone investigator, a character like Philip Marlowe or Miss Marple, conducts an inquiry the official police structures either refuse to investigate or are incapable of investigating. In other words, for the truth to come out, the hero is detached from the ruling classes and its power structures, and he or she joins forces with witnesses who are likewise powerless but possess knowledge. The witnesses

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116 Vernant, “Oedipus Without the Complex,” Myth and Tragedy, p. 105. Likening Oedipus the King to a detective story was one of the themes raised by E. Sanguineti in a “Debate on the novel” organized by Tel quel, and which included Foucault and Philippe Sollers, amongst many others. See the comments of E. Sanguineti in “Débat sur le roman,” DE, I, pp. 338-390, p. 375. A tiny portion of the debate, not including Sanguineti’s comments, has been translated: “The debate on the novel,” trans. Elizabeth Ezra, Religion and Culture by Michel Foucault, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York, 1999), pp. 72-74.
remember, the investigator foretells. It is not necessary that a detective discovers that he or she is the actual criminal; that may be twist, but it is not essential. Rather, the main purpose of the detective story is to demonstrate that power impedes truth seeking. Power is “blind.” *Oedipus the King* is attacking what the average detective novel also criticises: the amalgamation of power and truth-seeking in the situation of a single person – as if Philip Marlowe or Miss Marple could also be power-grabbing politicians. *Oedipus the King* is still relevant because it is essential to understand that a ruler cannot have a thirst for knowledge if he also has a lust for power and sexual domination. Average people can console themselves that, although powerless, they possess a natural and spontaneous knowledge about everyday life that a politician will struggle to represent, certainly, but never understand entirely.

It would be convenient to stop here and interpret Foucault’s analysis as a “Nietzschean” type of political critique. During the years from 1965-1976, Foucault took many opportunities to ally his work with that of Gilles Deleuze. Their aim was a type of philosophical criticism that no longer deferred to either Freud or Marx, and the common inspirational ground was Nietzsche. But locating this source will not suffice to explain Foucault’s unique position against “French Freud.” Others would protest, Foucault said, at his use of Nietzsche (and perhaps he had Deleuze in mind): they would say that it was Foucault’s own “obsession with finding power relations everywhere” that has made him believe that “Nietzsche said those things” (“TJF,” p. 13). What Foucault tried to bring to the attention of critical theorists during the 1970s was that “power” had never been adequately debated. Both “left” and “right” had, and continue to have, more or less identical views: political domination is defined by an absence of truth, and pure truth divorced of power will bring forth all life’s solutions. But both types of analysis
then overlook the "the sequence of mean and little things" that "pure and obscure power relations" threw together by chance. The lectures Foucault delivered in Brazil affirm the importance of the re-theorization of the concept of power within his corpus, leading directly to his critical history of sexuality.

As should be clear, though, Foucault's position cannot be explained in terms of "structuralism" either, despite Deleuze amalgamating Foucault quite inappropriately with this "movement" on one occasion.117 Miriam Leonard, too, tries to pitch the "historical psychology" of Vernant and his colleagues against Foucault and Lévi-Strauss, both proponents of what Leonard calls the "haute structuralism" of the 1960s—a signifier without a signified if ever there was one. Rather, because Foucault's emphasis throughout his career was the ethnographic landscape of Western culture, this finds echoes with the historical approach of Vernant rather than with the universalism of Lévi-Strauss.

However, in order to explicate this point properly, it is necessary to backtrack. Unlike Vernant, Foucault was open to the Lacanian formulation of the "subject," complete with an unconscious, and he took this as a departure point for his own genealogy of the modern Western individual. Historical psychology becomes redundant in this guise. It is now time to clarify what the "unconscious" entailed for Foucault in relation to the "subject" in order to distinguish this further from both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss.

Critics and supporters alike have discussed Foucault’s work in terms of an early period of “structuralism,” which he then abandoned in favour of “genealogy.” It was argued that this practice obscures Foucault’s search for an alternative analysis of “sexuality,” the inspiration and support for which he found in various “anti-Oedipal” forces external to French Freud, and made manifest by his non-Freudian interpretation of *Oedipus the King*, amongst others. For Foucault, the drama is not about issues of desire and incest, but explores the complexities of power and knowledge relations.

But the dual-period presentation also masks the importance of the unconscious – a concept evident in both Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical investigations. In an interview from 1978, Foucault described the intellectual’s task as making “conscious” those knowledges and techniques that have become unconscious.

I think that knowledge [*savoir*] in our societies is now something so large and so complex that it has become truly the unconscious of our societies. We don’t know what we know, we don’t know what are the effects of that knowledge. So it seems to me that the intellectual can have the role of someone who transforms knowledge regulating the unconscious of our society into conscious awareness.¹

This idea adds a very interesting “cultural” nuance to the classical psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious. There are many earlier instances where Foucault similarly stretches the meaning of this concept. During an interview granted in 1969,²

¹ Michel Foucault [1978], “La scène de la philosophie” [interview with M. Watanabe], *DE*, III, pp. 571-595, p. 595.
² Michel Foucault [1969], “Michel Foucault explique son dernier livre” [interview with J.-J. Brochier], *DE*, I, pp. 771-779, p. 772.
when speaking about his then latest book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault stated that, when he analysed discourses, he was not concerned with what was “secret, hidden, more silent and more profound” than consciousness. Rather, he seeks to “make visible” relations “at the very surface of discourse.” These are “invisible” only because they are “too much at the surface of things” [my italics]. (*DE*, I, p. 772).

Thus, what kind of unconscious Foucault is referring to when he used that term, or when he speaks of “invisible relations” at the very “surface of things,” is a complicated issue. In 1967, Jean Laplanche gestured briefly towards the changed philosophical landscape now confronting psychoanalysis: persistent objections to Freud’s system of knowledge were all the more insidious, he said, as they now came from philosophical “friends” no longer challenging the fundamental “psychoanalytic vision of man.”

Foucault was one of these friendly enemies.

However, a central purpose of this chapter is to disentangle Foucault’s position – however incompletely – from a common assumption declaring that the decentred subject was *de rigueur* for all French philosophy of the post-war years. On the contrary, it will be shown that Foucault was one of the very few philosophers of this period to take Lacan’s “subject” seriously – on his own, Nietzschean, terms. This area – the “subject” – is one of the most confused themes in discussions of so-called structuralist and post-structuralist “thought,” impacting directly on interpretations of Foucault’s work on sexuality. It therefore needs to be clarified how the philosophy of the subject advanced by Foucault very early in his career, and never “abandoned,” was

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not of the same order as existentialism, yet was different again to that of Lacan and Lévi-Strauss (though detailed comparison will be limited to these names only).

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The first step is the issue of "structuralism" and the role played by the unconscious in these discourses. As mentioned, Jean-Pierre Vernant, "historical anthropologist," was identified during these years as a "structuralist." However, Vernant had the freedom to choose those aspects of structuralism he saw fit to take on, while rejecting others; it was an instrument of research amongst others, nothing more. By contrast, and as is well known, during the 1960s and 1970s, Foucault had difficulty distancing his work from what was, in effect, a slur. You will have to ask Sartre what "structuralism" is, defied Foucault in 1968, because "he thinks that Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Derrida, Lacan and I constitute a coherent group." Structure is already an old word, Roland Barthes pointed out in 1963; today, the word is "quite overworked: all the social sciences resort to it abundantly." Why then were only some authors labelled as structuralists, when they were otherwise not united "by any solidarity or commitment?" Lacan, too, was adamant that "structure" meant something completely different for each theorist placed under the label. Foucault’s lectures in Brazil from 1974 contained the obligatory disclaimer. ("TJF," pp. 16-17). By the 1980s, the issue

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5 For example, according to Dosse, Vernant had never been interested in Lacan’s work and declined the invitation to attend his seminars. See Dosse, History of Structuralism, p. 328.
6 For the most comprehensive discussion of Foucault and "structuralism" see Eribon, Foucault et ses contemporains, esp. pp. 163-183 and pp. 233-263; and also his earlier biography: Eribon, Michel Foucault, pp. 156-168. See also O’Farrell, Michel Foucault, pp. 26-29.
7 Michel Foucault [1968], "Foucault répond à Sartre" [interview with J.-P. Elkabbach], DE, I, pp. 662-666, p. 665, cited in O’Farrell, Michel Foucault, p. 28. See also Michel Foucault [1968], "Une mise au point de Michel Foucault," DE, I, pp. 669-670, where he protests that his comments about Sartre had been strictly "off the record."
had become something of a joke for him: addressing an American audience, he declared “once and for all” that he had never been “an analytic philosopher” and neither had he been a “structuralist”. “Nobody is perfect.”

The debate about “structuralism” was played out in different ways. Opposition to its assumptions was expressed coherently in a long and complex article by Jacques Derrida in 1963, and this could be taken as the first expression of “post-structuralism.” In a retrospective essay, Derrida identified a period of his work between 1963 and 1968, when, in various analyses of the history of philosophy, “sciences” and those “so-called post-philosophical discourses,” he found the same “devaluation of writing” – that is, a lack of interrogation of the conditions enabling academic discourse – all ripe for his particular squeeze of “difference” in play. A significant example was his critique of Lévi-Strauss, delivered at the colloquium in the United States in 1966 (also attended by Jean-Pierre Vernant, as indicated previously), the content of which was expanded in his text Of Grammatology.

Most important amongst these writings for our purposes was Derrida’s critique, also dating from 1963, of Foucault’s History of Madness. Here, Derrida raised a “quantity of questions” besieging Foucault’s enterprise, some of which could equally and

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justifiably be asked of *La volonté de savoir*: what was this "historical ensemble" Foucault spoke about? How and why were the elements organized? And why the sole choice of Descartes to represent philosophy of the classical period, when "so many other philosophers of the same era were interested or – no less significantly – not interested in madness in various ways"? Unfortunately, these kinds of interesting questions pertaining to Western history and culture were overshadowed when Derrida turned in the 1990s to address Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis. As seen earlier, Derrida resurrected the debate in the very "French" terms Foucault scrupulously avoided: namely, the Freudian "drives."

In a different quarter, the arguments about structuralism revealed festering political tensions within the French left. Between March 1965 and February 1966, (that is, before the arrival of *The Order of Things*), *La Nouvelle Critique*, the main organ of the French Communist Party, ran a series of articles about the relationship between Marxism and humanism. The confrontation coalesced around two figures: Louis Althusser as representative of an anti-humanist and "structuralist" position and Roger Garaudy as spokesman for the "humanists." In an interesting partisan interpretation from the sidelines, Foucault claimed that one of the motivations behind portraying structuralism as "right-wing" was to defuse Althusser’s influence in the university and weaken his position in the Communist Party. In this view, what disturbed the old-

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17 Derrida, "Cogito," *Writing and Difference*, p. 44.
20 According to Foucault: "The French left is still dominated by the Communist Party. ... [An effort] is being carried out at the moment by communist intellectuals on the left wing of the Party, and they are all more or less orientated around Althusser. This structuralist wing is on the left. So, now you understand the manoeuvre of Sartre and [Roger] Garaudy, that is, the claim that structuralism is a typically right-wing ideology. It allows them to designate as accomplices of the right those who are in reality on their
style Marxists about Althusser hobnobbing with personalities like Lacan was not so much the risk of theoretical contamination as the added prestige this gave an already-popular Althusser with young Marxist students, concerned more and more with other issues besides the class struggle – foremost epistemology and psychoanalysis.

Finally, in its most “médiatique” forms, the arguments against structuralism amounted to little more than nostalgia for a certain image of the French intellectual that was now passing away. Instead of the hip existentialist taking philosophy into the jazz bars and cafés, an image renowned throughout the world, there was now the austere academic.21 Was it any surprise that structuralism coincided with the most “static period of the Gaullist republic” to take Derrida’s observation?22 Maurice Henry’s cartoon showing Foucault, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, grouped together in an exotic location, brilliantly captures the contrast to existentialism: now separated radically from Parisian signifiers and whisky cocktails, the French intellectual’s new-found interest in nature and primitivism only made him all the more grotesque for that.23

Both Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir reacted defiantly to the new circumstances, and not without provocation: from the outset, Lévi-Strauss had defined his method largely against existentialism and phenomenology – including “savage” polemics directed at Sartre.24 Sartre’s main target in response, however, was not Lévi-

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21 As David Pace argues, no-one could have been more removed from the picture of Jean-Paul Sartre in the post-war years, whether real or imagined, than Claude Lévi-Strauss, engrossed in archaic myths, weighed down by academic accolades. See Pace, Claude Lévi-Strauss, p. 2.
Strauss but Foucault, on the publication of The Order of Things in 1966. In an unprecedented outburst, Sartre labelled the book “the last rampart of the bourgeoisie.” Structuralism refused the “intervention of praxis,” namely “history,” said Sartre. Certainly, Foucault’s perspective was “historical” of sorts: he distinguished periods, there was a “before and after.” But Foucault “replaced the cinema with the magic lantern, movement by a succession of static images.”

Sartre had obviously forgotten a similar crusade against existentialism that had erupted in the late 1940s, brought to light by Mark Poster’s study, where no tactics had been “too low” for some Marxists when it came to discrediting the “intellectual fornications” threatening the “virility” of contemporary thought, and Lévi-Strauss had insulted “shop-girls” by implying they were little more than existentialists. Now it was Sartre on the offensive: Foucault was “called for” by those trendies who need him, such as “Robbe-Grillet, structuralism, linguistics, Lacan, Tel Quel” – a list reminiscent of Borges’ Chinese dictionary (perhaps Foucault’s book secretly inspired Sartre after all). De Beauvoir supported Sartre’s campaign in the pages of Le Monde. In what was ostensibly an interview about her new novel Les Belles Images, de Beauvoir found

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25 For an extensive discussion of the exchanges between Foucault, Sartre and de Beauvoir see Eribon, Foucault et ses contemporains, pp. 163-183.
28 See “The Attack on Sartre 1944-1948,” Poster, Existential Marxism, esp. pp. 109-125; Simone de Beauvoir, Force of Circumstance, trans. Richard Howard (Harmondsworth, 1965), pp. 44-54. It was in the context of his “off the record” reply to Sartre that Foucault recalled that, ironically, during his brief stint in the French communist party in the 1950s, he and other young Marxists had labelled Sartre the “last rampart of the bourgeoisie”; now it was Sartre’s turn in the 1960s to call Foucault the same thing. What goes around comes around, one may remark! See DE, I, p. 666. Later, Foucault quipped that the bourgeoisie must have been pretty desperate indeed to enlist himself as its last rampart. See Foucault, Remarks on Marx, p. 85. [“Entretien avec Michel Foucault » DE, IV, p. 62].
29 Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, p. 58.
room to criticise Les mots et les choses: the book was “boring and unreadable.”

Above all, Foucault was “fusty” [“poussièreux”], covered in the dust he gathered from tottering around in dark archives. But the layers of dust only proved that the books were unread, noted Georges Canguilhem, revealing more about de Beauvoir’s own “frivolous” interests than the current state of intellectual endeavour.

Canguilhem’s review will return later. Parallel to this sensationalist dimension, structuralism referred to a current of thought moving beyond the traditional philosophy of the subject, elaborated in its post-war French guises primarily by existentialism, constantly invigorated by tussles with Marxism. Now we get to the heart of the matter. Lévi-Strauss objected to Sartre’s imprisonment within the traditional Cartesian “cogito.”

To take Didier Eribon’s assessment, the “key” element linking what was called structuralism was the “problem of the subject.” Along with others, “notably Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and linguists,” Foucault posed the question of the subject in “novel terms.”

More precisely, these theorists recognised the role of the Freudian unconscious in the “problem” – a point often missed. As Foucault put it in an interview from 1968:

In a positive guise, let us say that structuralism explores above all an unconscious. It is the unconscious structures of language, of a literary work, and of knowledge that one tries at the moment to bring to light. ...

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31 She continues: “This type of thought was expected. Better, it was called for, as Sartre said ... A genuinely new thought makes its way slowly.” Eribon notes that Les Belles Images contained a critical “allusion” to the last pages of Foucault’s book. See Eribon, Foucault et ses contemporains, p. 170.


33 Poster, Existential Marxism, p. 324.

34 Eribon, Foucault et ses contemporains, p. 249.
make clear the logical correlations which can exist between a large number of elements belonging to a language, an ideology (as in the analyses of Althusser), a society (as in Lévi-Strauss) or different fields of knowledge; this is what I myself have worked on. One could describe structuralism in general as the study of logical structures wherever they have occurred. (DE, I, p. 653).

In relation specifically to his own work, he described it in the following way:

What I have tried to show in the first place is that there exist, within the history of knowledge, certain regularities and certain necessities at the interior of this knowledge that remain obscure to the knowledge itself and which are not present to the consciousness of individuals [hommes]. There is something like an unconscious in science ... (DE, I, p. 656).

Or, in an interview from 1981, he stated:

[L]inguistics affirms that it is too simple, indeed inadequate, to explain human discourse by referring simply to the intentions of the subject. The idea of the unconscious, and that of language as structure, enables one to respond to this problem, so to speak, from outside of the ego. I have tried to apply the same practice to history. (DE, IV, p. 667).

That is, what worried Sartre and de Beauvoir, beyond dust or ramparts, were “unconscious” psychic mechanisms, because this undermined the existential concept of “freedom.” As Foucault put it, the great “stumbling block” of existentialism was its refusal to recognise the Freudian unconscious. (DE, I, p. 654). Sartre confirmed as much in a remarkable interview conducted in 1969 by the editors of New Left Review.

A sort of xenophobia, he admitted, reinforced by the Nazi occupation of France, had contributed to his underestimation of Freudian theory in the 1930s and 1940s: “I have to say that I was incapable of understanding [Freud] because I was a Frenchman with a good Cartesian tradition behind me, imbued with a certain rationalism, and I was therefore deeply shocked by the idea of the unconscious.”35 For De Beauvoir, “all psychoanalysts systematically reject the idea of choice and the correlated concept of

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value, and therein lies the intrinsic weakness of the system,” while “only an ontological point of view, a comprehension of being in general, permits us to restore the unity of this choice.”  

By contrast, Foucault often spoke about his “conversion,” in the 1950s, to the philosophical implications of the Freudian “unconscious.” In an interview marking the death of Lacan in 1981, Foucault observed:

If I look back to the fifties, the time when, as a student, I read Levi-Strauss or the first texts of Lacan, it seemed to me that the novelty consisted of the following: we discovered that philosophy and the human sciences had existed according to a very traditional conception of the human subject, and that it was not enough to say either, from one angle, that the subject was radically free, or from another angle, that he [or she] was determined by social conditions. We discovered that it was necessary to try to liberate all that hides behind the apparent simple use of the pronoun “I”. The subject: something complex, fragile, about which it is so difficult to talk, and without which we are not able to speak ...

Foucault never abandoned this position, despite the dogged conviction of most commentators that his “perspective on ‘the subject’ changed over the years.” True, the problem of sexuality and its history had proved more complicated than Foucault had thought, and this seems to justify the insistence that Foucault “returned” to a conventional conception of the subject as autonomous and “free” from power. He introduced the second volume with this admission: “In order to understand how the modern individual could experience himself as a subject of ‘sexuality,’ it was essential first to determine how, for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognise himself as a subject of desire.” (UP, p. 6). On an earlier occasion, in a lecture

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explicitly digressing into an “autocritique,” Foucault conceded that, by insisting perhaps too much on “the techniques of domination,” in the “art of governing people in our society,” the relationship between self and experience remained elusive:

[A] analysing the experience of sexuality, I became more and more aware that there is in all societies, ... another group of techniques: techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. 39

But – a crucial point often overlooked – this was no reason to scurry back, either, to an existentialist conception of the subject that ignored the unconscious, or to the psychoanalytic theory of desire. Both were anathema. In the Foreword to the English edition of The Order of Things, Foucault claimed that discourse was such a complex phenomenon that it called for a range of perspectives: “we not only can, but should, approach it at different levels and with different methods.” (OT, p. xiv). He then went on to assert:

If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constitutive role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. (OT, p. xiv).

Meanwhile, Foucault similarly reported his motivation to break with the common conception of sexuality encapsulated by the psychoanalytic conception of “desire,” because “the subject of desire” had been “withdrawn from the historical field.” (UP, p. 4).

Foucault’s discourse and terminology in the 1980s reflects this continued repudiation of both phenomenological existentialism and psychoanalysis: not “ego” [le moi], nor “subject” [le sujet], but the “self” [le soi]. If the history of sexuality involved “techniques of the self” perhaps underestimated in his reformulation of the notion of power, this only made it all the more imperative to find an alternative, and to rid ourselves “of the more or less Freudian schema” that would attribute all forms of sexuality to “the interiorisation of the law by the self.” That is, Foucault remained attached until the end of his career to the Nietzschean project, described as a “genealogy” of the philosophical subject treated as “a historical and cultural reality.” Taking this path has not always been easy, “since most historians prefer a history of social processes, and most philosophers prefer a subject without a history.” It could not be equated to the Heideggerian project, as Foucault made clear in a footnote to his “autocritique,” because, instead of unravelling the true Being suffocated by more and more techne, “let’s turn the question around and ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the subject.” In short:

I have tried to get away from the philosophy of the subject by producing a genealogy of the modern subject, which I have treated as a historical and cultural reality; namely, something susceptible to transformation and which, obviously, is important from a political point of view. (DE, IV, p. 170).

At the end of his career, in an interview from 1984, we find Foucault giving the following summary of his views:

I do indeed believe that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere. I am very sceptical of this view of the subject and very hostile to it. I believe that the subject is constituted through

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practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty, as in Antiquity, on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment. 44

Thus, the argument to be presented in this chapter is that Foucault’s “self” found its original source in Lacan’s “subject,” but he quickly transformed it beyond psychoanalytic recognition. Put simplistically for the moment, Foucault injected a new “structural” unconscious – no longer at the mercy of transhistorical “desire” – into a Nietzschean body of instincts. This step was made possible because other fields of structural analysis had transformed the Freudian unconscious into a different concept to the one used in psychoanalysis: “through linguistics, logic and ethnology one arrives at the discovery of a sector which stands outside consciousness in the usually accepted meaning of that word.” 45 This “structural” unconscious, as he called it in an interview from 1972, involves relationships that “are operative in language, in formal thought, and even in certain social structures.” 46 It therefore cannot be equated, either to Freud’s individual unconscious, or to Jung’s “collective unconscious,” as Foucault made clear in the same interview:

One can say with confidence that we are not speaking of an individual unconscious, in the sense psychoanalysis generally understands that notion. Yet neither is it a collective unconscious, which would be a kind of collection or reservoir of archetypes at the disposal of everyone. The “structural” unconscious is neither of these things. 47

Another way of describing this structural unconscious was to stress its “positive” nature – seen before by Lévi-Strauss inflecting Freud’s negative prohibition against incest into a positive compulsion to give and to exchange. Foucault, too, alters the nature of the

46 Foucault, “Historian of Culture,” Foucault Live, p. 100.
47 Foucault, “Historian of Culture,” Foucault Live, p. 100.
unconscious in the history of ideas. Previously, the unconscious had always referred to the “negative side” of knowledge: “what resists it, deflects it, or disturbs it.” Foucault’s task instead was to reveal “a positive unconscious of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse.” (OT, p. xi).48

It will be argued later in this chapter that, in Foucault’s hands, the structuralist unconscious was made ethnographic. If universals are suspended, what exists instead are specific historical networks of power and knowledge relations – for example, “nineteenth-century medicine,” or the “Greek city state” – whose configurations are largely unknown. Contrary to Lévi-Strauss, many different regimes of truth production exist; the unconscious must somehow function not only on the cultural plane, but in a plural sense as well. But before we can elaborate Foucault’s difference from both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, it is necessary to establish first what Lacan meant in Freudian terms by the “subject.”

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According to Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, from as early as 1936, Lacan designates the first person (the one who speaks) by the name “subject,” in large measure to combat what had become of the Freudian “ego” at the hands of post-Freudians.49 As Borch-Jacobsen’s describes the nuance introduced by Lacan, the ego is the one who sees him- or herself “in the other,” while the subject, the “I,” is the being who “speaks to the

48 On this aspect of Foucault’s work, see Arnold Davidson, “Structures and Strategies of Discourse: Remarks Towards a History of Foucault’s Philosophy of Language,” Foucault and his Interlocutors, pp. 1-17, p. 7.
other” and attempts to respond to the range of the other’s communicative demands.\textsuperscript{50} Although helpful, this does not really capture the importance of Freud’s “unconscious” for Lacan’s subject, and for structuralism generally, and it will be seen shortly that Borch-Jacobsen’s interpretation is too driven by an opposing agenda. More useful is to make a direct contrast with the philosophical subject as proposed by Descartes: a being who emerges as a subject only after all hunger, sexual lust, anxiety, pleasure or pain has vanished. “I think, therefore I am” implies an already constituted subject who, secondarily, negotiates the outside world; there is an uninterrupted unity between thought and the person who is thinking, or “having” those thoughts.

Freud’s notion of the unconscious makes such a unity impossible, claims Lacan. The formula should read: “I think where I am not, I am where I do not think.” (É/S, p. 166).\textsuperscript{51} Thus, in the history of Western philosophy, there is a fundamental “dissymmetry” between Descartes and Freud due to the introduction of the “unconscious,” yet this fact has never been properly appreciated by philosophers ignorant of psychoanalysis, nor Freudians poorly informed philosophically. The subject “is ‘at home’ in the field of the unconscious,” not consciousness.\textsuperscript{52} For Lacan, the unconscious is not individual, nor collective, but “intersubjective.” As he expressed it in his interview with Madeleine Chapsal in 1957, fundamentally, the analyst does not ask, “who speaks,” but “from where does the unconscious speak”; it was not ontology but a “theory of intersubjectivity.”\textsuperscript{53} It is the gaps and discontinuities of conscious discourse that allow the subject of the unconscious to emerge. Only struggle, obsession, hunger, lust, dreams and so on, call forth the intersubjectivity

\textsuperscript{51} See also Lacan and Lapouge, “Auteur mysterieux et prestigieux, \textit{Le Figaro Litteraire}.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{T. Lacan, Four Fundamental Concepts}, p. 154.
necessary to produce the capacity for subjective action – curiosity, love, no less than violence – and reveal a recognisable human.

Importantly, Foucault takes this fundamental maxim of relation at the heart of “intersubjectivity” into his own conception of power relations: “In so far as power relations are an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces, it is clear that this implies an above and a below, a difference of potentials.” (“CF,” pp. 200-201). Or, as he expressed it in more political terms: “the most intense point of lives, the point where their energy is concentrated, is there where they clash with power, struggle with it, attempt to use its forces and to escape its traps.”

However, Foucault was by no means representative of a popularist take-over. Most psychoanalysts and philosophers found this idea of human agency foreign. Let us deal with Lacan’s psychoanalytic colleagues first. It was necessary “to accustom people’s ears to the term subject,” Lacan said – a continual battle, it seems. Daniel Lagache, for example, never accepted Lacan’s idea of the “subject” – even though he was united politically with Lacan in the 1950s against the old psychoanalytic society, as seen previously. Lagache preferred the more traditional “personality”, and, in order to distinguish it from psychology, he even employed the term “personology” [la personnologie]. The exchanges between Lagache and Lacan are, unfortunately, obscure; but, in retrospect, one of the early seeds of difference was how to define “transference” between the analyst and the analysand, and this gives us the necessary insight into their differences on the meaning of the “subject.”

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In very simple idiom, transference is the name given to the situation where current intersubjective relations stand in for past ones. It could be said to define "psychoanalysis" in its practical sense. But it was a marginal theoretical issue until Lacan reignited the discussion at a congress of psychoanalysts in 1951.\(^55\) Using Freud's case history known as "Dora," Lacan demonstrated the intersubjective nature of the analytic relationship, and the fact that the analyst's role in "transference" is far from neutral – as Freud himself discovered in this case. Lagache, too, wrote a paper on transference, published in the international journal in 1953.\(^56\) Both Lacan and Lagache agreed that nothing better encapsulates and legitimates the view that language is at the heart of psychoanalysis than the very mechanisms operating between the analyst and the analysand. This relationship was found nowhere else in medicine and science, and was impossible to understand without taking into account the complexities of "speech" and "discourse."

Crucial to Lacan's position was the following: "what happens in analysis is that the subject is, strictly speaking, constituted through a discourse."\(^57\) Recounting the past, complete with the analyst's distinct role to play in the reconstruction, will force the unconscious to emerge, and only then does the true psychoanalytic "subject" come into being. Importantly, this subject is not the organic subject of biology, nor the socio-biographical subject of psychology, but the subject of a transindividual and cultural force – the unconscious – made present by relations of intersubjectivity: in this case, the analyst and the analysand. This is the reality of the subject's experience in

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contemporary life against those various ideologies—"free enterprise," for example—which would direct him or her to deny any dependence on intersubjectivity, gaps, ambiguity, hunger, sexual lust, anxiety, pleasure or pain and assume a "whole" signifying identity.

Basically, Lagache, beginning with his response to Lacan's Rome discourse published in *La psychanalyse* in 1956, had a different idea of "intersubjectivity" to that of Lacan. Lagache wanted to maintain a place for "intrasubjective" structures prior to any analytic situation, what he called the "personological model." Lagache made a distinction between the "constituted" (constitué) ego of internal structures and the "constituent" (constituant) ego of external structures, of which the analytic situation would be one example. While the "constituted" ego is "the agent" of defensive operations that are "automatic and unconscious," characterised by tensions directed between the id and the superego, the "constituent" ego differentiates itself from this by its "resistance to tensions and repetitions," and by its "attention, reflexion, judgement and will."

This was unacceptable to Lacan, for the "instituted ego" slips too readily into the developmental ego of post-Freudian debasements—those people who mistake the psychoanalytic subject for the socio-biographical or biological subject. In this, Lacan

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60 Lagache "La psychanalyse et la structure," Œuvres IV, p. 219.
was no doubt influenced by Georges Canguilhem's famous critique of psychology.61 For Lacan, there can be only one ego of analytic theory, the one that shows its "stains" in practice, a function of "méconnaissance" ["misrecognition"] at the heart of human subjectivity. This is why it was necessary to develop a concept of "structure" specific to psychoanalysis; Lagache, amongst others, was in the process of undermining this. One had to think of "topology" rather than "form"; and, most importantly, "the structure of which I am speaking has nothing to do with the idea of the structure of the organism."62

Lagache's view also subtly changes the nature of "intersubjectivity" so that there is now a *reciprocal* dialogue of two equal consciousnesses in the manner of existentialism. Symptomatic in Lacan's eyes of Lagache's conservative position was failure to address the subject's assumption of his or her "sex role," an omission typical also of today's "Freudian circles."63 After all, there can be no such thing as an *intersubjective* unconscious if a person is automatically sexual in accordance with one's body, because, in that case, there would be no impetus to go beyond that body and to negotiate morphologies different to oneself. Taking stock of "where our perspectives differ," Lacan drew attention to the way Lagache defines intersubjectivity as a "relationship with the other as a *semblable*," "fundamentally symmetrical," seen from the fact that, for Lagache, "the subject learns to treat himself as an object from the

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61 Georges Canguilhem [1958], "Qu'est-ce que la psychologie," *Études d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences* (Paris, 1970), pp. 365-381. Canguilhem had in fact used Lagache's idea of the "unity" of psychological sciences as a critical departure point for the article.
other. By contrast, Lacan’s view states that “the subject has to arise from the given state of the signifiers that cover him in an Other which is their transcendental locus.” To put it in André Green’s more lucid words, the “Other” that Lacan speaks about is “the possessor of power” and “locus of the truth of the subject.” Lagache’s schema banishes intersubjective power differentials, whereas, at least in Lacan, power is ever-present: “the exercise of power” haunts the analytic situation, says Lacan, and this is why authentic intersubjective “praxis” is so difficult. (É/S, p. 226).

Lacan’s conception of the “subject” was inextricably linked to his formulation of “desire” and cannot be understood outside of this concept. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, Lacan set himself to “re-centre the Freudian discovery around the notion of desire” and place it at the “forefront of psychoanalytic theory.” Crucial to this project was recasting the Oedipus complex in terms of desire, which Lacan set in motion as early as 1938, in a long article dedicated to the modern family. Essentially, Lacan reconceived Freud’s libidinal stages of oral, anal and phallic in terms of more “social” or inter-relational concepts. The phases became, respectively, the “complex of weaning” between mother and baby; the “complex of intrusion,” when the subject is confronted with a new sibling rival or equivalent (an area Freud had barely touched on); and, third, the complex already well-known under the name of “Oedipus,” whereby the recognition of the role of the father in procreation wounds the subject’s

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64 Lacan, “Remarks on Daniel Lagache,” É/E, p. 549. It should be pointed out that Lacan’s article is extremely difficult to follow and some guesswork is involved in the interpretation.

65 Green, Tragic Effect, p. 79.


68 The subject of siblings and its conceptual complexities for psychoanalysis has been developed by Juliet Mitchell, who introduces the intriguing notion of the “law of the mother.” See Juliet Mitchell, Mad Men and Medusas: Reclaiming Hysteria and the effects of Sibling Relations on the Human Condition, Harmondsworth, 2001; and Juliet Mitchell, Siblings: Sex and Violence (London, 2003).
narcissistic assumptions about the central place he or she occupies in the original and primary inter-relationship with the mother. However, in Lacan’s revised schema (to be taken up in chapter six), he adds the interesting claim that the Oedipus complex now exists in a “decadent” form due to historical developments. The point was to stress that the family was not reducible to “instincts” but was always a “psychic circumstance.”

By the 1950s and into the 1960s, desidero was established as the Freudian cogito in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Desire resides in the Other. As part of enlisting the services of linguistics, Lacan read Freud’s formulations as that which “establish the subject in a certain position of dependence upon the signifier.” In very simple terms, therefore, a baby being fed involves not just the infant’s needs, but also the carer’s linguistic demands, dictated by his or her desire. Demand is never stable, it comes and goes, and it takes on different forms. This sets up a pattern of inter-subjectivity for the person’s entire life. Although this issue will return in more detail in chapter six, what Lacan calls the “phallus” has a privileged status as the “primary signifier” within any chain of communication because it acts as the metaphor of the father’s power. The phallus comes to stand in for missing “demand” in general, empowered with the capacity to fill absence of any kind. It assumes the value of everything the subject has ever been deprived of, even taking on the significance of the subject’s “very life.” But before going further into Lacan’s conception of “desire,” we must return to Foucault.

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It was not only psychoanalysts like Lagache who resisted Lacan's subject. The opposition was far more widespread, and, in embracing the "structural" unconscious as Foucault did, he was by no means part of a unanimous French philosophical take-over. According to a study by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, the post-war rejection of "humanism" and its "naiveties" was a movement that resurrected the "philosophy without a subject" as practised in the early twentieth century by Emile Durkheim. This view is very misleading as far as Foucault's work is concerned because Durkheim's sociology appealed to a "collective consciousness" - not at all the same thing as the Freudian unconscious, concerned as it was with the gaps, slips and patent inadequacies of conscious discourse.

Rather, the "philosophy without a subject" of Foucault's generation from the 1950s onwards, and under the influence of Lacan, was a subject with, or in spite of, an unconscious. Although "Freudian," this unconscious only gained its meaning within the terms set by the "human sciences" of those decades - linguistics, anthropology, and so on. These sciences had taken on an importance "in theory and in practice," that "they have never known before now," in Foucault's view. (DE, I, p. 659). So, an unconscious suited to their purposes emerged: not individual in the manner of Freud - but not "collectively" unconscious in the manner of universal archetypes, and certainly not a system of "conscious" social contracts as some sociologies may assume.

Inability to grasp the true, contested, meaning of the Freudian subject in post-war French thought - and even within the confines of psychoanalysis itself - has led to a string of confusing assertions similar to that of Bourdieu and Passeron. Carolyn Dean

claims that the “dissolution of the self” epitomized French thought in the post-war years, evidenced by the obsessions of literary figures such as George Bataille and Lacan. Dean sees Foucault’s declaration of the “death of man” as one episode of a long line of “French modernists, existentialists, phenomenologists, structuralists, and now poststructuralists” who have “decentred” the self “in radically different ways since the late nineteenth century.”

Recently, this view has been confirmed by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen: the “idea of a decentred subject is not something that Lacan invented in the fifties, for you find it expressed in numerous ways before him.” The notion derives in fact from Alexandre Kojève’s famous lectures on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which introduced a whole generation, Lacan and Sartre included, to the idea of a “subject” that “does not coincide with itself.” The “slogan of the 1960s” – death of man – was “prefigured in Kojève’s lectures,” proclaims Vincent Descombes in his influential account of modern French philosophy. Borch-Jacobsen readily admits that the “new philosophical reading of Freud was in no way faithful to psychoanalytic theory.” Nevertheless, figures like Maurice Merleau-Ponty elaborated a “phenomenological reading of Freud” as a result of the influence of Kojève. Meanwhile, Lacan distinguished himself from orthodox Freudians through this same take-up of Kojève’s Hegelian subject, partly

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74 Carolyn J. Dean, *The Self and its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 1. She continues: “They have developed the idea that the self no longer masters the world through its reason, but is mired in and constituted by culture.”
because Lacan recognised that the future of psychoanalysis in France “depended upon its acceptance by the intellectual elite.”78 As Borch-Jacobsen details:

[W]hat is crucial ... is Kojève’s redefinition of subjectivity in terms of radical negativity, because this is precisely what made possible the reception of psychoanalytic ideas by French philosophy. What Kojève introduced into French philosophy was a fascination with negativity in all its forms. ... Now, it is easy to understand why such a philosophy of the de-centred subject would be more hospitable to psychoanalysis than before. The ideas that consciousness is not transparent to itself and that the ego is not master in its own house suddenly didn’t seem so absurd anymore. ... And thus the philosophic subject was ripe for the psychoanalytic take-over to follow.79

Foucault adamantly rejected these kinds of assessments of post-war French thought,80 and not because he wanted to reclaim his rightful paternity as the progenitor of a “slogan.” Rather, in Foucault’s view, philosophers like Sartre turned to Hegel through Kojève precisely to find a philosophical alternative to Freud that could justifiably re-centre the subject away from “mechanistic determinations” and reinstate consciousness in its place. What existentialism affirms is that the subject, or “the freedom” embodied in “man,” is able to penetrate and therefore master “everything that Freudianism had described or designated as unconscious mechanisms.” (DE, I, p. 654). According to an interview from the late 1970s:

From Descartes until Sartre – I’m not trying to be polemical – it seems to me that the subject was indeed considered as something fundamental, but untouchable: it was what you couldn’t question. ... The idea that the subject is not fundamental and original, but forming itself according to certain processes that are not of the order of subjectivity but an order evidently very difficult to name and to make clear, but more fundamental and more primary than the subject itself, could not emerge. The subject has a genesis, the subject has a formation, the subject has a history; the subject is not a point of origins. (DE, III, p. 590).

Indeed, while Sartre admitted in 1969 that he had been short-sighted in regard to Freud, this did not mean he now accepted "the mythology of the unconscious." On the contrary: "I remain shocked by what was inevitable in Freud – the biological and physiological language." For Sartre, "the psychoanalytic object suffers from a kind of mechanistic cramp."\(^{81}\) His concept of "mauvaise foi" ("bad faith") was part of a range of emotional states designed to supplant psychoanalytic accounts of the mind, because, for Sartre, to accept the Freudian unconscious would be to think that "a lie without a liar" was possible. For Freudians, that is the whole point. And especially for those Freudians of the Lacanian school interested in epistemology, Sartre’s position would imply that those scientists who had accepted the Ptolemaic conception of the universe for centuries must have been blatant liars, each and every one of them.

Moreover, Sartre did not really find what he was looking for via Kojève. In Foucault’s view, not only could existentialism be taken as “anti-Freudian,” there was even a “profoundly anti-Hegelian” tenet informing its assumptions. \((DE, I, p. 654)\). After all, Hegel portrayed history as a kind of implacable logic; this process could easily be regarded as “mechanistic” too when seen through existentialist lenses. Describing her reading of Hegel during the Nazi Occupation, Simone de Beauvoir detailed how she gradually “diverged” from him. Yes, it may be ludicrous to overestimate this brief instant in time, when placed against the immense gravity of world history; but neither "History nor the Hegelian system could, any more than the Devil in person, upset the living certainty of ‘I am, I exist, here and now, I am myself’.\(^{82}\) It could even be said that post-war existentialism was a reaction \textit{against} Kojève by the attempts Sartre and company made to release conscious experience “from the strictures of logic.” \((DE, I, p. \ldots)\)

\(^{81}\) Sartre, "Itinerary of a thought," \textit{New Left Review}, p. 3

Hence Sartre’s recurring altercations with Marxism during the post-war years up to the late 1950s, the very time when Lacanians and Althusserians began seducing each other with more and more logical sweet talk, leading to various semiotic offspring quite foreign to both existentialism and orthodox Marxism.

Nor do we have to take Foucault’s word uncritically; existential resistance to psychoanalysis is well known. At the commencement of Merleau-Ponty’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1952, he explicitly opposed his philosophy to that current of contemporary thought that had diminished “consciousness” and the “sensible world.” No doubt with his friend Lacan in mind, modern theorists, he says, consistently “define the subject by its sheer power to confer significations,” while any attempt “to take account of the finitude of sensible consciousness is rejected as a return to naturalism or even pantheism.”

Likewise, if we go back to Merleau-Ponty’s lectures delivered at the Sorbonne in the late 1940s and early 1950s, we find the same determination to side-step psychoanalysis. These lectures deal primarily with child psychology and development; but, significantly, Freud’s “unconscious” is neither seen, heard, nor allowed to play; even the child’s acquisition of language is discussed entirely in terms of “consciousness.” When he utilizes Lacan’s re-worked “complexes” (of “severage”, “intrusion” and so

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Merleau-Ponty treats these “revisions and enlargements” as if they represented the current state of psychoanalytic theory – far from the case in reality, as these concepts were part of Lacan’s struggles against the dominant post-Freudian readings of Freud. Besides, they never caught on and Lacan did not pursue them. It was symptomatic of Merleau-Ponty’s general unwillingness to engage properly with the debates of psychoanalysis, an attitude glaring in the case of sexuality. He claims Freud conceived of the development of the boy and the girl “in parallel fashion,” and that Freud brought forward the notion of the “Electra complex” to describe the girl’s distinctly feminine relationships with parents. No less than Lacan, Freud strenuously rejected this concept, initially proposed by Jung, because of the egalitarianism it assumed (taken for granted also by Merleau-Ponty), and it was never part of classic psychoanalytic theory. Yet attributing the “Electra complex” to Freud was a common error in these milieux and seems to display a distinctly French wish-fulfilment: it was one of the many “fusions and confusions” of Simone de Beauvoir’s reading of Freud exposed by Juliet Mitchell.

According to Foucault, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre could only accept the unconscious as a “sort of shadow,” something “marginal.” (DE, IV, p. 667). This describes quite accurately the minor role Merleau-Ponty grants the Freudian concept in his later lectures as well – at least going by the truncated published “themes.” Designated under the general heading of “passivity,” the unconscious is equated with “sleep” and

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88 According to Freud: “I do not see any advance or gain in the introduction of the term ‘Electra Complex,’ and do not advocate its use,” Freud, cited in Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, p. 312.
“memory” – though the rationale for this grouping is not explained. “Passive” would be the very antithesis of Freud’s ideal adjective to describe the unconscious. Worse, what Merleau-Ponty finds attractive about the unconscious is its referral to a “primordial and originary symbolism.” He claims Freud’s “most interesting insight” is “not the idea of a second ‘I think’ which could know what we do not know about ourselves – but the idea of a symbolism which is primordial, originary.” This is almost the diametric opposite of Lacan’s reading of Freud. He often stated categorically that “Freud’s unconscious is not to be confused with the Romantic notions ... referring to the archaic, the primordial, the primitive,” and who saw the value in Freud’s theory residing precisely in its capacity to transform the traditional Cartesian maxim: “I think where I am not, I am where I do not think.”

It is therefore meaningless to say that post-war French philosophy embraced “the de-centred subject” when one of the issues that divided them into separate camps, and continues to divide their followers, was acceptance or rejection of the Freudian unconscious. Indeed, a broad existentialist opposition to the psychoanalytic subject continues to have strong currency in today’s philosophical thought in the wake of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir. The resistance has a profound impact on readings of Foucault. It is evidenced by Carolyn Dean’s implicit view that the dissolute “French” theorists “dissolving the self” (and Foucault is amongst these by association only) have now been superseded by more sensible philosophies.

Similarly, a tradition of philosophers mainly inspired by Derrida have claimed that Lacan’s interpretation of the unconscious only confirms psychoanalysis on a continuum

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91 Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures*, p. 49.
with Descartes: both traditions prioritise *representation*. According to Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan denies that we can have any experience that would not be "representational": "like most other French 'structuralist' or 'poststructuralist' thinkers, human experience is exclusively that of discourse, language and the symbolic." 93 Borch-Jacobsen cites the "experience of hypnosis," and other "trance-like states" we encounter everyday (driving a car, for example) as bodily realities that "allows us to access this non-representational sphere." 94 He believes that promoting these phenomenological dimensions - "affect, the body, sensation" - will do "philosophical justice" to human experience. 95

More specifically, many philosophers question Lacan's view of the relationship between Descartes and Freud. According to Yvon Brès, Lacan's schema is too simplistic, and outrageously so. 96 Descartes "cogito" as the "absolute foundation of knowledge" was hardly accepted unanimously over the centuries; one could cite David Hume as a counter example; and, even in Descartes, "the recourse to God as a source of knowledge for the thinking subject" prevented Cartesians from ever really positing the ego as absolute master. 97

These may be a valid criticisms, but, Lacan would protest, why then did philosophy not come up with the concept of the unconscious as developed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*? Why did we have to wait for psychoanalysis to give us a theory of wit and humour? On one

97 Brès, "Psychoanalyse et philosophie," *Psychanalyse à l'Université*, p. 444.
occasion, Lacan expressed his frustration that psychoanalysts were obliged to press home not just Freud’s, but Saussure’s radical revolution while they were at it: “On reflection, do we need psychoanalysis to tell us this? Aren’t we astounded that philosophers didn’t emphasize ages ago that human reality is irreducibly structured as signifying?”98

Thus, Lacan targets those who refuse the singular non-material, or “logical,” unconscious. These theorists propose instead phenomenological versions that seem more real because they are based on the body and sensation. Like Merleau-Ponty’s complaint fifty years earlier that contemporary thinkers proceed as if “sensible consciousness” had nothing to do with “being and subjectivity,” the linguistic or logical unconscious is sidelined in favour of a philosophy of pure somatic properties. One may as well resurrect Sartre’s concept of alienation, and with it, de Beauvoir’s assertion that Sartre can explain everything that Freud explains without needing a “mysterious unconscious.”99

By contrast, an important aspect of Foucault’s position in post-war French philosophy was his acceptance of the idea that the “subject” is subjected to an unconscious. To say that there is “something like an unconscious in science” reveals a project quite foreign to the search for the phenomenological essence at the heart of “being and subjectivity,” as well as to those various reformulations of “desire” – the most original of which for Foucault was the idea of “desiring machines” by Deleuze and Guattari. So, if Sartre and Lacan were “alternate contemporaries,” to repeat Élisabeth Roudinesco’s formula, the latter’s contribution to the idea of a “structural” unconscious would irresistibly

99 De Beauvoir, Second Sex, p. 78.
compel Foucault towards the psychoanalytic camp in preference to the existentialists. And to reiterate: incorporating the unconscious somehow into the "subject" was a position Foucault adopted in the 1950s and never abandoned.

Before moving on, it is necessary to answer certain general misconceptions about this "logical" use of the "unconscious." As stressed by Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley in the 1980s, Foucault's anti-humanism, no less than Lacan's version, is not a "denial" of human agency as is so often claimed. As part of conference proceedings published by the Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie in 1969, Lucien Goldmann characterised Foucault's thought as the "negation of man in general." (DE, I, p. 813). This "negation" of the subject was a central idea for a whole group of theorists and a whole philosophical current: the "French school of structuralism." (DE, I, p. 813).

Goldmann's "question" extended for five pages, and Foucault's response was confusing, but, later in the exchange, Lacan succinctly identified a key nuance:

I would like to make the remark that, structuralism or not, in the field vaguely delineated by that label, it is nowhere a question of the negation of the subject. It's a matter of the dependence of the subject, which is fundamentally different. And, in particular, at the level of the return to Freud, the dependence of the subject in relation to something truly primary, and which we have tried to capture under the term 'signifier'... (DE, I, p. 820).

Thus, what is promoted by both Foucault and Lacan is not the negation of the subject, but the recognition of unconscious forces acting on that subject, what Arnold Davidson translates as the "subordination" of the subject to knowledges beyond the power of any

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100 As they express it: "What is challenged is not the status of the person, free agent, or the subject of right, but rather the claimed ontological foundations of that status." See Paul Hirst and Penny Woolley, Social Relations and Human Attributes (London & New York, 1982), p. 131.
one individual. Most often, Foucault’s denial of human agency is seen to be encapsulated by the concept of “episteme” essential to his “structuralist” period. Although Foucault later “abandoned” the idea of the “episteme,” his notion of power nevertheless retains, for some commentators, all the negative and deterministic aspects of the former concept.

But this misapprehension arises because the concept of “episteme” is taken, wrongly, to represent the totality of a culture rather than a discreet series of relations that merely describe one part of that culture. On the contrary, it is against the hitherto unquestioned tendency to describe culture in global terms like Weltanschauung [spirit of the times] that both episteme and dispositif rally. Certainly, the aim is to capture the non-subjective historical conditions that make certain discourses and subjects possible. But characterising “the spirit or science of a period” is “the very thing to which my whole enterprise is opposed,” Foucault stated. (AK, p. 159). He continued:

The relations I have described [in The Order of Things] are valid in order to define a particular configuration; they are not signs to describe the face of a culture in its totality. It is the friends of the Weltanschauung who will be disappointed. (AK, p. 159).

Earlier, in response to questions from the journal Esprit in 1968, Foucault rehearsed the same point: the episteme is not describing “the sum” of knowledges or “the general style” of an epoque. Indeed, only through the introduction of episteme is it possible to see, not one, but many histories of knowledge – in the plural: “the history of mathematics does not obey the same model as the history of biology, which is different again to that of psychopathology.” (DE, I, p. 676). Pure science, for example, is put to

102 Michel Foucault [1968], “Réponse à une question,” DE, I, pp. 673-695.
one side in *The Order of Things*. (OT, p. xxi). Newton is not refuted by Einstein in the way that Darwin superseded Buffon in the life sciences: “the succession from Galileo to Newton to Einstein does not present ruptures” in accordance with Foucault’s schema, as Canguilhem noted, and nor is it meant to.103 The fact is, the “human sciences” cannot be understood by way of the progress of “noble” sciences like physics, nor everyday belief systems and practices. Yet the vital magnitude that “science” has taken on in modern culture means that these “human” versions cannot be allowed to roam as they please, free from proper analysis, hence the need for a concept like the *episteme* (a deeper discussion of this “middle region” of science is reserved for chapter nine and the history of psychoanalysis). The *episteme* attempts to capture “the background, the distances, the oppositions, the differences, the relations between multiple scientific discourses.” (DE, I, p. 676).

If the characterisation of culture given in the previous chapter is accepted – clusters of power-knowledge relations – these constantly engage or divide the subject, woman or man, unconsciously, in various and different ways. As Gilles Deleuze observed, Foucault’s power relations are “not known.”104 Knowing thyself will leave them unknown; knowing thy culture promises much more. In contrast to the psychoanalysts, these relations are “invisible” because they are “too much at the surface of things” [my italics]. (DE, I, p. 772). In any event, far from confirming the futility of human action, the general “pluralist” philosophical endeavour that accompanies Foucault’s studies presents countless openings for subjective experience, as well as the possibility of constructing different ways of life. In Foucault’s words:

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103 Canguilhem, “Mort de l’homme,” *Critique*, p. 612. For Canguilhem, this move may be too convenient, for it raises a problem Foucault’s study is forced to ignore: what, exactly, is “pure science” and what is the relationship between this and social “norms”?

104 Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 74.
There are a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge, by those who, recognising the relations of power in which they are implicated, have decided to resist them and escape from them. From this point of view, all my investigations rest on a postulate of absolute optimism. I don't conduct my analyses in order to say: right, this is how things are, you are trapped. I say these things only to the extent that I consider it possible to transform them.\footnote{Foucault, \textit{Remarks on Marx}, p. 174.}

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What needs to be emphasised now, however, as a final discussion platform for this chapter, is Foucault's distance from both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss despite the common attraction to the notion of the unconscious. To reiterate, while Foucault supported Lacan's conception of the subject, he did so only in terms of a "structural" version of the unconscious in no way submissive theoretically to a Freudian body and mind. As soon as symbols or signifiers are referred to a universal subject of desire (Lacan), or a universal subject of exchange (Lévi-Strauss), Foucault's interest is immediately exhausted. On one occasion from the late 1970s, Foucault introduced Nietzsche in the context of a discussion about "structuralism":

What provoked so much annoyance on the part of the preceding generation or their representatives, is true for the psychoanalysis of Lacan, the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, the analyses of Barthes, for what Althusser has done, for what I have tried to do myself, from my side, in my way – we would all agree that one cannot proceed according to the subject in the Cartesian sense as the primary point from which all should be engendered, but that the subject itself has a genesis. And through that, there is even a connection to Nietzsche. \textit{(DE, III, p. 590)}.

Only Foucault in this list of "structuralist" theorists pursued the Nietzschean "connection" to any serious degree – and therein lies the difference. One could say that Foucault was the most serious of the friendly enemies Laplanche referred to, by bringing Nietzsche into the equation. What gives Foucault's structural unconscious its
edge over both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss is the introduction of Nietzsche's surprising claim that the desire for knowledge is *not* a natural instinct of humankind. Truth production must therefore find its place amongst those "mean and little things" that "pure and obscure power relations" threw together by chance. Nothing could be more foreign to either Lévi-Strauss or Lacan. In fact, the whole point in positing "structures" for Lévi-Strauss, a position unequivocally supported by Lacan in the 1950s, was that it made the analysis of cultural phenomena susceptible to "scientific" principles and therefore *divorced* from political forces. ¹⁰⁶ Let us try to distinguish Foucault's take-up of the unconscious by contrasting it directly with, first, that of Lévi-Strauss, then Lacan. In both latter cases, the cultural phenomena under investigation refer to networks of the mind and body that are in some way universal and inevitable, making impossible the kind of "ethnographic" unconscious Foucault struggled to conceive from his side.

To recall from the previous chapter, Lévi-Strauss saw no problem assimilating the "bundles of meaning" found in *Oedipus the King* with those of the myths of indigenous Americans. ¹⁰⁷ In later years, he continued to analyse a massive inventory of myths considered to reveal the fundamental ideational structures of all human societies. ¹⁰⁸ In a move that became notorious — though he did stress his "playful" intentions — Lévi-Strauss argued that Sophocles' *Oedipus The King* and the nineteenth-century play *The Italian Straw Hat* by Eugène Labiche are "expanded metaphors of each other." ¹⁰⁹ Do not be fooled by the surface differences: both attempt to solve a problem relating to "marriage rules and the social status of the couple," and each story follows "the same

¹⁰⁶ Part of Lévi-Strauss's opposition to existentialism was its lack of scientific rigour. See Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, p. 58.
¹⁰⁸ See Pace, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, pp. 144-184.
threefold development" towards the solution. *Oedipus The King* may be more prestigious, due to its “great age” – but our interest in these widely different plots “is awakened less by their content than by their form.”

Essential to Lévi-Strauss’ anthropology is the idea that unconscious structures “are fundamentally the same for all minds – ancient, modern, primitive and civilized.” There was an “architecture” of the mind; to ignore these “mental constraints” is to “regress to the illusion of a naive empiricism.” There may be “many histories, a multitude of histories, a dust cloud of histories” – but these all reflect a common rational mind. The situation presented challenges as much political as academic, Lévi-Strauss argued. In an admirable defence of cultural relativism, published as “Race and History” in 1952, Lévi-Strauss contended that evolutionary assumptions were still rampant in the West, evident by its attitudes towards “developing countries.”

Cultural diversity demands a different logic to evolution. He gives the example of looking from the window of a moving train. If another train is rolling along in the same direction, but on a parallel track, the other seems to be not moving at all. This is an illusion, says Lévi-Strauss, the same at work when comparing cultures.

Lévi-Strauss had once likened his scientific method to geology. He claimed geology could act as a model for that area where the domains of Marxism and psychoanalysis

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115 See the discussion in Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, pp. 126-128. Lévi-Strauss was drawn into an intense debate with Roger Caillois over the respective merits of “primitive” versus “civilized” societies that we cannot do justice to here. See Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, pp. 128-130; and Pace, *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, pp. 93-95.

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overlap: namely, a deeper strata beneath surface contingencies. True reality is never the most obvious: "the nature of truth is already indicated by the care it takes to remain elusive." When answering objections that social anthropology could not be "falsified" in the manner of the physical sciences, Lévi-Strauss calmly replied that it was not legitimate to apply the criterion of falsifiability to anthropology, for it has not yet attained the "stage" of the "fully established sciences." He continued: "No physical or natural science could have come to maturity in the centuries it took for them to develop if they had allowed themselves to be stopped by this type of criticism." So, anthropology was now "structuralist" and not "evolutionary" due to an ineluctable – dare we say "evolutionary" – progress of reason.

It was precisely against these kinds of idealist and naturalist descriptions of the history of truth that Foucault was arguing in *The Order of Things*: "Despite the impression we may have of an almost uninterrupted development of the European ratio from the Renaissance to our own day... all this quasi-continuity on the level of ideas and themes is doubtless only a surface appearance." (*OT*, p. xxii). But the reference to "surface" as opposed to depth perhaps reveals, in retrospect, a careless choice of words. It only gave credence to Lévi-Strauss’s "geological" metaphor of "true" reality under the "surface," a idea invoked, left and right, to describe the *The Order of Things* and Foucault’s method generally. Gilles Deleuze spoke of the "deeper earth," or "underground," that constituted the domain of Foucault’s archaeology, and he equated it to Althusser’s quest to uncover a "deeper domain" behind "ideologies and imaginary

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relations.”

For his part, Sartre claimed Foucault presents us with a “geology,” or “the series of successive layers forming our earth,” citing as support a review appearing in Le Figaro – ironically enlisting one rampart of the bourgeoisie to combat another.

In an interview from 1969, Foucault noted two main unfortunate connotations of the term “archaeology”: first, that the Greek prefix “arche” implied he was dealing with “origins,” and, second, that the term indicated a project of “excavation.” (DE, I, p. 772). He clarified here that it was precisely the invisible “surface,” not underground, that he was trying to elucidate. (DE, I, p. 772). Thankfully, not all commentators had read The Order of Things in this “geological” way. Human beings inhabit a culture, Georges Canguilhem protests, not a “planet.” In likening Foucault’s method to geology, critics wrongly attribute to him the very analogy he actually avoids. For Canguilhem, the main aim of The Order of Things is to de-naturalise Western culture. This was a direct challenge to theorists like Lévi-Strauss, whose universal rational forms, upon which all cultures are based, are the next best thing to nature. According to Canguilhem:

The vast majority of critics have only acknowledged [the concept of “archaeology”] in order to contest it and put “geology” in its place. ... Man inhabits a culture and not a planet. Geology deals with sediments, archaeology its monuments. We thus easily understand why those who denounce the structural method (supposing one exists, properly speaking) in order to defend the rights of history – dialectical or not – persist in trying to substitute geology for archaeology. Then they can better maintain their pretensions to represent humanism. Turning Foucault into a sort of geologist amounts to saying that he naturalises culture by removing it from history.

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120 Sartre, “Jean-Paul Sartre répond,” L’Arc, p. 87.

121 Robert Kanters, “Tu causes, tu causes, est-ce tout ce que tu sais faire?” Le Figaro Littéraire (23rd June, 1966).

Later, Foucault devoted considerable effort himself to defining "archaeology." Basically, the stable underground governing all surface variations, what Lévi-Strauss called the "architecture of the mind," is no more than shifting sand itself. By enlisting Nietzsche, Foucault brought truth production—whether moral, religious or scientific—into the field of history and power relations. The desire for truth is not a spontaneous instinct of human kind, so knowledge production cannot be likened to natural processes such as evolution—whether conceived in biological or physical terms. Archaeology designates "the history of that which makes necessary a certain form of thought." 123

The most important consequence was the distance this set between his own method and traditional "history of ideas." Archaeological description is "an abandonment of the history of ideas, a systematic rejection of its postulates and procedures, an attempt to practise a quite different history of what [people] have said." (AK, p. 138).

Towards the conclusion of The Order of Things, when discussing the important twin poles occupied by psychoanalysis and ethnology in critical thought, due to their joint capacities to undermine the concept of "man," Foucault comes very close to identifying where the unconscious would be placed within this general politico-methodological approach. He speculates on the prestige and importance ethnology could possess, if, instead of studying societies supposedly "without history", it were "to seek its object in the area of the unconscious processes that characterize the system of a given culture." (OT, pp. 379). He distances this from a "collective unconscious," whose shared "hallucinations" on a social scale reflected what “analysis can discover at the level of the individual." (OT, p. 380). Rather, a “system of cultural unconsciouses” would

represent the “totality of formal structures which render mythical discourse significant, 
give their coherence and necessity to the rules that regulate needs, and provide the 
norms of life with a foundation other than that to be found in nature, or in pure 
biological functions.” (OT, p. 380).

To understand how this differs from Lévi-Strauss, we only have to listen to the plural 
form: “a system of cultural unconsciouses” – admittedly silent in French, difficult to 
sound out and to hear in English, let alone to explain. But the “unconscious” for 
Foucault must exist in the plural, as cultures themselves do, each producing its own 
identifiable processes and clusters of relations that adhere together accidentally. We 
have tried to capture this by the term “ethnographic unconscious.”

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Let us now return to Lacan. It is perhaps no surprise that at the heart of his theory of 
desire lies a medical ontology of the person, equally “universal.” At first glance the 
medical accusation seems unjust: a constant battle Lacan waged was to distinguish 
“desire” from those bio-medical ideas always “confused” with it, such as “instinct” and 
“need.” Thus, needs are “closely linked to the organism”; they connect up with the 
“general homeostasis of the organism,” needs can be satisfied, and so on.124 “Desire,” 
on the other hand, does not reside in the body but depends on the external existence of 
other desiring and speaking beings – otherwise the infant would not be there in the first 
place. These external figures exist under the general rubric of the “Other,” the 
possessor of power and locus of the truth of the subject. As Lacan puts it: the “new

Technique of Psychoanalysis, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, notes John Forrester 
little tyke will be saddled with a file that pre-dates his grandparents, in the form of their superego.\textsuperscript{125}

However, essential to Lacan’s schema is the idea of a pre-existing lack upon which desire is instituted: “Desire is a relation of being to lack” and this lack is “beyond anything which can represent it.”\textsuperscript{126} Desire is the element “necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued.”\textsuperscript{127} It was this aspect of the theory of desire that Deleuze and Guattari refused in \textit{Anti-Oedipus}: they declare that, on the contrary, “lack” – and all those sorry, “familial,” and “Oedipal” forms of sexuality that go with it – is \textit{produced} by desire, which, for them, has this specific configuration due to the forces of capitalist production. Likewise, the crux of Jacques Derrida’s criticisms of psychoanalysis consists in exposing that there cannot be an originary “lack” without a simultaneously pre-existing “presence” through which that lack is defined. And, sure enough, a masculine symbol comes to be imbued with the role of originary “presence,” thereby conveniently assuming the very male domination the theory is intended to explain. From a different angle to that of Derrida, Jacqueline Rose observes the same problem repeated in Lévi-Strauss’ economy of exchange objects: the theory “presupposes” women’s subordination to men, rather than accounts for it.\textsuperscript{128}

A general Foucauldian response would agree with these objections, but argue in addition that an original “lack” confirms dominant medicalized conceptions of sexuality never really questioned by psychoanalysis – or its critics, for that matter. Theorising sexuality in terms of “whole and part, principle and lack, absence and

\textsuperscript{128} Rose, “Introduction II,” \textit{Feminine Sexuality}, p. 45.
presence, excess and deficiency” establishes the very notion of “sex” broadcast from one end of intellectual discourse to the other, critical and conformist. (*HS*, p. 154).

But what has been equally overlooked by commentators and critics is that Lacan goes further in this medical direction than Freud ever did. Using the findings of embryology, Lacan claims that a “prematurity” of human birth is responsible for the pre-existing “lack.” Humans are therefore particularly susceptible to the economy of desire. In his essay of 1938, Lacan claims “the delay in dentition and walking, a delay parallel to most attributes and functions, is the cause of a total vital powerlessness in the baby which lasts for more than the first two years.”¹²⁹ He made the point again in the 1950s, this time assembling facts from physiology and neurology to support his arguments that the human animal may be regarded as born prematurely. The “nervous system” is “not complete at birth.”¹³⁰ The fact that the “pyramidal tracts are not myelinated at birth is proof enough of this for the histologist, while a number of postural reactions and reflexes satisfy the neurologist.”¹³¹ These data, he said, confirmed the thesis he had put forward in 1936: the “mirror phase” marks “a decisive turning point in the mental development of the child” for he or she makes up for the originary lack through an ingenious symbolization found only in humans.¹³² Hooked in after the first returned smile, the child believes that any form of lack can always be covered over by more and more of the same signifying band-aids.

This prematurity of birth “hasn’t been invented by psychoanalysis,” Lacan presages gravely. 133 No indeed, the idea is found expressed by Saint Augustine in the fourth century, for example, who drew attention to the feeble capacities of the human baby. 134 Other animals as soon as they are born “run about and recognize their mothers and require no external help or care when they want to suck.” A human at birth, however, woefully deficient, “is furnished neither with feet fit for walking, nor with hands able even to scratch; and unless their lips were actually applied to the breast by the mother, they would not know where to find it.” 135 These defects provided irrefutable proof of the inherent sinfulness of humanity, according to Augustine.

In this light, Lacan has certainly developed Freud – but not in the way usually portrayed by supporters and critics. The standard interpretation says that Lacan substituted “linguistics for biology as the scientific foundation and model for psychoanalysis, thereby ensuring that the human will be understood in terms of the human, since language is a uniquely human achievement.” 136 But, in reality, language and discourse can only be secondary reactions to this fundamental biological constant that is the prematurity of human birth. Lacan has merely substituted one type of medicine for another, now more all-inclusive. Whereas in Freud’s day, the doctor was needed to correct “little Hands,” now, Lacan’s premature baby is actually born crying out for a doctor.

Moreover, far from being challenged, the idea of human prematurity at birth is a recurring theme in the literature of “French Freud” and its surrounds. Merleau-Ponty

134 See the discussion of the “Defect of Babyhood” in the study by Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1996), pp. 234-236.
135 Augustine, cited in Steinberg, Sexuality of Christ, p. 234.
appeals to Lacan’s zoological data in his lectures. Roland Barthes repeats the claim in an interview: “Lacan tells us” that “man is an animal born too soon: biologically, a baby is always premature.” Or, in his quarrel with Vernant and other cultural theorists, André Green follows Lacan in saying that “the dependence of the subject on the Other, which we cannot escape because of human prematurity at birth, establishes the Other as the possessor of power and as the locus of the truth of the subject.”

Thus, despite the supposed “philosophical” bearings and the influence of signifiers such as “Hegel” and “Heidegger,” the opposite process was equally in evidence: Lacan’s discourse did much to infuse critical thought with medical ideas that, when removed from their proper context, can only be dogmatic assertions.

Foucault’s view is quite different. Just as he refuses a universal rational mind as the basis of all systems of thought, so too does Foucault reject a universal body. Again, Nietzsche provides the difference. In an important essay distinguishing Nietzsche’s conception of “genealogy” from that of traditional history, Foucault reports that nothing human can ever be taken as a historical constant: not even the “body” is sufficiently stable “to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding” others. On the contrary: “The body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.”

137 Merleau-Ponty, Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne, p. 113.
139 Green, Tragic Effect, p. 79.
141 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Language, Counter-memory, Practice, p. 137.
convinced of this view, one could consider the poignancies of the “wet-nursing”
business of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and feminism’s indifference to the
issue today. If the female body was a constant measure of feminine “feeling,” or
“resistance” as some theorists maintain, what actions would be more reflective of
proto-feminist values: the women who farmed out their babies, *against* the dominant
masculine or Enlightenment opinion (ideology?) advocating the opposite \(^{142}\) (those
rebels!), or the ones who were burdened with the feeding and inevitable neglect of
them (*CF*, p. 227), or the ones who think it has nothing to do with their lives today?

Like the traditional historians, psychoanalysts and most feminists believe in the “dull
constancy of instinctual life”; that “it continues to exert its force indiscriminately in the
present as it did in the past”; that feelings are “immutable.” \(^{143}\) By contrast, an
“effective” history of moral values would not be fooled by stories of the bodily
“origins” of male and female behaviour, but would seek out the masked sequences of
“mean and little things” – hatred, difficulties, problems, struggle, domination – that
pure and obscure power relations have thrown together by chance, ready to grip any
individual woman or man in their entanglements. An ontology of culture, *not* a
metaphysics of the person. Only this type of history would notice that breastfeeding
*salons*, academies, learning centres, or institutes were non-existent in eighteenth-
century France – but they are nowhere to be found today either despite the advent of
feminism.

\(^{142}\) According to Jean-Louis Flandrin: “Enlightened opinion unambiguously condemned the practice of
putting babies out to nurse.” See Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household

It is this stress on interpreting the modern Western subject in terms of its *cultural* genealogy – and not by way of a universal mind or body – that distinguishes Foucault’s take-up of the “unconscious” from both Lacan and Lévi-Strauss, turning the Freudian subject into a Nietzschean one. However misshapen and ill-suited (and certainly under-theorized) it may have looked, Foucault always implicitly housed the structuralist “unconscious” in a Nietzschean body – or, more correctly, within a Nietzschean genealogy of morals. The unconscious can only be ethnographic in this guise: that is, limited to a specific set of relations. Such a travesty of Freud’s “discovery” would scandalize any psychoanalyst, certainly. Although not entirely clear what was happening, the audacity of Foucault’s move was noticed by Lacan, who complained in 1966 that, for someone “who follows what I do,” Foucault paid scant credit to Freud; it was one of the reasons why Lacan found the label “structuralism” inappropriate.144 But while psychoanalysis defines the unconscious in terms of desire, a universal subject is reinstated by default – one derived, ultimately, from a medical ontology of the person.

Secondary works dealing with Foucault and “structuralism” have not sufficiently noted Foucault’s singular employment and development of the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious. It is a prime example of how neglect of Foucault’s relationship to the Freudian movement has led to inaccurate representations of his methodological approach. By way of conclusion, let us consider the two main responses to Foucault’s insistence that structuralism was, and is, a misleading label to describe his early work.

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The first reaction is broadly summed up by those who see “structuralism” as a negative weight in Foucault’s career, part of an immature period when he ignored the “subject” and “human agency.” This is to misunderstand the fusion between the structural “unconscious” of the human sciences as posited by Lévi-Strauss and others, and the subject of psychoanalysis created by Lacan – a fertile meeting ground Foucault exploited. The unconscious here was not “Freudian” as such, and Foucault developed it further with the addition of Nietzsche. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, and many others, underestimate the importance of the “unconscious” for post-war French thought to such a degree that it is barely even mentioned in their studies. They thereby betray a philosophical heritage overburdened with existentialism and Heidegger that is simply too one-dimensional to apply to Foucault. Simplistically put, doubtless the point at which “structuralism” and “hermeneutics” overlap methodologically is their mutual groping in the dark for a cultural conception of the unconscious free of psychoanalytic overtones. Foucault sheds light on this area, for how else would one understand his various theorisations of the “archive,” “discursive formations,” dispositif, etc., except in terms of an ethnographic alternative to the Freudian unconscious – even if given in a preliminary and ad hoc fashion?

Other commentators see structuralism as a positive influence in Foucault’s œuvre, and attribute an insincerity to the philosopher’s denials of this association. Clare O’Farrell makes the interesting point that Foucault betrays his allegiance to structuralism because he himself was one of the finest commentators on it. Deep down, he wanted to defend it: “There is no doubt that Foucault was, and, in fact, always remained closely aligned
to the structuralist movement."^{145} Didier Eribon finds it difficult to understand, "why Foucault could become so hostile in the years that followed to any attempt aimed at linking him to structuralism."^{146} After all, Foucault was happy to be associated with the historical "structuralism" of Georges Dumézil, for example, and even went out of his way to align himself in this tradition.^{147} This connection has been similarly explored in relation to Jean-Pierre Vernant. Foucault also readily acknowledged concepts shared with Lévi-Strauss such as the positive "structural" unconscious, and the "problem of the subject," as we have seen — issues characterizing Lacan's brand of psychoanalysis as well. Finally, Foucault admitted at times that "formalist" analyses became dominant for reasons nobody could really explain — perhaps him least of all.^{148}

But why do we not see more deferential exchanges by the participants in the "group" — or any trace of dialogue at all — if a structuralist "movement" existed? The fact is, Lacan’s medical ontology of being, expressed as "prematurity" or "lack," no less than Lévi-Strauss’s pre-given "architecture of the mind" cannot but run diametrically opposite to Foucault's philosophical enterprise of an ontology of Western culture. Only Foucault in that bizarre group of French intellectuals caricatured under the palm trees really appreciated the Nietzschean sunlight exposing the Western culture around them. Neither contemporary, Lacan or Lévi-Strauss, was in any position to understand this project very well. The most Lévi-Strauss could say about Foucault’s work was that it gives us something like a photographic negative of our society: what we thought was

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145 O'Farrell, *Michel Foucault*, p. 28. She continues: "if we define structuralism as a movement focused on the examination of the relations between things and their structures at every level of culture and knowledge, as opposed to attempts to describe things in their essences."


147 Eribon, *Foucault et ses contemporains*, pp. 139-161, esp. p.140

148 According to Foucault: "This problem of structuralism is a difficult one to unravel. ... I've managed to formulate a series of hypotheses, though I couldn't tell you how accurate they are". See Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, p. 85.

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black turns out to be white, and vice versa. While this tells us much about Foucault’s “opinions,” adds Lévi-Strauss, the “same quantity of information” is conveyed as before, so we do not actually learn anything new. With structuralist friends like that, never mind the existentialist enemies.

Part II

Dislodging Freud: Desire versus Power
Chapter Five

The Structural Unconscious:
between Freud and a Joke

This section, chapters five to eight, will clarify further why Foucault’s recuperation of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis – sexuality and the unconscious – was not a knee-jerk “resistance,” but responded to serious theoretical flaws, and reflected an effort on Foucault’s part to construct a “cultural” analysis of these phenomena as a viable alternative to Freud’s “psycho”-analysis. The first object of interrogation is the unconscious. Through the medium of jokes and the “psychopathologies” of everyday life, it will be demonstrated that Freud’s initial division of the unconscious into “primary” and “secondary” processes remained unchallenged by theorists in the French context, despite the contradictions and impasses this division generated, leading to one of the major paradoxes of “French Freud.” Namely, for all its reputation, Lacanian psychoanalysis and its offshoots continued to discount radically the “secondary” ethnographic context in the formation of psychic reality – leaving cultural phenomena like jokes as reflections of primary and universal networks of the mind and body.

Let us review briefly the salient points of the previous chapters before proceeding. Against those who would readily amalgamate Foucault with Lacan on the basis of common endorsement of the unconscious, it is important to stress once more that Foucault’s interest was part of a hostile takeover of this concept. In Didier Eribon’s study of Foucault amongst his contemporaries, invaluable though it is, he claims that Lacan had acted as a “support” for Foucault’s “archaeological and critical approach,”
then “reversed” during the 1970s with *La volonté de savoir*.¹ This conforms to a standard view of Foucault’s relationship to psychoanalysis, as treated briefly in chapter one: Foucault’s relationship to psychoanalysis reflected abrupt changes in his intellectual trajectory. Amongst other problems, to say that Lacan acted as a “support” for the archaeological method brushes aside Foucault’s contempt for the suggestion that “archaeology” had derived in any way from Freud or psychoanalysis.² More seriously, the view implies that *History of Madness*, composed in Foucault’s early period, was somehow consistent with a Lacanian view of that history. Yet Foucault targets any school of psychoanalysis no less than psychiatrists when they diminish the importance of confinement as a political issue; or when they assume an “immutable continuity in madness ... equipped with its timeless, intricate psychological complexities.” (HM, p. 79). His work on sexuality twenty years later is no less determined to challenge “immutable” continuities assumed by psychoanalysts and their followers. Foucault was never a Lacanian because he had never been a Freudian – making it impossible to accept Eribon’s implication that Foucault targeted the “psychology” of Freud while being kindly disposed in those years towards the “psychoanalysis” propagated by Lacan.³

¹ Eribon, *Foucault et ses contemporains*, p. 255. Since he wrote that study, Eribon has adopted a more critical stance towards all schools of psychoanalysis. His latest work attempts to merge Foucault with an eclectic group of anti-Freudians: Roland Barthes, Deleuze and Guattari, and so on. The argument of this thesis is that Foucault’s critique is in a class of its own, going beyond the tired pansexual accusations and vitalist philosophies based on the body. See Didier Eribon, *Échapper à la psychanalyse* (Paris, 2005).

² Foucault, “Monstrosités in Criticism,” *Diacritics*, p. 60.

³ Eribon, *Foucault et ses contemporains*, p. 140. Eribon repeats this distinction later (p. 234): Lacan, Eribon claims, was the founder of a “second and more prestigious” version of psychoanalysis, “breaking with the Freudian orthodoxy designated pejoratively as being ‘psychology itself’. Foucault refers to statements Foucault made in an interview under the title “La folie n’existe que dans une société.” Unfortunately, there is a discrepancy between the *Le Monde* version of this text, which appeared in 1961, and the version reprinted in *Dits et écrits* in 1994. The interview in *Dits et écrits* has Foucault saying “Freud is psychoanalysis itself” [“Freud, c’est la psychanalyse même”]. The earlier version supports Eribon’s interpretation more readily, for in this case Foucault says: “Freud is psychology itself” [“Freud, c’est la psychologie même”]. Understandably, the two accounts make for radically different meanings; the English version uses “psychology” following *Le Monde*. See “La folie n’existe que dans une société,” *Le Monde*, (July 22, 1961) and “La folie n’existe que dans une société,” *DE*, I, pp. 167-169, p. 168; “Madness only exists in society,” *Foucault Live*, p. 8.
Rather, Foucault identified with those anti-Oedipal protagonists who did not deny the reality of the Freudian unconscious, but tried to develop a “structural” version neither individual (Freudian) nor universally collective. For Foucault, a “genealogy” of the philosophical subject in its modern forms must be treated as “a historical and cultural reality.” Basically, this entails breaking up the “structural unconscious” so that it becomes discreet clusters of specific relations—“positive,” yet “invisible”—or a series of cultural or ethnographic “unconsciousses.” Unlike Lévi-Strauss, many different grammars and regimes of truth production exist; the unconscious must somehow function not only on the cultural plane, but in a plural sense as well. In this way, a genealogy of the subject need not ignore unconscious forces acting on that subject but, on the contrary, is able to identify and locate these powers more precisely.

Meanwhile, the unconscious proper belonged in psychoanalytic territory. Astute Freudian commentators like François Roustang and Jean Laplanche know full well that the “structural” unconscious invented by the human sciences during those years is not Freudian. Roustang even goes so far as to say that the exchange of ideas did not happen in the way usually thought: Lacan’s “unconscious” of the 1950s came directly from Lévi-Strauss, not vice versa—and Freud never got a look in. In Roustang’s view, Lévi-Strauss gave Lacan precisely what he needed to dispense with the tedious area of the “pre-verbal”: “Forty pages from Lévi-Strauss encapsulate everything that Lacan was waiting for in order to reactivate his project and make psychoanalysis a science.”


5 Roustang, Lacanian Delusion, p. 29.
Dreams, for example, cannot be captured by a "structural" unconscious, because the analysis must refer to a set of life circumstances specific to individual relations; linguistics is in no position to consider this personal dimension, let alone deal with its "non-verbal" nature. Indeed, the main thrust behind Laplanche's post-Lacanian reworking of Freud is a vigorous rejection of "structural" complexes of any kind.\(^6\) This attitude was present in his first published work in 1961, dealing with Hölderin and the "question of the father," when, although firmly Lacanian, Laplanche placed himself in the tradition of "the dynamic study of the individual creator in his singularity and not the tedious listing of unconscious themes in a work, indeed throughout literature generally."\(^7\) Even jokes entail reference to the specific psychology of the speaker or producer, notwithstanding Freud's presentation. In this respect, jokes would be regarded as forms of "sublimation" – the deflection of the sexual drive to cultural pursuits – even if, as Laplanche well acknowledged, the public "pragmatic effect" of humour is far more important, and this was the dimension Freud stressed in his text.\(^8\)

At a conference in the United States in the late 1970s, Laplanche reiterated that any attempt to speak of the unconscious "in general" outside of a "concrete subject" was to be strongly condemned, the main reason being that it recalled the "collective unconscious" of Jung.\(^9\)

However, viewed from the philosophical corner, Lacan's sociability and openness to intellectual exchanges presented a unique opportunity to rescue the unconscious from the incestuous control of feuding Freudians and merge it into a different family of ideas.


\(^7\) Laplanche, *Hölderin*, p. 4.


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This is the area of interest. In Lacan’s eyes, symptomatic of psychoanalysis turning away from its proper “symbolic function” and true object – namely, “speech” – was the neglect of those texts in the Freudian corpus dealing directly with language. If Lacan’s bent for “science” is quietly ignored, these texts also have most affinity with “philosophy” in the broadest sense of the word – what Foucault called on one occasion “philosophical activity.”

Jokes and their relation to the unconscious was a prime example.

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Although “little interest” has been taken in it, Jokes and their relation to the unconscious remains the work in which the unconscious is demonstrated in its most “subtle confines.” Lacan made good the lack of attention to this area by devoting the first part of his seminar series of 1957-1958 to the topic of witticisms. As Lacan had stressed in the “Rome Report,” the unconscious is “transindividual,” and “not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse.” (É/S, p. 49). It is also “the censored chapter” of one’s history. As well as bodily symptoms to be “deciphered,” its workings were revealed in “archival documents,” (which Lacan equates to “childhood memories”), in “semantic evolution,” corresponding to “the stock of words and acceptations of my own particular vocabulary,” and, finally, in “traditions” which “bear my history.” (É/S, p. 50).

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10 According to Foucault: “It seems to me that philosophy today no longer exists, not that in itself it has disappeared, but that it has permeated a large quantity of diverse activities; thus, the activities of the linguist, the ethnologist, the historian, the revolutionary, the politician, can be forms of philosophical activity.” (DE, I, p. 597).

Jokes and humour would presumably fit into the categories of “semantic evolution” and “traditions.” Using an amalgamation of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jacobsen, Lacan shows that a “trait d’esprit” [a flash of wit] and a “lapsus” [a slip of the tongue], no less than displacement and condensation in dreams, can be understood in terms of two basic linguistic mechanisms: metaphor and metonymy. Lacan takes up one of the main lapses in Freud’s inventory involving the neologism “famillionaire.” Without going into unnecessary technicalities, “famillionaire” was a condensation of two words, “familiar” and “millionaire,” spoken by a poor man to describe how decently the rich man had treated him: “totally famillionairely.”

Lacan claimed that in order for this witticism to work, there must be a difference in the signifying production between the “code” (the world is divided into rich and poor) and the “message” (rich people are not warm and “familiar” with their fellow human beings and it is naive to think that they will ever change), and it must involve a “third party” who “sanctions” this difference. Depending on the constitution of this “third party,” or what Lacan calls the “Other,” various non-literal meanings can be conveyed by the message. In this case, the Other intervenes to show that it is impossible to speak neutrally about the mannerisms of a rich man; the speaker is forced to relate the behaviour somehow to the man’s money, hence the slip: “famillionairely.” The meaning of the message has now changed subtly: the behaviour of rich people is not actually something intrinsic to themselves, but is produced by the social fact of their wealth.

12 “The witticism is structured, organized according to the same laws that we have found in dreams,” Lacan, Séminaire V: Formations de l’Inconscient, p. 49.
Let us take another example Lacan mentions, from Freud’s *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, to illustrate the point further. A woman remarks that people of her sex must be pretty in order to please men; a man on the other hand need not worry about his looks: “as long as he has his five straight limbs he needs nothing more.” The general social code expects “four straight limbs,” or “five senses,” meaning that as long as a man is basically healthy, or of sound body and mind, he will be able to find a life partner. A condensation has taken place to produce “five straight limbs” instead of four, now conveying a new meaning: a woman must be pretty in addition because a man has a special advantage; he has one limb more than a woman, which can also be “straight,” and this is really why he is better off. Again, in order for the second step to occur; in order for the message to be heard as a “witticism” and not as nonsense, the signifying production must be “sanctioned” by a “third party,” or the “Other.”

All interlocutors engaged in the witticism must similarly share complicity with the Other. The new meaning represents a “truth” impossible to communicate via the code itself. If we accept for a moment Freud’s dubious (and probably indefensible) distinction between the “comic” and a “witticism,” Lacan extends it by introducing this element of “truth.” The “comic” exists without sanction from the Other, like a “duel” between two parties. By its very nature, closed off from the Other, the comic may be funny – for example, a clown wearing an extra leg, or a Chaplin tramp trying to look sophisticated – but these are limited to the content and meaning of the “code.” The clown is funny because he is different to the “normal” or standard form of the human body taken to be universal; the Chaplin character amuses us because he is incapable of behaving in a cultivated manner assumed to be universally “natural.” Unlike a witticism, these comic examples cannot extend into the more complicated domain of
what may be called “truth games.” Both “famillionaire” or “five straight limbs” indicate that truth production is a struggle rather than a simple reflection of social codes pertaining to relations of class or gender.

In very general terms, this area of “truth games” is where a potential overlap between Lacan and Foucault resides. Moreover, as is well known by commentators, Lacan’s preoccupation with linguistic affairs highlights his distance from other French psychoanalysts. André Green, for example, viewed Lacan’s focus on linguistics as a diversion from the historical trajectory of psychoanalytic theory. Writing in 1962, Green announced ironically that the unconscious was making a “return” to philosophy and critical reflection, thanks in large measure to the fine study by Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire (to be discussed shortly). But the purpose of Green’s difficult reply was to express reservations about their “Lacanian” interpretation, and to wonder more generally whether the confrontation between Freudian theory, “the human sciences,” and “philosophical movements” was actually advantageous to psychoanalysis.\(^{13}\)

In Green’s view, it was Freud himself who dropped the old-fashioned people’s unconscious after 1920. Once Freud introduced the ternary system of Es, Ich and Überich (known in English by the Latin terms id, ego and superego), the unconscious became the “id”, and there was a shift away from what Green calls “representation” (jokes would fit into this category) towards psychobiological concepts such as “affect” and “drive.”\(^{14}\) Although there was almost unanimous agreement (within psychoanalysis at least), that Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams of 1900 introduced an “epistemological


\(^{14}\) Green, “À quoi ça sert?” Le Monde.
break” with both his contemporaries and the earlier *Project for a scientific psychology* of 1895, Freud at this stage of his career had marginalized the drives by not including them as essential components of the psychical apparatus – only the “representations” of these drives had been allowed to have a place in Freud’s original topography.\(^{15}\) Now, in the new version of the unconscious, or what Green calls the “second topography” after 1920, “the drive belongs by right to the psychical world and is no longer situated outside it.”\(^{16}\)

Jean Laplanche had different concerns (and neither he nor Lacan would agree with Green’s insistence that a “second” Freudian topography after 1920 introduces a radically new system incommensurate with the first).\(^{17}\) Laplanche supported the basic Lacanian initiative centred on unearthing Freud’s ingenious treatment of transindividual “meaning.” Without Freud, we would lack the double affirmation that, first, meaning resides “even in those phenomena previously considered the dross and refuse of human activity”; and that, second, it is always implicated in “conflict” and marked by “struggle.”\(^{18}\) The emphasis on “meaning” has of course been the main attraction for philosophers and cultural theorists external to psychoanalytic practice. Levi-Strauss, for one, had congratulated Freud for revealing through his notion of the unconscious that

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\(^{16}\) Green, *Key Ideas*, p. 101.

\(^{17}\) Lacan argued that a “crisis of analytic technique” led Freud to the realization that his colleagues had managed to restore the “ego” as master via the channels of analytic sessions, just like kids rushing out of the school gate: “Ah! Our nice little ego is back again! It all makes sense now!” This only increased Freud’s misgivings: “What Freud introduced from 1920 on are additional notions which were at that time necessary to maintain the principle of the decentring of the subject.” See Lacan, *Seminar II: Ego in Freud’s Theory*, pp. 10-11.

"beyond the rational there exists a more important and valid category – that of the meaningful... "19

However, in the view of Laplanche and others, the Freudian unconscious and the language of the linguists "are in such radical opposition to each other that a term for term transposition of their properties and laws may properly be regarded as a paradoxical undertaking."20 A pivotal episode in the history of Lacanian psychoanalysis was a conference that took place at Bonneval in October 1960, devoted exclusively to the domain of the "unconscious."21 It brought together psychiatrists, doctors, a historian, philosophers, as well as psychoanalysts. Here, the "French" exception does have real potency, for such a conference in the Anglo-American world would have been unthinkable. The paper that was to overshadow other presentations and have repercussions well beyond the conference landscape was the joint study by Laplanche and fellow psychoanalyst Serge Leclaire, first published in Les Temps Modernes in 1961.22 The joint study is seen as the first signs of open division in the Société; in retrospect, Lacan viewed it as a healthy challenge.23

But the main enemy targeted by Laplanche and Leclaire was all non-psychoanalysts who denied the existence of the unconscious. Perhaps because psychoanalysts were in the minority despite the Freudian theme, the authors went immediately on the offensive,

20 Laplanche, “Postscript,” Yale French Studies, p. 177. For a fuller treatment of his views on linguistics in psychoanalysis, see Laplanche, Unconscious and the Id, esp. pp. 86-121. Here, Lacan’s work is both the implicit and explicit reference.
declaring that Freud’s position on the unconscious “is radically and scandalously intolerant of any attempt at interpretation by the conceptual tools of a psychology of consciousness.”24 If psychiatrists and psychologists think they can deal with this concept according to their own presuppositions, they are gravely mistaken.

The authors began the paper by answering all the objections to the Freudian unconscious presented in the 1920s by the Marxist philosopher Georges Politzer — whom they considered to be an exemplary critic.25 The aspect relevant for our purposes is the Freudian distinction between “primary” and “secondary” processes.26 As seen previously in André Green’s analysis of tragedy, historical suppression in a political or sociological sense [répression] is secondary to psychic repression at a psychological level [refoulement]. Only secondary political determinations are susceptible to the influence of “time” and “the socio-historical context.” These determinations play a fundamental role in the formations of “ego-ideals” and “imagoes,” but, although important, they are only ever secondary. Along these lines, Laplanche and Leclaire identify the major misunderstanding ripe within philosophy: failure to recognise that Freud opposes the unconscious not just to “consciousness” (a dynamic referred to as “primary”), but to the system known as “Preconscious-Consciousness,” the greater part of which is also unconscious (“secondary”).27

Using Sartre’s existentialism as the counter-example, Laplanche and Leclaire say that the psychological states Sartre identified — “bad faith”, “reticence” and so on — are

26 Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, SE, 4, pp. 588-609.
situated at the level of "second censorship" in the Freudian schema. It may be described as the cultural context surrounding the person and refers to the ego’s attempts to negotiate a path through often incomprehensible *doxa* or *dicta*. It is evidenced by "non-activated memories," "knowledge," "stock of opinions" and so on. Though largely "unconscious," the content of this secondary system is always available to consciousness. To play tennis, for example, the rules have to be known in advance before the game can happen; but, while in play, this knowledge is below the surface of consciousness, or "preconscious." Grammar is another example: the rules of a language are unknown, but, with time and reflection, one can learn them, even though the system can be accessed just as effectively with no deliberate contemplation. The important point is that there is no "blockage" to awareness in these cases of the ego’s relationship with secondary systems. It is easy to see how this area of "secondary processes" may be related to political or ethical "consciousness-raising" (for want of a better term). For Laplanche and Leclaire, the situation opened the door for a possible affinity between psychoanalysis and philosophy, especially if one moved away from "phenomenology" to versions more closely correlating to Hegelian notions of "an organized structure of self-apprehension." 

However, the psychoanalyst no less that the philosopher had to be clear that this area was only of "marginal" interest in relation to the domain of the "properly psychoanalytic": the "unconscious." There is no such thing as "consciousness-raising" in the domain of the unconscious proper. The major danger — and theorists like Lévi-Strauss were in Laplanche’s sights here — would be to reduce the "specificity of the Freudian unconscious" and to forget that there was a fundamental difference between

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the interplay of representations on the “unconscious level,” and those of the “preconscious-conscious.” While the secondary processes can be known with few obstacles, the contents of the “unconscious” are completely “inaccessible to consciousness.” Only through dreams, and then only after laborious effort on the part of the dreamer and analyst to overcome intense resistance on both sides, can any sense of these “primary processes” be gleaned. It is no surprise, therefore, that Laplanche and Leclaire chose to present a detailed analysis of a dream, rather than a joke or a parapraxis, to illustrate the theoretical points of their argument.

For Laplanche, the unconscious in a properly psychoanalytic sense, if it can indeed be likened to the circulation of representations, is comparable only to the “vertiginous” layer of language which “certain poets” and “schizophrenics” occasionally allow us to glimpse. One of the consequences of the “confrontation” between psychoanalysis and linguistics was the risk of “splitting” each domain with no tangible benefit for either field. Psychoanalysis would be forced to divide its interest “into an unconscious area governed by the primary processes” and a “preconscious area governed by the secondary processes.” This was hardly desirable and the debate was a “familiar theme” in these circles. The major nuance Laplanche adds to Lacan’s linguistic focus is therefore the following: the unconscious ... rather than being structured like a language, “is the very condition of language.”

30 The main concern of psychoanalysis was repression as it functions “between Unconscious and Preconscious, between primary and secondary processes.” Laplanche, “Postscript,” Yale French Studies, p. 178.
Now, as stated in chapter three, the main thrust behind Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis is the lack attention to “power.” The distinction between “primary” and “secondary” processes is untenable without specifying the differences of power mechanisms operating at the primary level of repression (*refoulement*) on the one hand, and those acting in a secondary manner in the form of suppression (*répression*) on the other. Moreover, if both are negative powers, they could never “construct” or produce “identity.”

For the moment, however, let us be clear about Lacan’s position. For him, the main game as always was to rescue Freud from the post-Freudians – those people who want to restore the “ego” as master of the drives and who try to make psychoanalysis compatible with “the ideology of free enterprise.” One must dispel the “confused image” of the unconscious as a “reservoir of drives” that Freud’s notion of the *id* may have allowed subsequent analysts like Green to exploit. If we must insist on seeing the unconscious as a “reservoir,” it would be so only in the form of a “letter-box.” That is, “letters of pleas and denunciations” deposited in the cavity come from “outside” before going off again to their destinations; when they amass inside, it is in order to “sleep” for a while. (*É*, p. 659).

In this view, the human baby cannot be said to be born with an “unconscious,” and nor do animals possess it. To say that the baby is born with an unconscious would be like saying that a letter-box was made with letters already inside it. For Lacan, it is nonsensical to propose an equivalent of the “unconscious” in the animal world and this fact reveals the “cleavage” between the psychoanalytic notion determined by

35 Laplanche, too, often repeated this view: “And let us add, for good measure: the baby has no unconscious,” Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as anti-hermeneutics,” *Radical Philosophy*, p. 11.
consideration of human language and one based on “instincts.” (É, p. 834). It was in this context that Lacan made the bold statement, subsequently challenged by Laplanche,\(^{36}\) that Freud had “never written” the word “instinct.” (É, p. 834).\(^{37}\)

Lacan’s statements are taken from two papers amongst several explicit or implicit rejoinders to colleagues communicated during this period. They are representative of growing tensions in the Société that would eventually produce the split of 1963. However, in line with the general argument of this thesis, the differences between Laplanche or Green, versus Lacan, over how to define the “drives” in relation to the unconscious, or the place of language in psychoanalysis, pale into insignificance as soon as we bring Foucault into the picture. Lacan’s affirmations as to the domination or pre-eminence of the symbolic order are those points that, superficially at least, most resemble Foucault’s politico-methodological approach. To assert, for example, that “there is no pre-discursive reality”\(^{38}\) even suggests the adoption of a Foucauldian vocabulary, as Jean Allouch argues.\(^{39}\) Speech “envelopes the subject,” says Lacan, and everything that has constituted him or her: parents, neighbours, “the whole structure of the community.” Almost from birth, each of us has that “little tag” which is our name, “the essential symbol” for what will be our lot.\(^{40}\) As he put it in the “Rome Discourse”:

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him ‘by flesh and blood’; so total that they bring to his birth, along with the gifts of the stars, if not with the gifts of the fairies, the shape of his destiny; so total that

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\(^{36}\) According to Laplanche, Freud uses the term “instinct” in a very precise way: “to refer to a programmed type of behaviour which is fixed and pre-adapted to a goal,” or to a “fixed action pattern.” See Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, trans. David Macey (Oxford, 1989), p. 29; and Laplanche, *Sexualité humaine*, p. 129.

\(^{37}\) The English translation of this passage was questioned in chapter two. See Jacques Lacan, “Position of the Unconscious,” É/E, p. 708.


\(^{39}\) Allouch, *Réponse à Michel Foucault*, p. 6.

they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death. (É/S, p. 32).

But any resemblance between the two intellectuals is chimerical because Foucault’s method already takes for granted, “literally,” that both sexuality and neuroses are cultural products only – an approach found in no other science or discipline. What is important for Foucault are the differences between symbols (if we must use that term) of various cultures and not the issue of whether, or how, symbols are joined or separated from “flesh and blood.” Foucault can escape, first, the futile search for the correct proportions of “nature” and “culture” (“inné” versus “acquis”) – for which there are no prizes for getting the right answer anyway. Secondly, the focus of Foucault’s analysis lies not in the divergence from a pure “normal” body impossible to experience anyway, but in the variations of one set of cultural practices from another, which can be known, however superficially.

While Foucault was one of the few philosophers to take Lacan’s “subject” seriously, he did so by going beyond psychoanalysis as a whole. Foucault supported Lacan’s conception of the subject only insofar as it gained its coherency from a “structural” unconscious in no way submissive theoretically to a Freudian body and mind. As soon as psychoanalysis starts referring symbols or signifiers to a universal subject of desire, thereby presenting yet another phenomenological version in disguise, Foucault’s support and allegiance is immediately and unreservedly withdrawn. If feminists and phenomenologists oppose Lacanian psychoanalysis from the side of the body and sensation, Foucault will challenge it from the opposite position: he will demand a more complex account of culture, one that incorporates various types of powers – in the plural.

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Thus, for the (Foucauldian) genealogist, it matters little whether life forces are called "instincts" or "drives," or just "life forces" (why not?) because that problem belongs to the biologist. Judith Butler, Peter Dews and Jacques Derrida, from different positions and opposing viewpoints, complain that Foucault has no "theory of the drives," and that he pays too little attention to Freud's "death drive." This is to misunderstand that it is not Foucault's role to propagate any theory of the "drives," dead or alive, whether Freudian, Lacanian, feminist, gay, Deleuzian, Derridean or whatever. To enter into these debates is to make the same mistake as psychoanalysis: remain subservient to terms already set by medical psychology, inevitably conforming to the old philosophical problematic pertaining to the metaphysics of the person.

Foucault is proposing instead an ontology of *culture*. As such, there is no general Other (capital or lower case) in opposition to or in complicity with power. Rather, it is more like a series of others— in the plural— a "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate." (*HS*, p. 92). Discourses are not "subservient to power" or "raised up against it," any more than "silences" are. Through the existence of discourses as historical events, "power and knowledge are joined together." (*HS*, p. 100). What is therefore important from this view is how one defines "*culture*" now that the Freudian "unconscious" is acknowledged as a reality. Is the Lacanian notion of the "Other" adequate?

In explaining the role of the Other in witticisms and slips, Lacan was clear that he was not resorting to the "imbecile" and delusional name of "collective consciousness."
Rather, the collective aspect is already present by the very existence of the Other.

According to Lacan:

It is indeed necessary that a code exists somewhere in order for discourse to have a hearing. This code is evidently part of the Other, that is, the Other as a companion of language. It is necessary that this Other exists, and, please note, there is absolutely no need to call it by that imbecile and mad name of ‘collective consciousness’. An Other is an Other. It suffices for a sole person to be there for a language to be alive.¹

But this relieves Lacan and those analysts after him of the burden of having to define that shared culture. As regards the pre-existing ‘code’ sanctioned by the Other and necessary for a truth to be expressed about relations between men and women (five straight limbs) or class (famillionaire), we are no clearer now as to its constitution than in Freud’s day. The ‘famillionaire’ example is especially intriguing in that Lacan offers a proto-Foucauldian insight into the word “familiar” during one of his seminars. Using Littré’s dictionary, Lacan dates the adjective from 1865, and claims it derives from the new “political science” concerned with “allocations familiales” [family allowances].² The original joke from a text of Heinrich Heine written in the early nineteenth century could not therefore have involved “familiar” at all, for the word did not exist then, whether in its French, German or English forms. Yet we immediately invoke this word to read the story today. Lacan makes the following comment: “It is thanks to negligence of this type that we can imagine we understand ancient texts as the contemporaries understood them.”³

For Foucault, it is thanks to negligence of this type that the difficulties involved in “knowing thy culture” are not underestimated. One must therefore conceive of culture


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as a plurality of power-knowledge relations whose formations, both logically systematic yet accidentally thrown together, are unknown, "unconscious," because they are too much at the very surface of things. Here, Nietzsche has the edge over Freud due to his insistence that all moral values circulating in the society, passed on from parents to children, lover to lover, friend to friend, enemy to enemy, have a history independent of them and cannot be explained in terms of transcendental emotions or biological "needs" of the body. In other words, the "letter-box" as such is of no concern — only the system of letters coming and going, varying over time and place, is of interest. To follow Freud would be to think that the system of mail exchange is explicable by the physical qualities of the letter-box. Let us go over the psychoanalytic distinction between "primary" and "secondary" processes to clarify Foucault's difference further.

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Freud's focus throughout his career had been directed towards "primary processes." As clarified in a short paper in 1912, he claims that some latent ideas "do not penetrate into consciousness, however strong they may have become." The term "unconscious" is reserved for these, having "a certain dynamic character." This is the essential crux of the psychoanalytic study of neuroses: "ideas kept apart from consciousness in spite of their intensity and activity." (SE, 12, p. 263). Equipped with the notion of "infantile fantasy" within an Oedipal structure, it is childhood experiences that are given a fundamental role in primary processes and the consequent production of ideas of a "dynamic character." Wishes "originating in infancy" are an "indispensable motive force for the formation of dreams" well into adulthood, for example. (SE, 4, p. 589). That childhood should have this determining role is assumed and not demonstrated.

Nevertheless, as a result of these experiences, neuroses represent “a more or less partial
overpowering of the ego by sexuality after the ego’s attempts at suppressing sexuality
have failed.” Later, Freud qualified this dualism as an opposition between life forces
and death forces. No doubt partly in reaction to external criticisms, Freud was keen to
stress that psychoanalysis does not explain “everything by sexuality”: “It is possible,
indeed, that the libidinal instincts in the ego may be linked in a peculiar manner with
these other ego [drives] which are still strange to us.” (SE, 18, p. 53). He was forced to
go “beyond the pleasure principle.”

Either way, though, all the attention for Freud throughout his career is on “repression”
as it functions between the primary and secondary processes: namely, the “drives” and
what happens to them as a result of primary repression [refoulement]. To repeat the
objection expressed above, if one speaks of suppression in a political sense [répression]
versus repression at a psychological level [refoulement], this indicates at least two
different types of powers operating: what are they, and where do they come from? But
there is also an obvious gap in the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious generally
when the analysis demands reference to political or social suppression [répression] for
its own sake – those times when psychological repression [refoulement] is marginal.
These are cases where external circumstances beyond the individual and his or her
personal life story must come into play. The overwhelming majority of the examples
given in The Psychopathology of Everyday Life fall into this nebulous category: Freud

45 Sigmund Freud [1913], “The claims of psychoanalysis to scientific interest,” SE, 8, pp. 165-190, p. 181.
46 “Our views have from the very first been dualistic, and today they are even more definitely dualistic
than before – now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego instincts and sexual instincts
but between life instincts and death instincts”, Sigmund Freud [1920], Beyond the Pleasure Principle, SE,
18, pp. 1-64, p. 53.
as analyst must refer to controls on behaviour, dare we say "powers," that are foreign to the subject, often temporary, socially constructed, or at least not fixed for all eternity.

In the chapter concerned with "slips of the tongue," for example, we are told the story of the President of the Lower House of the Austrian Parliament earnestly declaring the session to be "closed" when in fact he should have been opening it. The ensuing merriment alerted the President to his mistake and Freud gives the following commentary: "In this particular case the explanation no doubt was that the President secretly wished he was already in a position to close the sitting, from which little good was to be expected." Similarly, a woman was to visit her friend, who lived in "Hapsburg Street," but when she mentioned the incident at dinner, she mistakenly gave the address as "Babenberg Street." (SE, 6, p. 223). It so happened that two days before, there was a momentous historical event in their lives: the Hapsburg dynasty had been deposed and the Republic declared; the streets were now lined with colours going back to the Babenberg dynasty of the thirteenth century – red, white and red: "Our speaker introduced the change of dynasty into her friend's address," comments Freud. (SE, 6, p. 223). This is typical of his examples.

In neither of these cases is the classic psychoanalytic "repression" as it functions between the unconscious and consciousness enough – or really relevant. The woman's lapse demonstrates a political correctness or "censorship" operating in the wider environment, indicating a sensitivity regarding the change of dynasty. The story also requires implicit background historical knowledge about the colours of the thirteenth-

47 Sigmund Freud [1901], The Psychopathology of Everyday Life, SE, 6, p. 59.
century regime. In the example of the President of Lower House, a social code forbids the public expression of the idea that parliamentary sessions are futile.

Another interesting example falling into this category due to its obvious political connotations is the Swiss Professor and his “slip of the tongue” during a lecture he was giving at a university. While recounting an anecdote about a German schoolmaster, the Professor made a concerted effort to avoid using the word “boche” for “Allemand” – acutely aware of political sensitivities in a “neutral” country during a time of war between France and Germany. (SE, 6, p. 72). In fact, the university authorities had expressly forbidden use of this term: “boche.” Inevitably, towards the end of his speech (delivered in French), the professor carelessly substituted “muche” for the word he was supposed to say: “motte”. Laughter broke out immediately in “the mainly French audience.” Freud comments:

At the precise moment at which he had successfully said “instituteur allemand” [German schoolmaster] with perfect correctness for what was the last time, and was hurrying with an inward sigh of relief to the conclusion, which seemed to offer no pitfalls – the word which had been suppressed with so much effort caught hold of the similar-sounding “motte”, and the damage was done. Anxiety about committing a political indiscretion ... interfered with his main intention of giving a punctilious rendering of the illustration. ... On the other hand, the slip was received by the mainly French audience with real satisfaction, and its effect was exactly as though it had been an intentional play upon words. (SE, 6, p. 73).

Again, like it or not, here is a clear case of political events impacting in a direct way on the psychology of an individual: the internal “psychic conflict” is triggered by an external censorship, temporally specific, put in place by the university authorities due to the current political situation locking “French” and “German” cultures into warfare. The blunder gives no clues as to the professor’s “sexual” life, infantile or otherwise, and neither would his sexual “fantasies” explain why the slip was made. Freud of course
makes no attempt at any absurd connections to infantile experiences. But neither does he feel compelled to explain properly how these particular historical circumstances could have intervened in the whole "slip" – they are seen to be relevant to the story but not \textit{constitutive} of it.

In short, the "outside context" is both the crucial lynchpin \textit{and} the weakest aspect of the Freudian theory of the "unconscious." Freud "hardly began to describe" this field of "secondary censorship."\textsuperscript{48} The external censor remained as Freud had originally represented it to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897: mysteriously "Russian," at all times and all places.\textsuperscript{49} There were never any debates between Freud and his colleagues as to how to define external censorship, and nor did it lead to any splits in the psychoanalytic movement.

Yet, perhaps the whole room for "error" in everyday life is due to the fact that all social knowledge must be "acquired" – and continually for each and every context. To incorporate the "acquired" dimension, Freud is forced, either, to give complicated background details for every case; to reinvent the whole wheel of world history every time somebody slips up; to "personalize" that history, as he did in the case of "Babenberg" for "Hapsburg"; or, alternatively, he can dissolve the importance of each episode within general \textit{biological} themes like "sexuality" and "death" as he did in the opening example of forgetting the proper name \textit{Signorelli} (\textit{SE}, 6, pp. 1-7). Either way, without acknowledgement of varying \textit{ethnographic} forces or powers, it leaves \textit{The Psychopathology of Everyday Life} as an inexhaustible catalogue of charming human follies – but nothing more.

\textsuperscript{49} Freud, \textit{Complete Letters to Fliess}, p. 297.
Lacanian theorists were aware of this problem. But, for them, the situation was perfectly understandable and even appropriate because the object of psychoanalysis is not the ethnographic landscape but primary repression occurring in a strictly psychological sense between the unconscious and the preconscious-conscious. Secondary censorship is only that: secondary. In the seminar series of 1955-1956, Lacan stressed that, while the analytic communication has the “structure of a language,” this by no means implied that the unconscious can be “expressed” in discourse.\(^ {50}\) No exploration of the preconscious, “however profound or exhaustive it is,” will ever lead to an analysis of “unconscious phenomenon as such.”\(^ {51}\)

Similarly, in 1960, Lacan made it clear that the Freudian unconscious cannot be used to refer to political lapses – the kind of naivety evident when a rich dandy, for example, is blithely unaware that his wealth and freedom is dependent on social relations external to himself and which guarantee his situation: “Don’t think in terms of the psychoanalytic unconscious here,” Lacan says.\(^ {52}\) Using the example of the Marquis de Sade, Lacan claims that the famous nobleman of the eighteenth century was both a conscious and preconscious witness of his times. On the one hand, Sade was very conscious that his role as a “man of pleasure” was made possible by developments independent of his own life; Sade had recalled with “great joy” the “emergence of this tradition historically.” Other knowledge was only preconscious, for Sade “wasn’t fully aware of the conditions in which he as nobleman found himself, during the period from the beginning of the


French Revolution and down through the terror..." But, importantly, neither conscious nor preconscious testimonies reveal his unconscious motivations; for that, we would have to seek out his infantile relationship with his mother, father or nurse; we would need detailed access to the content of his dreams, and so on.

But if Freud's theory of the unconscious cannot capture the type of "political" unawareness personified in the example of the Marquis de Sade, where else do we go for it? As seen in chapter two, the central characteristic of the "French" schools of psychoanalysis is said to be their united recognition that the Freudian Trieb, "drive," is not the same concept as the biological idea of "instinct." The principle differences Trieb allowed over instinct was that it "varies from one individual to another" and that it was "historically determined." So, if what restrains Instinkt is a stress on individual variation and historical context, then one would expect the latter to be the main focus of their analyses, the aspect that distinguished French psychoanalysis from all other Freudian schools. We would now be aware of various different manifestations of Trieb, depending whether it takes affect in Ancient Greece, medieval France or contemporary Japan. There would perhaps be acknowledgement of different modes of reproduction that act independently of the modes of production in the classical Marxist formulation. After all, Sade's relationship with his mother, father, or nurse, no matter how "primary," would have been very different had they taken place today rather than two centuries ago – the whole family would have been exposed to a lot more bad television, for a start, even in France.

54 Laplanche, La sexualité humaine, p. 129.
These historical factors were, by the admission of French psychoanalysts themselves, secondary. Besides, as everyone knows, when jokes have to be explained, they very quickly become boring. During the period from 1953 to 1980, it was only in the fifth seminar series of 1957-1958 (discussed above) that jokes made a brief appearance on the Lacanian stage\textsuperscript{55} – despite the enigmas of language they expose and the gaps in scientific knowledge of human psychology that become obvious. Jokes are similarly absent from the lexicon developed by Laplanche and Pontalis, while the category of "pulsion" (Trieb, or "drive") is one of the weightiest of the text, with several subheadings. In their view, clarification of Freud’s concepts is especially called for at those points where the meaning has become disputed or oversimplified – "drives" being a perfect example. A Foucauldian perspective would argue that "jokes" are sacrificed to "drives" because the latter is more consistent with a dominant, medical, conception of sexuality that all versions of psychoanalysis, French included, are secretly enthralled by.

Either way, what remains is a paradox: a type of psychoanalysis renowned for its "linguistic" and "cultural" focus, when this was not really the prime concern of these theorists at all. In the view of Jacqueline Rose and many others, it was "the failure to grasp the concept of the symbolic" which had led psychoanalysis astray and "to concentrate increasingly on the adequacies and inadequacies of the mother-child relationship," amongst other tendencies.\textsuperscript{56} While this may describe Lacan’s polemical stance vis-a-vis colleagues locally and internationally, the fact remains, symbolic linguistic knots evident by "famillionaire" or "five straight limbs" were not the real objects of French psychoanalysis; rather, "desire" understood in terms of a medical ontology of the person was always the central theme. It is "desire" that structures

\textsuperscript{55} Marini, \textit{Jacques Lacan}, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{56} Rose, "Introduction II," \textit{Feminine Sexuality}, p. 37.

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Lacan’s “culture.” The shared “code” of the Other gains its meaning from a primary signifier – the “phallus” – which in turn acquires its power from the law. Let us now examine critically Lacan’s concept of desire.
This chapter will finalise our interpretation of Lacan by exploring in more detail his conception of desire, and making some preliminary comparisons with Foucault’s critical history of sexuality – as a prelude to a deeper discussion of the latter in Chapters seven and eight. It was contended that Lacan’s analysis of the unconscious and his conception of the symbolic did not really shed light on fundamental linguistic mysteries manifested by jokes and parapraxes. This is not the end of the encounter, however, for Lacan has become renowned if not notorious for his theory of desire and sexual difference; resurrecting texts such as *Jokes and their relationship to the Unconscious* is incidental to this longer-range inquiry into “desire.” As a way of reaffirming the general argument and setting the scene, it may be useful to give a preliminary summary of the two positions – psychoanalytic desire and Foucauldian power.

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Lacan stated in 1972 that, since the age of 20, he has done “nothing other than explore philosophers on the subject of love”¹ – by which he means love between men and women. It is not that Lacan (or Freud for that matter) denies the reality of other forms of love,² but that, because heterosexuality can pass itself off as reflecting biological instincts “naturally,” it presents entrenched challenges to the type of psychoanalysis Lacan was trying to develop. As seen in chapter four, one of the main tenets of Lacan’s disagreement with colleagues was their collective failure to address the issue of the

2 For example, Lacan claimed that “when ones loves, it has nothing to do with sex,” Lacan, *Seminar XX: Encore*, p. 25.
subject’s assumption of his or her “sex role.” In Lacan’s view, the idea of natural heterosexual attraction followed in the wake of this theoretical lacuna.

Freud had noted that the ardour of the “poets” was not really evident in everyday life. Lacan reaffirmed Freud’s pessimism in the area of heterosexuality with the enigmatic statement that “there is no sexual relation,” only “desire” for one. If we imagine the ancient Chinese Yin-Yang symbol, with its unity, harmony and graceful flow between masculine and feminine – this would be the complete antithesis of Lacan’s assertion that “there is no sexual relation.” Various myths of unity are set up “through which this division is persistently disavowed,” to use Jacqueline Rose’s words. That is, philosophical and post-Freudian traditions constantly clamber for some kind of natural sexual “rapport,” endlessly garnishing the same old formula: $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$.

They remain mere myths, however, and Lacan argues that, “short of castration,” or unless the man relinquishes his “phallic function,” he has “no chance of enjoying the body of the woman,” no means of “making love.” Certainly, he can “desire” her in all manner of ways, and do “all kinds of things to her which bear a remarkable resemblance to love.” Also, one cannot deny that, insofar as the sexual relationship is “not working out,” it “works out anyway,” thanks to a certain number of “conventions, prohibitions and inhibitions.” After all, reproduction manages to take place: $1 + 1 = 3$. But, aside

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4 According to Freud: “It is my belief that, however strange it may sound, we must reckon with the possibility that something in the nature of the sexual instinct itself is unfavourable to the realization of complete satisfaction. ... Psychoanalysis has shown us that when the original object of a wishful impulse has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitutive objects none of which, however, brings full satisfaction”. Sigmund Freud [1912], “On the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love,” SE, 11, pp. 179-190, p. 189.
from glimpses of an alternative feminine “jouissance” that “mysticism” occasionally reveals; or the fact that some men “get the idea,” both the woman and the man are trapped in an austere “phallic” sexual economy and must use various strategies either to “take” it on, or to “keep” it for themselves.⁹

To illustrate his position, Lacan sometimes dwelled on the enigma of courtly love, describing it on one occasion as “the only way to come off elegantly from the absence of sexual relation.”¹⁰ The accuracy or otherwise of Lacan’s knowledge of this history need not concern us, only the way he uses it to explicate the concept of desire. The appearance of courtly love in the age of Feudalism is surprising when nothing else would indicate “the advancement of women or indeed their emancipation.”¹¹ As in earlier historical periods, the woman is identified with a social function that “leaves no room for her person or her own liberty,” except perhaps with reference to “religious rights.” On the other hand, courtly love has been one of the few episodes in the history of culture, perhaps the singular instance, when the man’s lady was idealized beyond her inferior position, to such an extent that she “was entirely, in the most servile sense of the term, his female subject.”¹² (Not object, it should be noted, but subject)

But this does not mean that courtly love can provide a model for sexual rapport between two independent subjects, male and female, according to Lacan’s reading. On closer inspection, the man is falsely enslaved to a phoney female “subject”; the relationship is “fundamentally narcissistic in character.”¹³ The feminine participant is always

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introduced as inaccessible; the man who longs to reach her must resort to “all kinds of evil powers.”\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, the Lady is frequently referred to by a masculine term—“Mi Dom” or “my Lord”—and is represented with “depersonalised characteristics.” It is as if all the poets of this tradition are addressing the same woman: “The Lady is never characterized for any of her real, concrete virtues, for her wisdom, her prudence, or even her competence.”\textsuperscript{15} Finally, and most importantly, courtly love does not deal with the actual erotic intercourse between male and female, so avoids the issue of mutual pleasure. In an interesting contention, Lacan argues that “holding back” resonates in Freudian discourse itself. While courtly love places all emphasis on the seduction process, Freud, too, refrains from speaking openly of the union between men and women. Instead of penetration and reception, Freud diverts everyone’s attention to polymorphous pleasures instead:

Freudianism is in brief nothing but a perpetual allusion to the fecundity of eroticism in ethics, but it doesn’t formulate it as such. The techniques involved in courtly love ... are techniques of holding back, of suspension, of \textit{amor interruptus}. The stages courtly love lays down ... are expressed more or less in terms that Freud uses in his \textit{Three Essays} as belonging to the sphere of foreplay. Now, from the point of view of the pleasure principle, the paradox of what might be called the effect of foreplay, is precisely that it exists in opposition to the purposes of the pleasure principle. It is only insofar as the pleasure of desiring, or, more precisely, the pleasure of experiencing unpleasure, is sustained that we can speak of the sexual valorisation of the preliminary stages of the act of love.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, ironically for those ready to accuse psychoanalysis of heterosexual “bias,”\textsuperscript{17} Lacan sees a perpetual wading through the whole spectrum of perversions, and endless references to polymorphous development, in an effort never to arrive at the heterosexual climax of the story. Not that this gives any green light to different sexualities of course;

\textsuperscript{17} For example, Eribon, \textit{Échapper à la psychanalyse}.

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but, at least in Lacan’s schema, everybody ends up equally unsatisfied. For Lacan, what makes it impossible to speak properly of the sexual relation in examples like courtly love, or Freudian psychoanalysis, is “desire” – defined, as seen in chapter four, by its incapacity for satisfaction. It is instituted on the basis of a pre-existing lack: “Desire is a relation of being to lack” and this lack is “beyond anything which can represent it.”

By contrast, Foucault had little to say about the universal valorisation of the phallus and subsequent deprecation of the feminine, or the inscrutabilities of love. And while it was hinted that Nietzsche gave Foucault’s “structuralist” unconscious its difference from Lacan and Lévi-Strauss in a methodological sense, Nietzsche is not known as a theorist of sexuality, regardless of how he may have been enlisted by avant-guard writers, so Foucault seems to have shaky credentials compared to Lacan. Are bodies not sexual, at least in male and female, if not masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual? Is not identity isomorphic with the body, even at those times when sex could be discounted? Intellectual games like chess, or sports like darts or motor racing that require no physical strength, are still overwhelmingly dominated by men, just as child-caring activities are almost always the domain of women. If Foucault claims that nothing human, not even the body, can act as a historical constant; if he makes no apologies for denying “sexuality” as the psychoanalysts have formulated it, promoting the view that issues of “sex” should be subordinated to those of “power,” how would all this take place?

La volonté de savoir of 1976 provided the outline of his alternative, especially the chapter entitled “Method.” (HS, pp. 92-102). The crucial new ingredient was “power” –

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one of the main topics of this and the following chapters. The questions addressed included the following:

In a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places (around the child’s body, apropos of women’s sex, in connection with practices restricting births, and so on), what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work? How did they make possible these kinds of discourses, and conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations? (HS, p. 97).

Pluralizing relations of power and knowledge, Foucault was able to create a new field, one that merged the “political” and the “moral” theoretically – the two domains already amalgamated in practice by movements such as women’s liberation in their claims that the “personal is political.” Thus, what is important is not “love” so much as contraception, mutual and consensual pleasure, appropriate relations between adults and children – those “acts” that have “connections with the political relationships that define our societies.” 19

As regards courtly love, Foucault shares with Lacanians a wish not to reduce such episodes to economic history. But it is equally false to see courtly love as a version of today’s “heterosexuality,” as if relations of reproduction can be removed from history. 20 Invoking Georges Duby’s fascinating account of courtly love, 21 Foucault claims that the male courtiers were the dispossessed younger brothers of noble families, with no hope of inheriting from their lineage, in search of a rich widow: it was “an affair of a landless knight turning up at a chateau to seduce the lord of the manor’s wife.” (CF, p. 202). Far

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19 Foucault, “Historian of Culture,” Foucault Live, p. 103.
from illustrating a static structure of “desire,” courtly love was a “comedy around power relations,” a series of events “in the interstices of power.” A loosening of constraints between men and women of this class resulted, yielding “this real-fictive joust one finds in the themes of courtly love.” (CF, p. 202).

Moreover, courtly love was to exercise a determining historical influence beyond its activity as a poetic creation, a feature not captured by Lacan’s analysis, but which became an essential component of Foucault’s account of sexuality. For courtly love entailed the diffusion of the aristocratic principle that contraception was an integral part of heterosexual lovemaking. The Malthusian couple, defined essentially by coitus interruptus, would not have been possible without mutual acceptance of a courtly relationship, and the more flowery understanding of intercourse that went with it.22

Beginning in the seventeenth century, and certainly by the eighteenth century, one finds more and more evidence that this form of contraception was practised widely in all classes of Western Europe.23 It is “henceforth difficult to maintain,” writes Jean-Louis Flandrin, “that no one thought of separating sexual intercourse and procreation” until recently.24 Priests were not very happy about the situation: husbands have become “too sensitive” to their wives’ complaints about “what it costs them to bring children into the


24 Flandrin, Sex in the Western World, p. 100.
Beginning in the late eighteenth century, a secular movement taking up the cudgels on behalf of a "population" dying to be created joined hands with the church. This is the campaign of "medical socialization" Foucault refers to that attributed a "pathogenic value" to birth control practices. (HS, p. 105). In a quotation that has become a cliché in this literature – certainly classic – Moheau’s treatise on population from 1778 proclaimed that “rich women” are not the only ones who regard the propagation of the species as a hangover from the "olden days"; already, “these disastrous secrets unknown to any other animal but man have penetrated into the countryside: nature is being tricked even in villages.”

The generalization of a “courtly relationship” represents a historical victory for feminist ideals in the broadest sense of that term. As Duby and others have shown, abduction and rape had been integral parts of “normal” heterosexuality, at least as represented from sources deriving from the Carolingian aristocracy of the ninth century. By the twelfth century, and partly as a result of denunciations by the Church – an ambiguous ally for women – these ritual abuses had been curtailed and courtly love took its place, at least within the aristocracy. Meanwhile, Flandrin provides a chilling account of what uninterrupted coitus looked like in the popular classes of the early modern period. Thus, even with the confines of heterosexuality, different forms exist and

27 According to Duby: “The few ninth-century texts that survive are full of cases of abduction. Widows, nuns, wives, daughters, whether betrothed or not, all appear as so many quarries pursued by packs of young men,” Duby, Knight, Lady and Priest, pp. 38-39.
28 Duby, Knight, Lady and Priest, p. 40.
29 Flandrin claims rape of women amongst the general populace was "frequent," "public," and involved "gangs" of young apprentices, servants and journeymen. The victim was always poor, usually a servant, a newcomer to the town suspected of having low morals, an opinion which the rape subsequently cemented – adding insult, literally, to her injuries. It followed a particular pattern similar to the following:
have existed, and it is only with Foucault’s analysis that these differences can be analysed.

Crucially for these purposes, Foucault’s reformulation of power exposes a flaw in the Lacanian conception of desire, and this will constitute one of the key discussion points later in this chapter. It will be seen that Lacan’s “return” to Freud did not include questioning the political notion of “power” already operating in standard Freudian or Marx-Freudian discourse. For now, Foucault’s general position can be described as an effort to place sexual subjects within an ontology of the present, or ethnography of Western culture. It was unacceptable that the subject of desire has been “withdrawn from the historical field” in all analyses, whether historical, political, cultural, philosophical, or psychoanalytic. In Lacan’s case, the subject is subjected to a transhistorical law of desire that instances like courtly love are evidence of; all historical forces are secondary. In his New Foundations for psychoanalysis from the early 1980s, Jean Laplanche does not depart essentially from Lacan, as this summary of his general position demonstrates:

We start out from the obvious fact that we are living beings before we become human beings or ‘cultural’ beings. No one will dispute this obvious fact: the history of life is such that non-cultural beings existed before culturally marked beings; it is also unlikely that anyone will dispute the fact that, in the history of hominids, the cultural stage was grafted on to a more biological stage. And, finally, it is not unreasonable to assume that the ‘anteriority’ hypothesis also applies to the development of the individual, as observation allows us at least to reconstruct the existence of an adaptational-non adaptational stratum (so to speak) of neonate behaviour which is not marked by social interaction.30

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Foucault, on the other hand, does not accept this medical conception of human being, especially as the basis for a non-medical enterprise. It was necessary to retrieve human phenomena like madness and sexuality from scientific assumptions “no one will dispute” because it is impossible to dispute them outside of their proper scientific locations. Consequently, Foucault proposes four main historical subjects of sexuality instead: the hysteric, the masturbating child (male and female), the Malthusian heterosexual couple (man and wife practising conception and contraception) and the perverse adult – all subjected to a network of power and knowledge relationships he calls the dispositif of sexuality, a bourgeois construction. One could add to this list the male subjects of aphrodisia introduced by Foucault in the second volume of his history of sexuality dealing with ancient Greece. These subjects act as a counter possibility to modern versions of subjectivity more plausibly than vague references to the ars erotica of other cultures in La volonté de savoir. (HS, pp. 57-58). The ancient example shows, if not in the case of females, that thinking of male-to-male love as “error” or “perversion” from the “norm” is a modern construct.

No less than the Lacanian account, none of the subjects posited by Foucault correspond to anyone’s biography, but reveal a largely unconscious cultural attitude towards eroticism and procreation. To repeat what was argued in chapter four, the “subject” in the sense employed by both Lacan and Foucault is not the organic subject of biology, nor the socio-biographical subject of psychology, but the subject of a transindividual and cultural force ontologically prior to the individual – or series of forces in Foucault’s case, no less powerful for all that – which for convenience is called “the unconscious.” Unlike Lacan, and consistent with the general argument up to this point, Foucault’s
modern subjects reflect a distinct ethnographic unconscious not found elsewhere: \textit{scientia sexualis}, the lifeblood of the "\textit{dispositif} of sexuality." Therein lies the essential difference between the two – ethnographic versus transhistorical. The two positions can now be investigated more thoroughly, beginning with Lacan.

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As seen in Chapter three, "sexuality" remained unhistorical and non-ethnographic in psychoanalysis primarily through Freud’s arguments about the "eternal" themes in the ancient Greek tragedy \textit{Oedipus the King}, and we detailed Foucault’s alternative interpretation. But the "anti-Oedipal" movement outlined could equally claim Lacan as one of its founding fathers. Deleuze and Guattari often paid tribute to Lacan in \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, acknowledged their debts to his school of thought (Guattari was a practising psychoanalyst), and implied at times that the oedipalizing tendency of psychoanalysis had taken grip despite Lacan’s work.\textsuperscript{31} As Lacan put it in his discussion of the Rat Man in the early 1950s, "the whole Oedipal schema is to be criticized."\textsuperscript{32} This attitude echoed statements he had made years before, in a long article from 1938 dedicated to the modern family mentioned in chapter four, where Lacan departed from Freudian theory to insist that the family was never a collection of "instincts,” but always a "psychic circumstance."\textsuperscript{33}

To recall Freud as briefly as possible, it is one of the inevitable consequences of all culture that instincts must be suppressed: "each individual has surrendered some part of his possessions – some part of his sense of omnipotence or of the aggressive or

\textsuperscript{31} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, p. 53 and p. 217.


vindictive inclinations in his personality.”34 The reason why Oedipus the King “moves” a modern audience no less than the contemporary Greek one is because “the oracle laid the same curse” upon Oedipus as upon us. We are all driven, Freud says, male and female, “to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father.” (SE, 4, p. 262). The story shows the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes and we shrink back from Oedipus “with the whole force of the repression by which those wishes have since that time been held down within us.” (SE, 4, p. 263).

It was possible to read Freud in a strictly economic way, as did Herbert Marcuse in his text Eros and Civilization.35 Basically, if sexual energy were allowed to run free, no work would get done. For Freud, libido is more primitive than labour power, so there must be an initial “sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction for the benefit of the whole community” before relations of production come into effect.36 While this renunciation has produced suffering on the part of humanity, it cannot be otherwise, for “what motive would men [...] have for putting sexual instinctual forces to other uses if, by any distribution of those forces, they could obtain fully satisfying pleasure?” It was only logical that they would “never abandon that pleasure” and, therefore, “never make any further progress.” (SE, 9, p. 190). In Freud’s opinion, repression has not been all bad, as the “noblest cultural achievements” have resulted from deflecting the sexual drive to other pursuits. As he expressed it later in his Introductory Lectures:

The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic one; since it does not possess enough provisions to keep its members alive unless they work, it must restrict the number of its members and divert their energies from sexual

36 Sigmund Freud [1916], Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (Parts I and II), SE, 15, p. 23.
activity to work. It is faced, in short, by the eternal, primeval exigencies of life, which are with us to this day.\textsuperscript{37}

One could protest immediately that those classes in history freed from the obligation to work do not spend their time exclusively engaged in sexual activity, contrary to what Freud's logic would demand. Nevertheless, this is not Marcuse's objection, who denounces instead the equally unacceptable idea of "scarcity" lying at the heart of Freud's theory. For Marcuse, there are "historical forms" of the reality principle; not every kind of labour is necessarily in contradiction with the pleasure principle. The irreconcilable conflict is not between "work and Eros," but between "alienated labour and Eros."\textsuperscript{38} Freud was so wrongly pessimistic about the liberation potentials of Eros because he failed to see that there could exist a state "where freedom and necessity coincide." A particular "distribution of scarcity" has now been "imposed" on individuals.

Throughout the recorded history of civilization, the instinctual constraint enforced by scarcity has been intensified by constraints enforced by the hierarchical distribution of scarcity and labour; the interest of domination added surplus-repression to the organization of the instincts under the reality principle. The pleasure principle was dethroned ... because it militated against a civilization whose progress perpetuates domination and toil.\textsuperscript{39}

Marcuse agreed with Freud however that, along with various forms of positive "sublimation" and substitute satisfactions, neuroses are the consequence of "repression."

Freud had added the important historical qualification, not considered by Marcuse but adopted by Lacan as the basis of a more "cultural" reading, that as civilization becomes

\textsuperscript{37} Sigmund Freud [1917], \textit{Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis} (Parts III), SE, 16, p. 312.
\textsuperscript{38} Marcuse, \textit{Eros and Civilization}, p. 47, note 1.
\textsuperscript{39} Marcuse, \textit{Eros and Civilization}, p. 40.
more sophisticated, the deflection of the sexual drive from its true purpose gains momentum. Thus, *Oedipus The King* would not have been possible at a later time in our civilization. William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, for example, has “roots” in the same soil as *Oedipus*. But the greater obscurity surrounding the central themes in *Hamlet* is evidence that, by the time Shakespeare came to write his version of the tragedy, “culture” had diverted the sexual drive even further away from its natural tendencies. The changed treatment of the material “reveals the whole difference of the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind.” (*SE*, 4, p. 264). While in *Oedipus*, the wishful fantasy “is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream,” in *Hamlet* “it remains repressed” as in a neurotic symptom. (*SE*, 4, p. 264).

Freud’s views in both the economic or cultural shades founded subsequent “histories” of sexuality, all sharing a common “repressive hypothesis” that Foucault would dispute, which will be seen more fully in the next chapter with the introduction of Norbert Elias, Jos Van Ussel, and other cultural historians. However, it is important to note here that Foucauldian commentators, in their discussions of Foucault’s rejection of the “repressive hypothesis,” not only overlook the role of historians in propagating this idea, but have also disregarded the crucial differences in the respective readings of Freud found in Marcuse and Lacan. As part of the general lacuna identified by this thesis, failure to grasp the true significance of Foucault’s critique of *Lacanian* psychoanalysis in the *French* context leads to a simplification and underestimation of the place occupied by power and sexuality within Foucault’s work as a whole.
By and large, commentators go no further than locating the repressive hypothesis Foucault criticizes under the umbrella term “psychoanalysis”: “there is more than a little influence of psychoanalytic thought in the repressive hypothesis.” \(^{40}\) But Foucault was well aware that Lacan and his school had repudiated “repression” as the very cornerstone of the theory of “desire.” These theorists have challenged, Foucault conceded, and “for some time” before him, “the simple little machinery that comes to mind when one speaks of repression; the idea of a rebellious energy that must be throttled has appeared to them inadequate for deciphering the manner in which power and desire are joined to one another.” \((HS, p. 81)\). During a conference Foucault participated in at the University of Bahia in 1976, he made similar reference to this difference, evident in various post-Freudian schools:

I am not the first, far from it, to try to twist the Freudian schema that opposes instinct to repression, or instinct to culture. For decades now, a whole school of psychoanalysts has tried to modify and elaborate the Freudian schema of instinct \textit{versus} culture; instinct \textit{versus} repression. I refer just as much to psychoanalysts writing in English as well as French, such as Melanie Klein, Winnicott and Lacan, who have all tried to show that repression, far from being a secondary mechanism, after the fact, which tries to control a given instinctual drama, is, by its nature, part of that very mechanism or process through which the sexual instinct develops, unfolds, and constitutes itself as a drive. \(^{41}\)

What “troubled” Foucault, and what he found “insufficient” about the elaboration proposed by these psychoanalysts was that they modified the conception of “desire,” but changed “absolutely nothing” when it came to the concept of “power.” \((DE, IV, p. 183)\). In \textit{La volonté de savoir}, Foucault playfully attributes to himself what is in fact a theoretical sloppiness at the heart of Lacanian psychoanalysis itself: “I sometimes spoke as though I were dealing with equivalent notions, of \textit{repression}, and sometimes of \textit{law}

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\(^{41}\) Michel Foucault [1976], “Les mailles du pouvoir” [lecture delivered at the University of Bahia, 1976, followed by questions], \textit{DE}, IV, pp. 182-201, p. 182.
... I failed to consider everything that could distinguish their theoretical implications.” (HS, p. 82). As seen in relation to André Green’s defence of the Oedipus complex, or in Jean Laplanche’s explanation of the differences between psychoanalysis and philosophy, historical suppression in a political sense [répression] is secondary to psychic repression at a psychological level [refoulement]. Lacan made a number of other qualifications of this type, including the claim that “negation” [dénégation, Verneinung] was a different phenomenon to “repression” [refoulement, Verdrängung].

Foucault’s brilliance consists in exposing that if the same political conception of power (juridical and negative) acts in all cases, the distinctions are meaningless. “Negation,” “repression,” “suppression,” and so forth, imply different types of external powers. It is nonsense to explain these differences in terms of internal sexual drives. The Lacanian reading of Freud – indeed any reading of Freud, including Freud himself – is reduced to ashes by this one stroke, and the unconscious becomes again the very pool of “instincts” Lacan so vehemently despised.

Yet, as far as can be gleaned, no commentator or critic who has written about Foucault and “psychoanalysis” has ever explored the ramifications of this “power” vacuum inherent in Lacanian theory exposed by Foucault. Perhaps a first step towards appreciating his stunning intervention is the fact that Marcuse’s reading of Freud, no less than that of Reich, was never popular amongst Lacan and his followers. As Foucault put it, they had rejected the “simple little machinery” and idealist politics that

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43 See the detailed study by Jean Laplanche [1969], “Notes sur Marcuse et la psychanalyse,” Révolution copernicienne inachevée, pp. 59-88. Laplanche argues that Marcuse takes no account of Freud’s revisions after 1920, whereby the “death drive” becomes the force incompatible with culture, not the sexual drives. As well as presenting a detailed critique of Wilhelm Reich, Juliet Mitchell, too, argued that the worst aspects of both Marxism and psychoanalysis were bedded together in Marcuse’s notion of “surplus repression”: he “traps psychoanalysis with Marxist economics,” while casting “too evolutionary a light over the course of human history.” See Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p. 410.
“repression” entailed. Besides, speaking from the 1930s, Lacan had already complicated Freud's notion of repression anyway, for he claimed that current sociological and historical conceptions of the family showed a “decline” in the “paternal imago” – almost the opposite phenomenon to increasing “repression.” Psychoanalysis was obliged to take account of this historical development. As Lacan presents it, in terms too general to satisfy the historian but nevertheless pointing to important problems they recognise, the declining power of father had begun with Christianity and its valorisation of marriage as a partnership of “free choice” between persons. It was realized further in the “fifteenth century” with the “economic revolution from which bourgeois society and the psychology of modern man emerged.”  

It will be seen that lack of attention to the problem of power renders hollow, even pointless, these efforts on Lacan’s part to move away from Freud’s “repression.” Nevertheless, on the basis of the decline in the paternal imago, Lacan was able to class as “modern” those psychological crises making up the bulk of psychoanalytic knowledge. According to Juliet Mitchell, the human social order that the subject perceives and must negotiate is always patriarchal in some way or another. The father “stands in the position as the third term” that breaks the dyadic unit of mother and child: “There can be nothing human that pre-exists or exists outside the law represented by the father; there is only its denial (psychosis) or the fortunes and misfortunes (‘normality’ and neurosis) of its terms.”  

Lacan suggests in addition that, logically, unless this third term can act with overpowering force and conviction, there is not adequate incentive to abandon the mother psychologically. In other words, the traditional psychoanalytic schema had presupposed too readily the neat overlapping of the “symbolic” and the

“real” in the actual situation of the father and his functions; that the father would be both “himself” and also “the representative, in all its fullness, of the symbolic value crystallized in his functions.” Lacan argues instead that, “clearly,” this “coincidence of the symbolic and the real is totally elusive.” He continues:

At least in a social structure like ours, the father is always in one way or another in disharmony with regard to his function, a deficient father, a humiliated father…. There is always an extremely obvious discrepancy between the symbolic function and what is perceived by the subject in the sphere of experience. In this divergence lies the source of the effects of the Oedipus complex that are not at all normalizing, but rather most often pathogenic.

Thus, modern neuroses can be characterised, essentially, as “narcissistic” fixations on the maternal object; what Lacan describes as an “incomplete repression [refoulement] of the desire for the mother.” Contrary to misunderstandings, the Oedipus complex in Lacan’s schema is not a “normalizing” force, but in fact produces the different and manifold sexualities we recognise. Especially if “non-normalizing” is granted a positive rather than “pathogenic” value contrary to Lacan’s tendencies, it becomes clear that openly lesbian and gay identities, as well as greater emancipation of women and children generally, are an effect of the “decomposition” brought about by the social decline of the “paternal imago” specific to contemporary times. The best example is found in “American life,” says Lacan, which has banished authoritarianism further into obscurity and displays today’s “matrimonial exigencies” most visibly.

To simplify for the moment, what Foucault does in turn is take this proposition seriously enough so that the productive fragmentation itself becomes the very object of

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49 The term “imago” derives from Carl Jung. See Laplanche and Pontalis, Vocabulaire, p. 196.
his analysis. Namely, only with the recognition that authority is dispersed amongst various sites of power and knowledge relations is it possible to identify those persistent points of entrenched oppression, or false “liberation,” within any culture that may, with some work, be susceptible to change and modification. Thus, the “repression” Foucault targets is one Lacan had criticized too, but Foucault takes it further: “repression” is untenable not because it gives a false picture of the “drives” (these biological forces are not our concern anyway); rather, repression must be rejected because it has become a hold-all psychological notion that actually masks, conceptually, the multiplicity of external powers or suppressions that operate in the social or cultural field at any one time.

Before expanding Foucault’s difference, it is necessary to elaborate Lacan’s version of the history of sexuality more fully. His schema essentially relies on Durkheim’s historical “law of contraction.” During a lecture delivered in 1892, Durkheim had introduced the idea of the “conjugal family”51 – a term described by Lacan in his 1938 essay as “excellent.”52 The conjugal unit was a new development that quietly reflected changes in laws of inheritance after the French Revolution, and entailed a decrease in the authority of the father in favour of greater legal and economic rights for the son, if not the daughter.53 A similar view was propagated earlier by the French sociologist Frédéric Le Play (1806-1882): namely, that large families – composed of grand-parents, husband, wife, and their children all living together in the same dwelling – dominated

52 Lacan, Complexes Familiaux, p. 17.
pre-industrial Europe, and that this form gradually gave way to the marriage partnership of modern times.\(^{54}\)

Durkheim was part of the evolutionist current in sociology that Lévi-Strauss's structuralism set out to undermine beginning in the 1950s, while Le Play and his offshoots became favourite targets for the "Cambridge group" of historians associated with Peter Laslett in the 1960s and 1970s.\(^{55}\) Nevertheless, aligning himself with any version of the history of the family, however primitive, was introducing something quite foreign into psychoanalytic circles. As one commentator succinctly put it, "psychoanalysis has no theory of history after the primal horde,"\(^{56}\) so Lacan's foray into the world outside the cave is daring. It is as if the ghost of Lacan's past has come back to answer the criticism made in the previous chapter: if repression [refoulement] is the mechanism through which sexual subjects take on the signifying functions prescribed for them, then changes in the nature of secondary social suppression (industrialization, or the growth of capitalism) will surely alter the way primary repression (relations in the family unit) takes place. Both Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Élisabeth Roudinesco have discussed how, during the 1930s, although Lacan's views on the family were largely unknown, his psychiatric work in the area of criminal paranoia reflected the same political leanings. An awareness of "social tensions" in the construction of "personality" therefore explained why Lacan was warmly received in French Marxist

\(^{54}\) See the important discussion by Flandrin, Families in Former Times, pp. 50-65.


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quarters at that time, in contrast to the cool reception they gave Freud’s work as a whole.\textsuperscript{57}

Moreover, as Markos Zafiropoulos observes, while he abandoned Durkheim in favour of the new formalist anthropology of Lévi-Strauss of the 1950s and 1960s, Lacan took with him into his structuralist period the idea that “modern” neuroses were attributable to a diminished paternal imago.\textsuperscript{58} It was in this vein that Lacan reinterpreted Freud’s Rat Man, for example. Freud had presented the case as a classic psychoanalytic triangle between the Rat Man, his father, and his mother now represented in the contemporary circumstances by a young woman. The Rat Man “must have felt his father as in some way or other an interference” in his love life.\textsuperscript{59} Although Freud did not actually use the term, to all intents and purposes, the “Oedipus complex” made its grand debut in this drama.\textsuperscript{60}

Freud’s interpretation would only be valid, adds Lacan, if the real father always lived up to the super paternal image he is supposed to fill. But what we find in the Rat Man story is a caricature of this ideal: a humiliated father haunted by failures in his past. Sure enough, the son suffers a typically modern neurosis: a narcissistic fixation at the level of the maternal object. In Lacan’s revised interpretation, the father becomes involved in the Rat Man’s life through a quartet, not triangular, structure – more of a shadow of the subject and not a distinct figure in his own right. So, the subject (the Rat Man) is doubled by his own foppish possibility (he could end up exactly like his father),


\textsuperscript{58} Zafiropoulos, \emph{Lacan et les sciences sociales}, pp. 194-206.

\textsuperscript{59} Sigmund Freud [1909], \emph{Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis} (“Rat Man”), \emph{SE}, 10, pp. 151-318, p. 182.

\textsuperscript{60} According to the editors of the \emph{Standard Edition}, Freud used the term for the first time in 1910. See Sigmund Freud, “A special type of choice of object made by men,” \emph{SE}, 11, pp. 165-175, p. 171.
and this is reflected in the narrative by the indecision whether to be a real virile man and finish his law degree, or escape it all through illness (endlessly reliving the trauma of his army experience), and quitting his studies.

Meanwhile, the object of his affections (the Mother) is doubled too by a pair of love possibilities in the present of equal attraction and repulsion: a “rich woman” offering superficial fondness but security, and a “poor woman” capable of real love but requiring a strong man. One minute someone is a candidate for marriage, and thus life and sex, the next they are ineligible and equivalent to death. It is a story about impasse and vacillation, rather than prohibited incest. Each of the four points in the quadrangle could just as easily signify “death” as “libido,” sickness rather than health, poverty as opposed to wealth, coldness and not love, and so on. As Lacan expressed it:

The quartet system so fundamental to the impasses and insolubilities in the life situation of neurotics, is a structure rather different from that given traditionally — incestuous desire for the mother, prohibition of the father, its obstructive effects, and around all that, the more or less luxuriant proliferation of symptoms. I think this difference should lead us to question the general anthropology derived from analytic doctrine as it has been taught up to now. In short, the whole Oedipal schema is to be criticised.61

Lacan presented similar views in an entertaining, if difficult, analysis of Hamlet. As those familiar with the story would know, Hamlet is capable of all kinds of cruelty and malice; but, strangely, he cannot muster these forces to take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father’s place with his mother. This is because, according to Freud, Hamlet secretly admires the impostor who usurps the position Hamlet himself yearns to fill: the stepfather shows “the repressed wishes of [Hamlet’s] own childhood realized.” Lacan agreed, but his main objection, consistent with his re-

reading of the Rat Man, is that Freud’s interpretation does not take adequate account of
the role of the mother (Gertrude): Hamlet may be the hero, but “the play is dominated
by the Mother as Other.” This situation is no doubt related to declining paternal
power, and the modified conception of marriage as a free choice between persons.
Indeed, Lacan makes the interesting point that in the older, Anglo-Saxon versions of the
story, the character of Ophelia (Hamlet’s “girlfriend”) did not have the same defining
role she would later have in Shakespeare’s drama, showing an increasing presence and
importance of feminine figures in the general culture. This is not to suggest of course
that Ophelia represents a dynamic feminist role model; Lacan describes her as “bait.”
But the fact remains that there is no equivalent of Ophelia in Sophocles’ tragedy, nor
older versions in other languages, another indication that Hamlet is more reflective of
“modern” psychological dynamics.

These cultural differences having eluded Freud, he is unable to analyse properly what
makes Hamlet tick. Unlike Oedipus, Hamlet is stuck in what Lacan calls the “mother’s
time,” “the hour of the Other.” This produces a thoroughly different type of “hero,”
who, like the Rat Man also, is in a state of perpetual indecision and impasse. Hamlet
“feigns” a madness that for Oedipus was all too real. In both Oedipus the King and
Hamlet, the father has been murdered. But only in the first case (Oedipus) is there the

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image of Gertrude and femininity within the play, which critics such as T.S. Eliot have perpetuated, see
pp. 123-140. Rose briefly discusses Lacan’s interpretation of Hamlet towards the end of her essay, but
does not relate it to his revision of Freud’s account of Western civilization.
are mad heroes, but, to the best of my knowledge, there are ... no heroes who feign madness.” Lacan lists
many other differences between the two tragedies. For example: “In Oedipus, the crime takes place at the
level of the hero’s own generation; in Hamlet, it has already taken place at the level of the preceding
generation. In Oedipus, the hero, not knowing what he’s doing, is in some way guided by fate; in Hamlet,
the crime is carried out deliberately.” Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation,” Yale French Studies, pp. 43-44.
capacity to mourn the dead father and move on, to live in his name, if not under his person. Oedipus dispenses with the father, destroys himself, his kingdom and power in the process; but the image of the dead father lives on in the form of the “phallus,” or the “law,” set up to compensate for the initial crime. In the tragedy of Hamlet, by contrast, after the murder of the father the stepfather moves in to take his place. One cannot therefore “mourn the phallus” adequately. Essentially, according to Lacan, this “decadent” form of the Oedipus complex is being played out in today’s societies: the “image” or “memory” of the prohibition established by the law of the dead father is not quite powerful enough to effect a definite and clean-cut transition from “pre-Oedipal” to fully-functioning Oedipal subjects.

So, in sum, Freud had rescued the study of the family from the prey of nineteenth-century “moralising paraphrases,” making it the object, instead, of a “concrete analysis.” But, in a statement destined to melt the hearts of Foucauldians not even as yet conceived, let alone “oedipalised,” Lacan complained that Freud had taken a specific type of the family as it exists in bourgeois societies and had “subordinated all the social variations” of it to that one form. Lacan insisted there were wide differences according to cultural conditions, as well as “individual contingencies” in the complexes of “weaning” and “intrusion.” What is more, Freud’s work had to be included in the historical process itself: where else but in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century, the “melting pot” of Europe, would one discover the effects of the decline of the paternal imago so starkly? Psychoanalysis could not have developed elsewhere:

Whatever its future, this decline constitutes a psychological crisis. Perhaps the appearance of psychoanalysis itself is an effect of this crisis. The sublime chance

68 Lacan, Complexes Familiaux, p. 49.
69 Lacan, Complexes Familiaux, pp. 35-36.
emergence of genius cannot explain on its own that it was in Vienna – at that time the centre of a state which was the melting-pot of the most diverse forms of families, from the most archaic to the most refined, from the last patrilineal groups of Slavic peasants to the most reduced bourgeois households and the most decadent of unstable marriages, not forgetting feudal and mercantile paternal units – that the son of Jewish patriarchy imagined the Oedipus complex.70

Nevertheless, Lacan’s revisions were very much an “internal” critique. This can be seen, superficially at least, by the fact that Lacan does not question Freud’s original interpretation of *Oedipus the King*; he too assumes that issues of incest and desire can adequately capture the essence of the drama, and that nothing specific to the Greek city state of the fifth century (B.C.) need intrude. Foucault’s interpretation may be incorrect or limited also, but it represents an independent critical alternative to Freud impossible to find in Lacan. So, remaining within the strictures set by Freud, Lacan’s comparison of *Oedipus* with later “versions” like *Hamlet* may be quite inappropriate anyway – even meaningless – because the analysis appeals to a trope only understood in psychoanalytic, and not historical or cultural, terms: the universal “law” of desire.

From here, Lacan’s general statements pertaining to the relationship between sexuality and Western culture diverge ever further in relation to Foucault. The idea of a decline in the paternal imago was a tenuous thread potentially linking the two approaches; but this becomes increasingly stretched by Lacan’s compromising appeals to Freud’s transhistorical theory of paternal “power.” That is, the differences between *Oedipus the King* and *Hamlet* identified previously are constantly subordinated to an over-arching and common significance: the “phallus.” Citing Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* favourably, Lacan claims both tragedies are negotiating the fact that a “primordial” crime (murder

of the father) calls forth the need for the law, represented by the “phallus.”\footnote{Lacan, “Desire and the Interpretation,” Yale French Studies, p. 42.} The essence of the law is that desire for the mother is “prohibited.” The law lives on unconsciously today. It continually “superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating.” (ÉS, p. 66). Thus, the “freedom of choice” we think we are exercising in marriage games is due entirely to our complete unconsciousness as to the permanence of these laws.

Crucial is the meaning of the concept “paternal metaphor,” formulated by Lacan in the seminar series of 1957-1958,\footnote{Lacan, Séminaire V: Formations de l’Inconscient, pp. 143-178.} and which is more in tune with Freud’s original theory in Totem and Taboo than with the idea of a varying “imago.” According to Lacan, the actual father is the metaphorical vehicle prohibiting sexual intercourse with the mother: he intervenes as someone who “has the law,” or has the power to proclaim the interdiction. He acts in the “name of the father.” But, importantly, the real father’s presence or absence matters little because the phallus he represents will be put into signifying action regardless. Even if he merely “calls the mother on the telephone” once or twice – the “result is the same.”\footnote{Lacan, Séminaire V: Formations de l’Inconscient, p. 173.} The actual father may be “weak,” “sick,” “subjected,” “subdued,” “castrated,” “blind,” “bandy-legged” – “anything you like” – but he will still be called to fulfil this mission.\footnote{Lacan, Séminaire V: Formations de l’Inconscient, p. 167.} In other words, the phallus is not conditioned by a cultural or historical context, as Lacan expressed clearly in the following statement:

\begin{quote}
The position of the father as symbolic does not depend on the fact that people have more or less worked out that there must be a connection between events as different as a coitus and the birth of a child. The position of the Name-of-the-Father as such, the qualification of father as procreator, is an affair situated at the level of the symbolic. It can be realized according to diverse cultural forms,
\end{quote}
but it does not depend as such on the particular cultural form, it is a necessity of the signifying chain. From the moment a symbolic order is instituted, something or other responds or not to a function defined by the Name-of-the-Father, and, interior to this function, there are significations which can be different according to the specific case, but, in any case, they depend on no other necessity than the exigency of the father function, to which the Name-of-the-Father responds in the signifying chain.  

This confuses, not to say *contradicts*, the previous idea of a decline in the paternal imago. Either the power of the phallus acts independently of historical forces as the above passage suggests, or it is embedded in them. If one supports the former view — namely, that the power of the phallus acts independently of historical forces — then a decline in the paternal imago would not have much influence on actual relations between parents and children; these would proceed according to eternal “law,” and psychoanalysis is forced to dismiss historical change as largely irrelevant. In the other case, there could be no such thing as a “phallus” in the *Totem and Taboo* sense of this term because the power of its “image,” in the form of the paternal imago, can be diminished or shifted according to circumstance. The latter would correspond roughly to what the historians posit: a historically variable image of fatherhood that the real man lives up to (or not). What is to be, or not to be? Sooner or later, one has to stop vacillating.

In Freud’s case, as is well known — though this will be seen more clearly in the final chapter with the increasing role of “primal fantasies” in psychoanalytic theory — he tended increasingly to write off social and cultural forces in the construction of an individual’s psychology: “Anyone who, in analysing adults, has become convinced of the invariable presence of the castration complex, will of course find difficulty in ascribing its origin to a chance threat — of a kind which is not, after all, of such universal

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occurrence; he will be driven to assume that children construct this danger for
themselves out of the slightest hints, which will never be wanting.”

As part of the general understanding of Lacan’s innovations in the French context,
commentators had always identified his stress on “symbolisation” as going beyond
Freud in this respect. Theorists insist that Lacan is not presenting a biological theory of
subjectivity with his notion of the phallus: “it involves subjection to a law which
exceeds any natural or biological division.” Indeed, critics are most likely to attack
Lacan on the grounds that he ignores the body (especially the “feminine”), “sensations,”
the “pre-verbal” and the “pre-oedipal,” and so on. Lacan is accused of considering
human experience as “exclusively that of discourse, language and the symbolic,” just
like “most other French ‘structuralist’ or ‘poststructuralist’ thinkers.”

But as has been argued with equal persistence, if Lacan is to be reproached, it is for the
opposite failing: not taking the problem of language and discourse far enough, and
ignoring their complex inter-relations with power. Incapable of discarding the original
Freudian understanding of the “law” of the phallus, Lacan’s conception of the
relationship between culture and sexuality may revamp the terminology, but it presents
an identical Freudian story. To take the Marquis de Sade from the previous chapter as a
summary illustration, this nobleman in Lacan’s analysis is both a conscious and
preconscious witness of his times, but none of his actions or statements will reveal his
unconscious motivations without proper psycho-analysis of the transhistorical structure
of desire that ultimately determines his personality. In other words, changes in the

76 Sigmund Freud [1909], “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year Old Boy” [“Little Hans”], SE, 10, pp. 1-
150, p. 8, note 2 [added 1923].
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nature of secondary social suppression (industrialization, the growth of capitalism, the advancement of women, or marriage as partnership, the decline of the paternal imago) will not alter radically the way primary repression takes place (the phallus or some other symbol is always the key signifier structuring relations in the family unit, regardless of the context).

The overwhelming majority of Freudians similarly support the view that there exists a “timeless” or “eternal” dimension of culture that Freud correctly identified. Indeed, it seems there is nothing like the “law” as presented in *Totem and Taboo* to whip all stray Freudians into line and make them speak as one family of theorists. For Jean Allouch, the “cult of the phallus” is alive and well in contemporary capitalist societies. André Green similarly claims that everyone in today’s society has “committed parricide and incest” – at least in desire if not in act. And in a discussion about criminality and the law taking place in 1977 (involving Foucault also), Jean Laplanche took the opportunity to remind his interlocutors that the “law” harks back “unconsciously” to “parricide” and “incest.” The law has a “subjective” function for each of us: a child bought up in complete “permissiveness” and in absence of the “law” suffers anxieties and psychoses; subjectivity depends on the “interdictions we respect.”

Thus, each and every subject of “sexuality,” today as in Ancient Greece or Shakespeare’s England, has had to negotiate unconsciously the same recognition of a universal “law” that resolves a primordial crime. The sexual “drive” of all humans submits, in various ways, to the symbolic authority of an (imagined) all-powerful father.

The way one reacts to this power, within the limitations of family circumstances and historical conditions of course, will determine one’s psychological sex: masculine or feminine, homosexual or heterosexual, and so on.

Foucault’s exposure of the “power” vacuum in Lacanian psychoanalysis consists in saying that if the paternal metaphor always structures “desire” in this timeless and identical way, then Lacan can only account for historical, gendered and anthropological differences by assuming different natures. If it is always the same phallus, then different sexualities must inhere in themselves. Otherwise, we would all be phallic clones, and always identical versions of it, whether in Ancient Greece, modern China or contemporary America. If power only enters the stage of human history to pronounce an interdiction on the child’s incestuous desires, its role in the whole affair must be miniscule: “poor in resources, sparing of its methods, monotonous in the tactics it utilizes, incapable of invention, and seemingly doomed always to repeat itself,” as Foucault’s expressed it so well (HS, p. 85). In order that the Lacanian schema be viable, it must be able to differentiate cultural powers or truth regimes, not least because these theorists claim a distinction between primary and secondary processes, or individual repression at a psychological level [refoulement] and historical suppression in a political sense [répression]. What are the two types of power involved in this distinction, at the very least? This is the essence of Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis.

For Foucault, culture cannot be defined in terms of a universal signifier or global Other because different cultures are a reality. The methodological task is to define differences of culture, and not differences of person. If the key term representing the “law” were
feminine instead, as Judith Butler tries to construct,\textsuperscript{82} or something like the Yin-Yang symbol, the result would be equally unsatisfactory: unable to differentiate this “symbolic” from any other, the uniformity of culture promoted in these theories leaves the body and the pre-verbal as the only place to locate evident differences and explain why we are not all clones.

Besides, as Lacan’s many interesting side observations pertaining to sexual ethics testify, the concept of “law” is woefully inadequate for understanding contemporary “sexuality.” Even a foundational text such as the Ten Commandments, spelling out “law” in the most basic and “eternal” forms, contains no prohibition against incest: “it is nowhere specified that one must not sleep with one’s mother.”\textsuperscript{83} Although Lacan does not mention it, these commandments likewise contain no prohibition against masturbation, homosexuality, lesbian love, or contraception. It cannot therefore be eternal “laws” handed down through the ages that dictate the various forms of what we now call sexuality, or at least not these alone; “power” must come from elsewhere in addition.

This was the starting point for Jos Van Ussel’s \textit{History of sexual repression}, first published in 1968, a key critical source for Foucault’s introductory text.\textsuperscript{84} Van Ussel argues that one finds nothing in the New Testament pertinent to “young people,” nor general comments about “masturbation, homosexuality, pre-marital relations,

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\textsuperscript{82} Judith Butler, \textit{Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death} (New York, 2000).

\textsuperscript{83} Lacan goes on to say: “I do not think that the command ‘to honour’ her should be considered as the least suggestive of this, either negatively or positively...” Lacan, \textit{Seminar VII: Ethics of Psychoanalysis}, p. 69.

contraception and abortion."85 Despite the long inventory of sins castigated by Christian theologians over many centuries, masturbation barely got a mention, contrary to the myth. Thomas Aquinas, for example, never spoke of it.86 Instead, church fathers condemned with equal vehemence all voluntary and involuntary ejaculations not directed towards procreation (including the female versions, as these were understood at the time), and penance was dispensed according to where each individual case fell within a hierarchy of abominations (bestiality, sodomy, coitus interruptus, and so forth).87 If "sexuality" is invariable, why then is the subject-matter of today’s "sexuality" not universally applicable? For Van Ussel, "sexuality" could not have the same significance for those populations in the past, "composed essentially of farmers and rural dwellers whose elite remain celibate."88

Van Ussel’s repressive hypothesis will be expanded in the next chapter. In Foucault’s view, and crucial for his reformulation of power, reliance on the notion of “law” to understand sexuality reflects the progressive “juridification of Western culture” which began in medieval contexts, and has “led us” to take “law” as “the general principle of every rule in the realm of human practice.” (HER, p. 112). It is not that law has “faded into the background or that institutions of justice have disappeared,” but, rather, that “law” in our society functions more and more as a “norm” dependent on outside power and knowledge relations for its rationality (medicine, for example), and that these circumstances cannot be captured by a strictly political analysis. (HS, p. 144). Law is in fact only one aspect of a “long history in the course of which the Western subject we are

85 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 31.
86 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 194.
87 John Noonan provides a much richer history of this tradition than Van Ussel. See John T. Noonan, Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists (Cambridge, Mass., 1965). We will refer to this book again in the next chapter.
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faced with today was formed.” (HER, p. 112). It is possible, notwithstanding its obscurity, to find traces within Western civilization of alternative ethical systems that are not dependent on reference to the law. The Hellenistic and Roman “care of the self” is one example. (HER, p. 112). 89

While “law” remains the dominant concept, it acts as a barrier to proper comprehension of the dispositif of sexuality. Deeper discussion of the “dispositif of sexuality” is reserved for chapter eight. But the main conservative function psychoanalysis performs in Foucault’s eyes is to cast bourgeois “sexuality” as eternal through this attachment of sexuality to “law” and kinship structures – rather than to variable relations of power and knowledge reflecting a specific history. In bourgeois societies, where intra-familial relationships have become so intense, the family is now a “hotbed of sexual incitement” provoking conflict with the “dispositif of alliance” (or kinship). Yet, propped up by anthropology, Freud and then Lacan after him was able to formulate the phenomena he observed as determined by law and alliance: “If one considers the threshold of all culture to be prohibited incest, then sexuality has been, from the dawn of time, under the sway of law and right.” (HS, p. 110). 90

Exclusive critical focus on law also obscures the complexities of power in general. If indeed there has been a “decline” of paternal power in modern society as theorists of various persuasions in addition to Lacan have suggested, what type of power has taken its place? The fact is, Lacan’s “return” to Freud did not include questioning the

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89 To ensure no misunderstandings, Foucault underlines that, when he recommends the investigation of these ancient practices for the constitution of an “ethics” of the self that may be applicable today, he is not speaking of some sort of “universal ethical law.” (HER, p. 112).

90 He continues: “Psychoanalysis... rediscovered the law of alliance, the involved workings of marriage and kinship and incest at the heart of this sexuality, as the principle of its formation and the key to its intelligibility. (HS, p. 113).
political notion of “power” already operating in standard Freudian discourse. This is why he “failed to consider” everything that can distinguish the “theoretical implications” of concepts such as “negation,” “repression,” “suppression,” and why he thought they could all be made synonymous with the notion of “law.” In Foucault’s terms: “what distinguishes the analysis made in terms of the repression of instincts from that made in terms of the law of desire is clearly the way in which they each conceive of the nature and dynamics of the drives, not the way in which they conceive of power.” (HS, p. 82).

This deceptively simple sentence introduces a revolution of Copernican proportions into critical thought. Not just Lacanian psychoanalysis, but all social theories deriving in one way or another from the “nature-culture” divide become untenable in the light of Foucault’s reformulation of power. Unless one can differentiate the powers that constitute and reproduce any cultural formation – ancient Greek, modern Japanese or contemporary Islamic societies – then all cultures, or superstructures, become identical clusters of the same mechanisms, technologies and artefacts; difference resides in the people themselves and individual bodies; in a word, “nature.” If secondary suppression is variable over time and place, a view endorsed by almost all traditions of critical thought, how would it be possible to distinguish one type of political or moral suppression – medieval courtly rituals in a Feudal society – from another – bourgeois family morality in a capitalist society – without reference to varying relations of power and knowledge? Foucault’s radical overturning of sex and politics allows this analysis to take place, while not ignoring the relations of production and class identified by Marxists. Let us begin to explore Foucault’s alternative analysis in more detail.
Chapter Seven

Undressing the Repressive Hypothesis

This chapter and the next are concerned to elucidate Foucault’s “dispositif of sexuality” as the critical alternative to Lacan’s conception of desire. It was seen in the previous chapter that commentators by and large associate the “repressive hypothesis” vaguely with “psychoanalysis.” It was argued that this view ignores the various readings of Freud, especially Lacan’s differences from Marcuse, and the fact that the former endorsed at one time a “history” of sexuality more in tune with Foucault than with Freud’s idea of inevitable and increasing sexual repression over time.

Rather, historians espousing widely different approaches and otherwise not aligned to psychoanalysis – Marxist, Weberian, or mentalités-oriented studies in the tradition of Philippe Ariès – all nevertheless concurred with Freud that modern societies demanded ever-increasing “repression,” put into effect by moral “laws,” which entailed, foremost, a confiscation of erotic pleasure. Foucault challenges this idea of modern bourgeois culture, arguing that it leaves out precisely how crucial “sexuality” was and is for the fortunes and misfortunes of the bourgeois class as a political and economic power.

Furthermore, central to Foucault’s argument in La volonté de savoir is that the tendency to conceive of power relations in terms of “law” is by no means confined to Lacanian psychoanalysis, or to critical discourses dealing with sex. On the contrary: “one frequently encounters it in political analyses of power, and it is deeply rooted in the history of the West.” (HS, p. 83). For a society that has created so many technologies of
power that are "foreign" to the concept of law; a culture that has been "more imaginative, probably, than any other in creating devious and supple mechanisms of power," and "where the devices of power are so numerous, its rituals so visible and its instruments ultimately so reliable," it is surely paradoxical that critical discourses persist in trying to re-code power mechanisms into forms of law. (HS, p. 86). In political thought and analysis, "we still have not cut off the head of the king." (HS, p. 89).

Despite the appearance that "power" is at the forefront of critical analyses, it is in fact the phenomenon least understood: power is that which "must be explained."¹ The reinterpretation of Oedipus the King in 1974 is an example of this attempt to promote "power" beyond a strictly political meaning. The recent publication of lectures from the 1970s, the period after Foucault’s appointment to the Collège de France, give other glimpses of this “powerful” project in its various fits and starts. Let us examine certain fragments as a way of providing the necessary background to a detailed account of Foucault’s rejection of the repressive hypothesis.

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In addition to targeting psychoanalysis – indeed, without which his critique would not have been possible – crucial was disputing the “superstructural” model of power most fully developed in Marxist interpretations of contemporary society. A concrete illustration revealing the inadequacies of previous "macro" or State accounts of power are the thousands of lettres de cachet issued in the period 1660-1760 (at least in Paris and its environs). These display not so much the anger of the King as the passions of

¹ Foucault, Remarks on Marx, p. 148.
the people at a “micro” level, neighbour-to-neighbour, husband to wife, mother to son.²

Often with the help of a “public writer,”³ the “arbitrary” power of the King was solicited by ordinary people themselves against individuals considered undesirable. This practice of “informing” was the cause of thousands of internments known to us only by those intriguing labels “debauched,” “imbecile,” “prodigal,” “infirm,” “of unsound mind,” “libertine,” “ungrateful son,” and so on, seen on the registers of correction houses in the late seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. In particular, the years 1720-1760 saw a distinct increase, then fall, in demands for internment of undesirable family members.⁴

While amassing these fragments of “lives” had been a pet project from the beginning of Foucault’s career, making up a core of primary sources for History of Madness, in 1977 he used them as a gauntlet thrown down to critics in the wake of La volonté de savoir: okay, let us hear how you interpret these documents.⁵ The fact is, the “arbitrary” and “absolute” power of the King takes on a completely different texture if the ruler was known to have responded to demands that came “from below,” performing what we would recognise today ironically as a sort of public service. One of the major components of Foucault’s reformulation of power was to highlight these relationships of force existing independently of “political” power traditionally conceived. These relations subsequently “take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions” and form the basis “of wide-ranging effects

² Le Désordre des familles: Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille, ed. and intro. Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault (Paris, 1982).
³ Farge and Foucault, Désordre, p. 16.
⁴ Farge and Foucault, Désordre, p. 16.
of cleavage that run through the social body.” (HS, p. 94). In short, the standard conception of power cannot cope with these micro realities of today’s “political” life.

Indeed, the reformulation of power is the key to an entirely new ontology of modern culture not derived from Marx or Marxism, which Foucault then brought to bear on psychoanalysis. First and foremost in Foucault’s reformulation, power and knowledge are not separate domains:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (DP, p. 27).

Neither are power and knowledge secondary reflections of relations of production; they constitute in fact the essential oil of political economy: “we must produce truth in order to produce wealth,” and “we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.” (“TL,” p. 93; SMD, p. 24). Foucault’s basic difference, drawn from Nietzsche instead, is that if truth production can no longer be protected by the armour of “science,” it must find its place amongst those “mean and little things” that “pure and obscure power relations” threw together by chance. Thus, in any society, Foucault says, “there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body,” and these relations cannot themselves be “established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.” (“TL,” p. 93; SMD, p. 24). The genealogist sets about discovering these configurations.
In Foucault’s account, therefore, industrial capitalism would not have been possible without the emergence, or “invention,” of what he termed “disciplinary power” and its concomitant “sciences” of living beings – later to be baptised “man.” Before the particular type of labour-power needed by capitalist economies could be “extracted” from the worker, it had to be produced by power-knowledge ensembles. Disciplinary power possessed “highly specific procedural techniques, completely novel instruments, quite different apparatuses,” all of which were absolutely incompatible with sovereign forms of power exercised by a monarch over his legal subjects. ("TL," p. 104; SMD, p. 36). In broad terms, disciplinary power is “more dependent on bodies and what they do than the Earth and its products”; it permits “time and labour” rather than “wealth and commodities” to be “extracted” from bodies. ("TL," p. 104; SMD, p. 36). It is exercised by means of “surveillance” and not by a system of levies or obligations. Surveillance became “a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power.” (DP, p. 175). Disciplinary power does not presuppose the physical existence of a sovereign wielding a sword, but a “tightly knit grid of material coercions.” ("TL," p. 104; SMD, p. 36). Finally, it is a type of power that must be able, constantly, to improve the efficacy of the forces applied while not diminishing or destroying the body or person subjected to that force.

Importantly, disciplinary power cannot be assimilated with paternal power exercised within a family. One of the major interesting features of Foucault’s interrogation of power is his argument that the family does not provide the model for the kinds of disciplinary power that he was trying to bring to light. While psychoanalysis and

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6 See also ABN, pp. 86-88, and PP, pp. 41-58. For the relation between “disciplinary power” and the constitution of the working-class, see PP, pp. 70-73.
sociology place the family as the bedrock of all society and culture without question, Foucault insisted that the family "does not duplicate society, just as society does not imitate the family." (HS, p. 100). The father is not the "representative" of the sovereign or state; and nor is the latter "projections of the father on a different scale." (HS, p. 100). On the contrary, "nothing in the way the family functions enables us to see any continuity between the family and the institutions [of] disciplinary apparatuses," operating in institutions such as "the asylum, school, barracks, workshop." (PP, p. 80).

The discussion of Freud's patient known as the Rat Man from the previous chapter can serve as an illustration of this point. To recall, Freud considered the Rat Man to exhibit all the classical symptoms of the Oedipal conflict between father and son. In questioning Freud's interpretation, Lacan proposed a "quartet" not triangular structure, and he argued that the story shows a "humiliated" father, and reflects modern psychological dynamics rather than timeless dilemmas surrounding the prohibition of incest. But, for all that, Lacan does not give the modern army any greater role, or independence, than Freud had done – even though military themes were essential to the narrative, and Freud had interpreted them as examples of the patient being embroiled "in a state of unconscious identification with his father." (SE, 10, p. 210). So, Lacan does not take Freud to task over the isomorphism established in the case history between two power relationships: the Rat Man and his father, and the Rat Man and the army captain.

Foucault, on the other hand, explicitly appeals to the difference between the two forms of power – "paternal" versus "disciplinary" – in a lecture from 1974. Notwithstanding the way it is often discussed, disciplinary power is "democratic" in nature – identified as
such by Jeremy Bentham himself in order to explain his panoptical surveillance system for prisons. \textit{(PP, p. 77)}. Therefore, the subject who occupies the watch-tower only embodies a “power” already existing, just as, in the hierarchy of the modern army or business corporation, the person filling a position of authority is less important than the function itself and the image that must be presented. Disciplinary power is therefore politically “progressive,” in that any “body” – Jew, Protestant, Moslem, rich or poor, man or woman – can, at least in theory, exercise this type of power. Disciplinary power has no recourse to “excess, force or violence”; it “does not need to hold the sceptre in its hand or wield the sword to punish.” \textit{(PP, p. 77)}. It is more like the power of the sun: capable of touching and illuminating everything, yet “non-material.” \textit{(PP, p. 77)}. As Foucault expressed it in the text \textit{Discipline and punish}: “it is a power that seems all the less ‘corporeal’ in that it is more subtly ‘physical’.” \textit{(DP, p. 177)}.

By contrast, parental power exercised in a family is totally undemocratic: regardless of talent, physical attributes, or merit, it is impossible to chop and change one’s relationship. Nor can one move up or down or sideways in the family, unlike in social hierarchies: the roles are fixed once and for all, and for all time – mother, father, brother, daughter, and so on. Moreover, this type of power touches only a tiny collection of intimates, so cannot be compared to sunlight. It has no capacity to affect those outside the family circle: one cannot perform social acts like judging a court case on the strength of being a “father” or “mother.” The modern family therefore acts as a sort of “cell” where the power exercised within it is confined to that space, and appeals artificially to the old relations of sovereignty for its rationality. \textit{(PP, p. 80)}. This does not mean that the family is the “anachronistic” residue of a previous system; rather, invoking this old “sovereign” form of power in a new context serves a strategic purpose.
of contrast for a wider society otherwise “completely penetrated by the apparatuses of discipline.” *(PP, p. 80).*

Another version of power Foucault isolates is the “pastoral” variety, elaborated in the lecture series of 1977-1978 entitled *Security, Territory, Population.* It is unclear how pastoral power relates to the modern family unit. But, although possessing a deeper and longer history than disciplinary power, Foucault claims the pastoral knew no equivalent in ancient Greek times, and recalled long-standing Hebrew practices instead. *(STP, p. 147).* It can be likened essentially to the actions and demeanour of a shepherd, whose power is not exercised over a “territory” but, by definition, over a “flock” in its “movement from one place to another.” *(STP, p. 125).* This type of power became inextricably associated with the development of Christianity as a church, representing for Foucault the one real innovation that this religion introduced into ancient Roman society and consequently the West as a whole – after crediting Paul Veyne with the insight that Christianity was not responsible for the three types of sexual restriction usually associated with it: monogamy, reproduction as the exclusive purpose of sexual engagement, and a general disqualification of erotic pleasure. *(STP, p. 148; DE, III, p. 559).* These were distinct features already entrenched in Roman society prior to Christianity.

Unlike the disciplinary forms, pastoral power is defined entirely by its beneficence; “its only raison d’être is doing good.” *(STP, p. 126).* Pastoral power was therefore perfectly suited for the “government of souls” now required for processes of in-depth Christianisation of the population in the sixteenth century to counter the effects of the Reformation: “modern states begin to take shape while Christian structures tighten their
grip on individual experience." (ABN, p. 177). It was here that the increasing role of the confessional was to take root. Pastoral power is a type of individualizing force that requires knowledge of the "interior" of persons to function. Each member of the flock becomes known and identified by an overseer—a role easily filled by a priest or later by a doctor—in order to protect him or her from dangers they do not see and cannot possibly understand. Sexuality has relevance in such a context, for these disturbing and mysterious impulses could potentially impede salvation—or, what was more likely to be the goal by the eighteenth century in a medical context: "health." Thus, at a time when states were "posing the technical problem of the power to be exercised on bodies and the means by which power over bodies could effectively be put to work," the Church was elaborating "a technique for the government of souls, the pastoral, which was defined by the Council of Trent," and later taken up and developed by Catholic theologians such as Carlo Borromeo. (ABN, 177).

Finally, what Foucault calls "bio-power" should be mentioned—a type of power found exclusively in modern States, which have as their goal the control and government of "life." Power would no longer be dealing simply with "legal subjects" but with "living beings." (HS, pp. 142-143). Bio-power was another "indispensable element in the development of capitalism." (HS, p. 141). In direct contrast to sovereignty, the aim of bio-power is "to invest life through and through." The resort to killing or even the very existence of death is a scandal for this way of thinking, for death becomes the extreme failure to harness life properly. Bio-power was accompanied by "the growing importance assumed by the action of norm, at the expense of the juridical system of the law." (HS, p. 144). Life was brought into the realm of "explicit calculations," through which it could become "an agent of transformation." Sex becomes crucial in such a
political landscape, because it was a means of access “both to the life of the body and
the life of the species.” (HS, p. 146). It was why sex and sexuality was sought out in the
“smallest details” of private experience, and yet also sat comfortably as a theme for
macro “political operations, economic interventions (through incitements to or curbs on
procreation), and ideological campaigns for raising standards of morality and
responsibility.” (HS, p. 146). Thus, without the scientific concept of “life,” bio-power
would be impossible, demonstrating again the inadequacies of previous sociological or
Marxist accounts of power that separated truth production from the machinations of
political wheeling and dealing.

Foucault set himself in the 1970s therefore to develop a “strategic” model of power,
against a political and juridical conception “based on law” – what Foucault called the
“juridico-discursive” conception of power – which had been used uniformly and
indiscriminately in analyses of the human sciences, whether political, sociological,
psychological, psychoanalytic, historical and whether speaking of domination,
totalitarianism, authority, oppression, suppression, refoulement, or repression.

The analysis of sexuality suffered in particular from unsuitable “juridical” models of
power, which, as seen in the previous chapter, rendered futile the Lacanian attempts to
retheorize Freud’s sexuality in terms of desire. Basically, one cannot say that the law is
“productive” of desire if this same law is also held responsible for “repression,”
“suppression,” “negation,” and any number of other negative forces. But Foucault’s
purpose was also to distance himself from the tradition personified by Herbert Marcuse
– associated with a general leftist opposition to the sexual status quo, a resistance
hastily reconstituted to respond theoretically to the sexual liberation movements in the
1960s and 1970s. A rash of texts by women denouncing male power and calling for a feminist and sexual “revolution” was also a component of this surge.\(^7\) La volonté de savoir opens with “three serious doubts” concerning the notion of “repression” employed by the theorists within this tradition. (HS, p. 10). The three doubts can be summed up by Foucault’s argument elsewhere that the psychological concept of repression is thoroughly inappropriate “for the mechanisms of a historical process.” (ABN, p. 236).

Jos Van Ussel’s History of sexual repression was a particular point of critical departure. Foucault singled out this text in a lecture of 1975 as an illustration of the shortcomings of the “repressive hypothesis.” (ABN, p. 42). He objected to the “implicit reference to a power” that would be effective essentially at a “superstructural level,” and whose mechanisms are linked to “ignorance and blindness.” (ABN, p. 43). But let us establish first what the “repressive hypothesis” consisted of.

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According to Van Ussel, the term “sexuality” did not appear until the nineteenth century. One will not find it “in the Bible, nor in Homer, nor in Shakespeare.”\(^8\) This absence cannot be attributed to general silence or lack of related vocabulary in the past, quite the contrary: the early modern French language “possessed 300 words for designating the sexual act and 400 words for naming the sexual parts.”\(^9\) He claims, like Foucault, that we must reckon on the non-existence of a “system” of sexuality in previous times, and that there may be “other historical factors” thus far “unknown” that would need to be taken into account. As Van Ussel puts it: “Sexuality only became a

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\(^7\) For example, Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex.*

\(^8\) Van Ussel, *Histoire de la répression sexuelle,* p. 15.

\(^9\) Van Ussel, *Histoire de la répression sexuelle,* p. 16.
‘coherent’ emotional ensemble gradually in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”  

Van Ussel’s main objective, taken up in turn by Foucault, is to elevate to its rightful political significance the campaign against childhood and adolescent masturbation, which he says has been curiously neglected by historians. For a start, the crusade erupted quite suddenly in the eighteenth century and was spearheaded by doctors, not theologians. It is therefore wrong to dismiss the movement as a hangover from an earlier Christian mentality, or to amalgamate it with manifestations of the “anti-sex syndrome” of the “Victorian era.” Rather, for Van Ussel (and we will detail Foucault’s interpretation later), the movement against masturbation indicates the arrival of a novel “sexual morality,” part of the coherent “system” that evolved in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

That Foucault took seriously this point offers a crucial insight: it is not just that there has been a historical evolution whereby the eternal “structure” of desire has been modified (Freud or Lacan), but that the very idea of a “sexuality” as a secondary and emotional set of effects distinct from “sex” betrays a recent conception of “bodies and pleasures.” Contrary to the claims of Thomas Laqueur, Foucault is not arguing that the concept of “sex” was non-existent before, but that, once imbricated in a political system of “sexuality” from the eighteenth century onwards, its meaning was inflated wildly, cast eventually in an interminable play of “sex” versus “sexuality,” “nature” versus “culture,” and so on, by the nineteenth century. (HS, p. 155).

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12 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 192.
Van Ussel also paints an ethnographic picture of modern civilization overlapping Foucault’s account in many respects. In a complex society such as ours, he says, external “macro-controls” are “ineffectual” and “weak.” They have gradually been replaced by more efficient “microsystems.” Essentially, “an anonymous, supra-personal, unconscious and invisible form of constraint,” now exerts itself indirectly and “assures the proper functioning of society.”15 The area of education has been most amenable to these invisible forms of control, manifesting the shift dramatically: “a single teacher is more useful than ten policemen,” he argues.16 These changes in educational practices must be associated somehow with the condemnation of masturbation, and it seems fair to assume that “adolescents” have been the chief targets of sexual repression in this modern, secular context.

In order to make his argument, Van Ussel explicitly places himself under the auspices of Norbert Elias and the Frankfurt School, especially the studies by Max Horkheimer and his exiled colleagues – Herbert Marcuse was amongst them – from the 1930s and 1940s. The idea of a shift from “external” to “internal” controls derives from Elias. His eloquent study of the “civilizing process” may be regarded as the closest thing to a germinal text of this tradition.17 Neglected for many years, Elias suddenly became widely influential in the 1960s and 1970s,18 including amongst French historians.19

15 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 62.
16 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 62.
It is not difficult to see why. Elias traces the evolution of manners since the Middle Ages – a historical development assumed by the use of terms such as “cultivated” or “enlightened” – in order to argue that the psychology of modern individuals is quite different from previous forms. The process began in the sixteenth century, to gain ground rapidly in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, “first in the higher classes and much more slowly in the lower.”\textsuperscript{20} The “private” sphere has expanded to such an extent that it now constitutes the bulk of a person’s existence: those intimate, as well as the most insuppressibly “animal” aspects of human existence, have been gradually, for better or worse, withdrawn from public display. In a text by Erasmus from the sixteenth century, for example, a youth is reminded that it is impolite “to greet someone who is urinating or defecating.”\textsuperscript{21} Such guidance would not be necessary today, and indicates a fundamental cultural disjuncture. Spitting, blowing one’s nose with bare hands, and eating from the same plate as others – these were practices taken for granted.\textsuperscript{22}

Gradually over the course of modernization, “performing bodily functions” in public became more and more unacceptable and “a high degree of restraint” is now expected in all areas of life. Many physical activities including sport or swimming are possible today because each individual is “curbed by self-control and a strict code of etiquette.”\textsuperscript{23} Elias hints throughout that a price has been paid for positive progress: rigid psychological barriers now separate bodies too radically. The self must do battle with the self on a daily basis: “pleasure-promising drives” come into ceaseless conflict with “pleasure-denying taboos and prohibitions.” This was the state of affairs, Elias says,
that “Freud tried to express by concepts such as the ‘superego’ and the ‘unconscious.’” The appeal to Freud was not accidental: in a footnote, Elias wrote that his study owed much “to the discoveries of Freud and the psychoanalytic school.”

Sexuality occupies a minor role in Elias’ overall thesis. It is nonetheless fundamental, not least because this is where Elias explicitly appeals to Freudian theory, and Van Ussel, in turn, adopts this rather weak aspect of the “civilizing” thesis as the foundation of his own history of sexual “repression.” The result is an overstatement of figures like Erasmus in the history of sexuality, to be seen shortly, and an undue focus on “adolescent” sex. For the moment, the general view of the history of sexuality that Foucault eventually challenges is expressed by Van Ussel and Elias through the claim that monogamous heterosexuality has now overridden all other forms due to the civilizing process. According to Elias:

Like many other drives, sexuality is confined more and more exclusively, not only for women but for men as well, to a particular enclave, socially legitimised marriage. Social tolerance of other relationships, for both husband and wife, which was by no means lacking earlier, is suppressed increasingly, if with fluctuations. Every violation of these restrictions, and everything conducive to one, is therefore to the realm of secrecy, of what may not be mentioned without loss of prestige or social position.

Relations between the sexes have been “hemmed in, placed behind walls in consciousness,” says Elias. Moreover, as the nuclear family became the sole legitimate “enclave of sexuality” and of “all intimate functions for men and women,” so too did it take on the primary function of cultivating the young, and controlling their volatile “impulses and behaviour.” In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, argues Elias,

27 Elias, Civilizing Process, p. 158.  
adults did not impose on children “the same degree of restraint with regard to the sexual
life” as would be the case later. In short:

[T]he sexual drive has been slowly but progressively suppressed from the public
life of society. The reserve that must be exercised in speaking of it has also
increased. And this restraint, like all others, is enforced less and less by direct
physical force. It is cultivated in individuals from an early age as habitual self-
restraint by the structure of social life, by the pressure of social institutions in
general, and by certain executive organs of society (above all, the family) in
particular.

As stated, many French historians were drawn to Elias’s arguments. For example, the
“civilizing process” formed the backbone of five studies dealing with “history” and
“sexuality” which appeared in the prestigious Annales journal in the summer of 1974.
The introduction to the volume defers to Elias and argues that “process of
modernisation” in conjunction with the “constitution of states” imposed the ideal of
“control” and “uniformity of conduct” in all areas of life, including “repression of
sexual instincts.”

Also within the framework generated by Elias, Jean-Louis Flandrin speaks of an
“internalisation of desire” in the modern period, whereby late marriage and the
suppression of pre-nuptial courting rituals produced the advance of “solitary reverie.”
As adolescents were increasingly prevented from satisfying their “sexual desires” in any
other way, “they turned more and more to masturbation.” He also suggests that bodily
“control” as it was promoted by austere Protestantism in England and perhaps

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29 Elias, Civilizing Process, p. 147.
30 Elias, Civilizing Process, p. 158.
31 Annales ESC, 29 (July-August, 1974) [Special Edition: Histoire et Sexualité].
See also Burguière’s study of Protestantism in an earlier volume, where he argues that this “religious
ideology” influenced the economic “base,” and not vice versa, by encouraging late marriage and
restrained relations within marriage. See André Burguière, “De Malthus à Max Weber: le mariage tardif
Société].
33 Flandrin, Sex in the Western World, p. 286.

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Jansenism in France produced an unexpected "contraceptive" effect: inadvertently, the faithful became "capable of practicing coitus interruptus" on a wide scale for the first time in history. Elsewhere, with a reluctant nod to Foucault’s work, Flandrin acknowledges that a "certain eroticisation" has taken place over the period in question, but concludes with the very Freudian sentiment that "our entire modern society – our sensibility and our passivity – seems to have arisen from sexual repression."

In Van Ussel’s case, he ties the sexual component of the civilizing process more directly to Marxism through the intervention of Herbert Marcuse. "Modernization" or "civilization" shifts from a neutral gear to the more politically-charged notion of "bourgeoisification." Marcuse’s idea of the body as "instrument of performance" in the capitalist configuration of class relations makes sexual pleasure a problem because it is inconsistent with the economic and political aims of the bourgeoisie: "the more the process of bourgeoisification intensifies, the more sexuality is repressed and withdrawn." It was why the campaign against masturbation was a secular affair and directed towards young people, designed to stamp out wastefulness of the body’s energies, rather than sinfulness of the soul. Thus, the advocates of repression emanated from the bourgeois or middle class, and the primary targets and the first to be exposed to the new tendencies were adolescents – forced to "repress their sexual needs" in order to direct their energies to "study." Work became an end in itself and pleasure changed its meaning:

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34 Flandrin, *Families in Former Times*, p. 238.
35 Flandrin, *Sex in the Western World*, p. 267.
36 Flandrin, *Sex in the Western World*, p. 288. Presenting statistical evidence, Flandrin demonstrates that illegitimate births were very low in those areas where pre-nuptial courting rituals were established and tolerated. He therefore views the eradication of these practices as a sad testament to Western discomfort for all things sexual. See Flandrin, *Sex in the Western World*, pp. 274-284.
Singing, amusing oneself while working does not lead to maximum production. ... Laziness is the mother of all vices. Pleasure for pleasure’s sake was a sin. The body was transformed from an organ of pleasure to an instrument of performance. The bourgeoisie developed a mentality of performance, making voluptuous experience of sex impossible. One of the symbols of this attitude of performance was the chair. On a rigid, upright chair, one sits, separated from others, in the best position for working. 40

Following Elias, Van Ussel makes a contrast between this state of affairs and earlier positive attitudes towards the body and sexual pleasure. He claims Erasmus is proof that, early in the sixteenth century, frankness in regard to sexuality had been the norm and young people were encouraged to pursue pleasure. The dialogue entitled “Courtship” [“Proci et Puellae”] of 1523 is a prime example, he says. Erasmus examines “the meaning of the sexual act,” and Van Ussel interprets the text as advocating a dual purpose for this activity: not just procreation, but pleasure as well. 41 For his efforts, Erasmus was banished and placed on the Index of prohibited books. This reflected the beginnings of the “repression of sexuality,” a process that continued up to the end of the nineteenth century. It was why nineteenth-century commentators on Erasmus were scandalized to find him speaking “to a child” of “prostitutes,” 42 whereas, in Erasmus’s time, “children knew of the existence of these institutions.” 43

Philippe Lejeune endorses and develops Van Ussel’s general Marxist position. 44 With a focus on Rousseau’s Confessions, Lejeune cautions against seeing the recent “liberalization” of lifestyles as a sign of “progress” indicating that we are now free from a medical “ideology” that ran wild in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather, it

40 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 60.
41 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 40.
42 Van Ussel, Histoire de la répression sexuelle, p. 40.
merely reflects a different configuration of the same fundamental economic conditions and relationships:

If the repression of sexuality corresponds to the economic demands of the bourgeoisie in the process of constituting itself, then the realisation of the arbitrary nature of this repression, and the liberation of desire since the beginning of the twentieth century, probably reflects new economic exigencies: those of a consumer society, which has an interest in reviving desire and encouraging spending.\(^{45}\)

Meanwhile, Philippe Ariès, too, uses identical assumptions in his history of the rise of childhood.\(^{46}\) Although he makes no reference to Elias, and speaks from a position quite different to that of the broad Marxism of the *Annales* historians, Ariès describes the "great moral reformation," at first Christian, later secular, which "disciplined" eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century society in France and England with regard to sexuality.\(^{47}\) Children had previously participated in all areas of adult life and learned by direct example and experience. Wherever people worked or amused themselves, "even in taverns of ill-repute," children "mingled with adults."\(^{48}\) There was a total lack of reserve displayed towards children – in scurrilous jokes, lurid stories and games – later hushed up by the unassailable idea of childhood innocence. Adults took liberties now regarded as perverse or unacceptable. For example, based on the belief that the genitals of male children would become larger and more potent in their adult forms if manipulated regularly while they were young, it was common for adults to indulge in this type of fondling until the boys were aged about six or seven.\(^{49}\)

\(^{47}\) Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, p. 101.
\(^{48}\) Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, p. 356.
Thus, the “repressive hypothesis” was widely circulated, well beyond the borders of “psychoanalysis” per se, and Foucault, too, comes out of this tradition, as do other “anti-Oedipal” theorists met in chapter three. Georges Bataille’s allusions to the “bawdiness” of Elizabethan theatre, later stamped out by bourgeois morality, reflects the view from a similar angle. His study of *Eroticism* concluded with the following challenge to critical thought: “if philosophy is to tackle all problems as a single whole it must start from an historical analysis of taboo and transgression [of taboos].”

Importantly, Foucault’s rejection of this suggestion in favour of a “positive” analysis of power is not only designed to challenge the idea that industrialization demanded “erotic austerity.” It also refuses a naive representation of “hundreds of years of open spaces and free expression,” found implicitly in the accounts of many historians, when, in pre-bourgeois days, or so “the story goes,” “knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults.” (*HS*, p. 1).

For example, the text entitled “Courtship” [*Proci et Puellae*] cited by both Elias and Van Ussel as a flagship of tolerance does not actually deal with sexual pleasure at all, whether of the man or the woman. The arguments are simply pro-marriage and anti-clerical. As John Noonan identified already in the 1960s, Erasmus cannot be taken as the progenitor of a new humanist ethics of heterosexuality in contrast to the Christian tradition, because, while he has much to say “in praise of marriage,” there is no analysis of the “purpose of intercourse” beyond procreation. A rose gleaming “white” may look impressive, says the boy, but it will wither and die eventually if left on the bush;

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much better to pluck it now and enjoy the delights while this is still possible.53 Hardly graphic, and besides, the end result will always be a baby rosebud: “unless your mother had been deflowered,” the boy beseeches, “we wouldn’t have this blossom here.”

What is more, far from advocating the separation of erotic pleasure and procreation as Van Ussel asserts, Erasmus elsewhere actually condemns the marriages of the old or sterile: these cannot be “true unions” because no offspring are possible.54 In this, Erasmus accords perfectly with the trajectory of Christendom as a whole. To take the Council of Trent as the example, this was a series of meetings of Catholic authorities extending from 1545 to 1563, organized specifically to respond to Protestant attacks. Significantly, however, the area of marriage did not present problems for the members of the Councils, because everyone concurred already that procreation was the chief purpose in the union of man and woman: “[the Council of Trent] did not feel the need to recall the ends of marriage since these were not challenged by its adversaries.”55 Members only bothered to address marriage on the occasion of the twenty-fourth session, in 1563 – that is, almost twenty years after the first meeting. Even here, it was “clandestine marriages” that exercised their indignation, because this was an affront to Church authority. The issue impacted on the Christian purposes of marriage, while the actual relations between man and wife remained the same as those formulated elsewhere.56

54 See the discussion in Noonan, Contraception, pp. 309-310.
56 Noonan, Contraception, p. 313.
Yet, aside from this dubious milking of Erasmus, and vague references to nude girls frolicking in the marketplaces of medieval towns, Van Ussel provides little evidence for the earthy secular celebration of sexual pleasure in sixteenth-century Europe and England, right under the nose of Christian asceticism – necessary for the contrast he wants to make with the repressive campaign against childhood masturbation later. The same criticism could be levelled at Ariès. Certainly, representations from the sixteenth century showing attendants fondling the genitals of infant Christ are quite surprising, and Ariès cites them to expose the naiveties of “modern psychoanalysts.” But the example does not necessarily indicate a more lax economy of bodies and pleasures between adults in secular spheres at that time compared to “bourgeois” or “Victorian” times – at least, not on the basis of the evidence Ariès provides. Far from convincing us that “sex” varies “according to environment,” the fact that the organs of little girls were not likewise fondled during this period of open transgressions to make them more powerful in their adult forms, and that Ariès does not even comment on this difference, perfectly confirms what psychoanalysts have been saying all along.

Indeed, only through Foucault’s thesis can a proper history of repressive practices be constructed. The first of his three “serious doubts” about the repressive hypothesis was the suspicion that sexual repression had never been established as historical fact. It was much more likely that a psychological idea, “repression,” had been borrowed lazily – from Freud – and then “adjusted” to historical requirements, to make the “advent of the age of repression” coincide historically with the rise of the bourgeoisie. (HS, p. 5).

57 Van Ussel, Histoire répression sexuelle, p. 65.
58 Ariès, Centuries of Childhood, p. 101.
59 See the extraordinary study by Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1996). Steinberg objects (p. 118) to the “documentary” value that Ariès adduces from a woodcut of the sixteenth century; he argues that only Christ, and never the everyday mortal boy of the manor or village, was represented in this graphic way – so the phenomenon can only be understood in theological terms. See also Davidson, Emergence of Sexuality, pp. 40-46.
Once these obligatory strictures have been removed, whether glossed by Weberian or Marxist understandings of modern society, a more complicated history of suppressions and freedoms emerges:

The society that emerged in the nineteenth century – bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial, call it what you will – did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. (HS, p. 69).

In an implicit reference to Norbert Elias, Foucault agrees that, yes, no pedagogue of later times “would have publicly advised his disciple, as did Erasmus in his Dialogues, on the choice of a good prostitute”; and a certain longstanding “freedom” of language between pupils and teachers disappeared. (HS, p. 27). But if one looks beyond standard literary signposts, a different story is apparent: not any less was said about children’s sex or the behaviour of adolescents, “but things were said in a different way; it was different people who said them, from different points of view.” (HS, p. 27). The “architectural layout” of secondary schools of the eighteenth century, for example, betrays the “constant preoccupation,” with sex; it was a facet of their lives taken “permanently” into account. (HS, p. 27). Pedagogical institutions have therefore “multiplied” the forms of discourse on the subject of sex, inducing educators, parents, physicians and administrators of schools to speak of it.

Likewise, one can agree with Elias that certain forms of literary language were subjected to “a regime of censorship or displacement,” beginning in the seventeenth century, consistent with the rationality of confinement. The repression of male homosexuality in its social and literary expressions was a prime example, to which History of Madness had already alluded: homosexual “feelings” and “amorous
ambiguities” were now surrounded by scandal and severe condemnation, considered crimes in and of themselves – only “compounded by the practice of sodomy” rather than vice versa. (HM, p. 88). But Foucault is clear that this was not a simple “imposition of silence.” In different quarters, the homosexual was now explaining himself more and more, and, by the late nineteenth century, the “monologue of the surveyed” would include interrogation of his female counterpart in addition, according to the terms of psychiatric medicine and its reports.60 The homosexual was thus no longer an extravagant lover, but a “case history” reflecting a kind of “interior androgyny, a hermaphrodisim of the soul.” (HS, p. 43).

No doubt the most notorious of Foucault’s illustrations pertaining to the new “institutions of power and knowledge” is his account of a farm hand, who, in 1867, suddenly became embroiled in the new medico-legal structures of sexuality that had assembled around “timeless gestures” – a strange choice of words considering Foucault’s overall argument (HS, p. 32). Foucault is often rightly criticized for his flippancy in this instance.61 But while it may be considered progressive that “inconsequential bucolic pleasures” previously rampant in village life are now condemned as “rape,” or “paedophilia,” Foucault’s point is that the problem has not gone away now that the culprit is subjected to a “collective intolerance” as well as “a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.” (HS, p. 31). For none of these developments represents any greater freedom or sexual knowledge for the girl who had participated, willingly or unwillingly, in the “familiar game” of “curdled milk,” if one type of masculine power

60 For example, Sigmund Freud [1920], Psychogenesis of a case of Female Homosexuality, SE, 18, pp. 145-172.

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(the itinerant worker pressuring for "favours") is merely shifted to another (the father and the courts).

Thus, La volonté de savoir, especially the first part, complicates the idea of the "civilizing process," at least as it pertains to sexuality. Put very schematically for the moment, if Van Ussel and others tied the sexual component of the civilizing process to Marxism via Marcuse, Foucault will untie the nexus again, shed the Marxism, and recast the relationship between sex and class in a totally different light (this aspect will be made clearer in the following chapter). For now, Foucault expands the meaning of culture used by Elias to include not just literature and the arts but also those scientific discourses and political institutions concerned with truth production, and these "truths" are given a positive rather than negative power to effect human behaviour. This last point in particular – that power is "positive" – will serve to demonstrate most clearly Foucault's distance from this tradition.

Instead of the psychology of individuals being “transformed” as Elias presents it, Foucault contends that the very idea of an individual with his or her psychology is part of the reality “fabricated” by the specific technology of power he calls disciplinary. (DP, p. 194). Analyses like those of Elias implicitly describe the effects of power in negative terms, that it "represses," "excludes," "masks," and so on. Foucault argues by contrast that power "produces": “it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.” (DP, p. 194). As he put it in a lecture from 1975:

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in doing so subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and
constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. ("TL," p. 98; SMD, pp. 29-30).

Importantly, it is often claimed that this productive model of power makes no sense. When Foucault ends up as a political apologist for "child molesters" in the example cited above, this is the direct and logical consequence of his theoretical experimentations in the area of power. The objection echoes misapprehensions addressed in chapter four concerning Foucault's employment of the episteme: without a "principle, force or entity" to be released from power's repression, Foucault's analysis lacks "political import." Charles Taylor's critique of Foucault is well-known: he argues that if one system of power is replaced by another, or if one over-arching "mentality" gives way to something equally arbitrary, there is no "justification" for the change, and how is "judgement" to work anyway without an objective truth overriding all possible systems? Deleuze voiced these kinds of concerns also: it was all very well to invoke "points of resistance" as counterparts to power, "but where was such resistance to come from?"

But just as these criticisms assume that "culture" is universal and necessarily totalizing, so too do they take for granted that the "freedom" opposing it is a given and static human quality. If universals like "freedom" are suspended, what remains are various cultural manifestations of freedoms, set within systems of constraints that may or may not be necessary. As Elias has revealed, swimming and sports are made possible by what he calls the "civilizing process." This would indicate, somewhat against his own

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62 See the discussion in Bourg, Revolution to Ethics, pp. 213-218.
conclusions, that freedoms, no less than the body's capacities, have not diminished in the way that the concept of “repression” and appeals to Freud's “super-ego” would imply, even if one acknowledges that oppressions are a reality. Rather, as Foucault would argue, certain skills and behaviours – including those taken as given in the form of “labour power” – have been cultivated in bodies at the expense of others (reciting narratives or long tracts of poetry, for example). Teaching a child to swim or to ride a bike is to produce freedom and truth in the exercise of a power relationship – micro-style and historically determined (bicycles and artificial swimming pools being fairly recent technologies). In neither of these cases is anything being removed from the child's body: rather, capacities, pleasures and subjective relations are, on the contrary, intensified, not repressed, by the whole process. If the parent became violent, or abandoned the child, what would rescue the child and set him or her “free” again is a different form of power.

As described throughout this thesis, Foucault's method takes for granted that human phenomena are cultural products only. This shifts the analysis away from pure essences impossible to experience anyway – “freedom” – to a comparison of one set of cultural practices with another. This difference of cultural ontologies can be known, however superficially, and allows negotiation and judgement to take effect – just as one portrait or landscape can be compared to another; an ontology of culture, not the person. It is also why the imperative to “know thy culture” becomes a serious enterprise.

Essentially, theorists like Elias or Van Ussel paint a picture of modern culture that is far too bland and narrow. It explains amongst other things why this tradition collectively has overlooked the widening secular role of the confessional in modern culture,
Catholic and Protestant. Let us conclude this chapter with a brief consideration of the confessional, before moving on to sexuality proper in the next chapter. The scope of this institution, by no means synonymous with “psychoanalysis” despite what many commentators contend, “continually increased” after the reforms associated with the Tridentate Councils, giving the priest in Catholic countries increasing power at local level. (ABN, p. 175). Western societies gradually establishing the confession as “one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth.” (HS, p. 59). An imperative was established to confess not just “acts contravening the law” but “thoughts, desires, voluptuous imaginings, delectations, combined movements of the body and soul.” (HS, p. 19). This power was taken over later by the doctor in his relationship with the patient, exploited in turn by practitioners like Freud. (HM, pp. 510-11). Moreover, Foucault argues that one can “plot a line going straight from the seventeenth-century pastoral” as it existed in both Catholic and Protestant contexts, to autobiographical literature of the nineteenth century epitomized by the anonymous book called My Secret Life. The common feature of all points on this “line” is a response to the injunction to transform “every desire” into “discourse.” (HS, p. 21). We have become a singularly confessing society:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. (HS, p. 59).

66 The priest is no longer bound by external rules, “but fixes the penalties himself according to the sin, the circumstances and the person.” Moreover, the compulsion to confess in an exhaustive fashion, not just “serious” sins but all sins, became the standard practice, for it was up to the priest “to handle the very subtle distinction between venial and mortal sins that, as you know, can be transformed into each other” at a pinch. (ABN, p. 175).
It was in this modern landscape, with its attendant disciplinary, pastoral and biological forms of power that Foucault housed the “dispositif of sexuality,” a network composed of a distinct series of historical and political events. Let us turn to this now.
This chapter will delve into key aspects of Foucault’s "dispositif of sexuality” before moving on in the final chapters to the issue of Freud’s place in the history of science and culture. The essential difference Foucault represents compared to Lacan has been identified, broadly, as the introduction of an “ethnographic” component. That is, Foucault’s subjects reflect a distinct set of unconscious conditions operating in the sexual field that are not found elsewhere: scientia sexualis, the lifeblood of the “dispositif of sexuality.” This provides the vital ethnographic contrast needed to challenge properly Lacan’s universal subject of desire. Four “strategic unities” comprising the “dispositif of sexuality” can be isolated (HS, pp. 104-105). These served as “anchorage points” for the mechanisms of power and ventures of knowledge, so that four privileged figures emerged: the hysterical, the masturbator, the Malthusian heterosexual couple, and the perverse adult.

Perhaps the most extraordinary claim made about La volonte de savoir is that Foucault denies “the class and gender dynamics of public sexuality.”\(^1\) Through an investigation of two of these unities – the “hysterization of women’s bodies” and the “pedagogization of children’s sex” – the main aim of this chapter is to argue that, on the contrary, Foucault reinstated both class and gender very firmly into sexuality, and in an interesting way. La volonte de savoir not only overturns the relationship between

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politics and sex so that the latter — "sexuality" — becomes a determinant feature of modern political life, but the content of the text itself could be read as a culmination of Foucault's general "rethinking" of the interconnections between the "moral" and the "political" — not an insignificant component of his work as a whole. Implicit throughout this chapter therefore is the view that Foucault's "power" should be rescued from dominant interpretations centred on "governmentality" that tend to reinforce traditional conceptions of power, and returned to the field of sexuality. This is not to suggest retrieving a "true" Foucault so much as a downtrodden slogan: that the personal is political.

Whether through economic materialism, or, alternatively, promoting the influence of mentalités as Philippe Ariès does, various types of historical analyses adopt a particular version of the bourgeois class when it comes to "sexuality": essentially a story of repression, both of its own class-body and, in more strenuous ways, of the sexual activities of the working-class. For Foucault, this ignores the vital role that sexuality has played in the constitution of the bourgeoisie as a distinctive entity, as well as overlooking how crucial was the "dispositif of sexuality" in their struggle not only — at a later date — against the working class, but, more fundamentally, against the aristocracy and its lingering values. After all, first and foremost, the rising dominant class had to attack entrenched notions of superiority based on "blood": bourgeois representations of Louis XVI and, especially, Marie-Antoinette as "political monsters" was one example of this political brawl. (ABN, pp. 95-98). Thus, Foucault argues that the bourgeoisie distinguished themselves not by amputating its sex-body all the better to repress others — the unquestioned leftist war-cry — but actually through an "arrogant" and "garrulous" political affirmation of sexuality that all classes were then forced to
adopt. As Foucault indelibly put it: the bourgeoisie's "blood" was its "sex"; rather than a valorisation of ancestry, the bourgeoisie turned to its future progeny and converted "the blue blood of the nobles into a sound organism and a healthy sexuality." (HS, p. 126).²

What put at risk, or even potentially destroyed, a "sound organism" and "healthy sexuality" were inappropriate femininity, masturbation, "fraudulent" heterosexuality, and perversions. Importantly, these fears had little or no place within aristocratic sensibilities, whose superior blood took precedence over physical deficiency or deformity even in death. Let us dwell on the first of these fears: inappropriate femininity. An interesting aspect of Norbert Elias's "civilizing" thesis is his analysis of everyday French and German novels written by women in the eighteenth century.³ Dozens, if not hundreds of these novels appeared, and Elias considers them important as examples of bourgeois affirmation. Certainly, the novels ridicule courtly life with its exaggerated courtesy as a "puppet theatre."⁴ Invariably, a young middle-class heroine is wooed by a despicable aristocratic cad, from whom she flees, honour intact.

But Elias shows another side: the novels also reveal a feminine perspective on love not as unambiguously hostile to aristocratic and "courtly" values as their male bourgeois partners would have liked – given the trenches of class warfare. The heroine quickly befriends another "scoundrel" of that class whose status is more ambiguous: this second figure, for whatever mysterious reason, is an outcast of the court. So, the fallen lord is approachable, yet he nevertheless embodies precisely all the attractive and alluring qualities of men of the higher class: handsome, amusing, intelligent, rich and

² Grace, "Faux Amis," Critical Inquiry, p. 68.
⁴ Elias, Civilizing Process, p. 23.
(implicitly) sexually exciting. Eventually he "deceives" the heroine, because marriage between the two was always impossible due to the class barrier. And it was not the good-natured chap of more modest yet respectable stock who came to win her heart in the end; no, much better that the heroine die instead.

Far from being "repressed," therefore, these novels give testament to a feminine imagination fired into action by new circumstances – in its "bourgeois" form at least (by no means universal). While the complexity of this issue goes beyond what Foucault outlined, his schema allows these expressions to be placed in a wider heterosexual struggle not captured by Elias, nor his Marxist-Freudian allies, yet is specific to the very political configuration they analyse.

In Foucault's analysis, the first figure to be "sexualised" was the "idle" bourgeois woman: here, "the hysterization of woman found its anchorage point." (HS, p. 121). The bourgeois woman was the link between the old dispositif of alliance, founded on a system of kinship ties and "transmission of names and possessions" (HS, p. 106) and the new dispositif of sexuality, now based on a proliferation and intensification of the body's energies and resources. Working-class or peasant women, just as able to provide children, or "sexual" satisfaction for men, lacked symbolic and economic value. Only the bourgeois woman inhabited two spaces simultaneously: "the outer edge of the 'world', in which she always had to appear as a value," and "the family,

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7 Juliet Mitchell has analysed the English autobiographical versions of this tradition and claims they herald the arrival of a distinctly feminine historical subject, in "flux." According to Mitchell, the novels express the "simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organization of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism." See Juliet Mitchell, "Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis," Women: The Longest Revolution, pp. 287-294.
where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations."
(HS, p. 121).

It was perhaps due to this double agency that the woman could get close enough to the closed world of the court and its blue blood to taste some of its forbidden fruit – if only in fantasy. But it also meant that her loyalty to the bourgeois cause was suspect, evidenced by her _penchant_ for pernicious “courtly” and frivolous pursuits. In any case, medical vigilance was required to ensure that these women did not follow the bad lifestyle habits of their aristocratic sisters. They needed to understand the proper and natural borders separating “night” and “day,” for example, and not imitate those Parisian “beauties” who rise from their slumbers after “the best hours of the day are gone, the pure air has disappeared,” when all that was left was “vapours” and “harmful exhalations.” (cited by Foucault, _HM_, p. 370).

Moreover, _History of Madness_ had already revealed the opinion prevalent in the eighteenth century that women were especially vulnerable to the types of illnesses gripping modern life, now multiplying alarmingly due to the affects of “civilization” and “milieu.” Modern women, more so than modern men, have exposed themselves to dangerous movements of the soul, becoming enflamed and “exalted” by spectacles such as the theatre. (_HM_, p. 370). Novels were singled out for particular condemnation: the “artfulness” they deployed to imitate reality “only enhance the prestige of the violent and dangerous sentiments that they sought to awaken in their female readers.” (_HM_, p. 371). According to one source from 1768: “of all the causes that have been harmful to the health of women over the last century, the infinite multiplication of novels is the most important ... A girl of ten who reads rather than
running around will be a woman who suffers from the vapours at 20, and not a solid

Along these lines, the text entitled “Courtship” by Erasmus examined in the previous
chapter is more accurately situated as an early example of this tradition of oppressive
medical theorising. “What can be more unnatural than an old maid?” Erasmus pleads in
this dialogue.8 The male youth has seen “many girls who before marriage were pale,
run-down, and as good as gone.” Marriage “brightened them so much that they began
to bloom at last.”9 Far from liberal humanist, Erasmus now joins forces with that
formidable bevy of experts who set out to medicalize feminine sexuality in the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries armed with venerable authorities such as
Hippocrates. They offer little more than blackmail: accept sexuality (implicitly
bourgeois and masculine), and like it, or be doomed to a life of illness as the only
alternative.10

Greensickness, otherwise known as the “virgin’s disease,” was a common theme in
European cultures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.11 There are many
references to “greensickness” in Shakespeare, and Dutch paintings of the seventeenth
century often depict domestic scenes where expert doctors attend pale and sick
maidens.12 They doubtless reflect a general pro-marriage attitude of that period in
reaction to centuries of strict forbearance. But a text by Pinel cited by Foucault in

10 The medical statement considered decisive in this tradition is that of Johannes Lange, whose account
of De Morbo Virgineo appeared as part of a larger medical text in 1520. See “Johannes Lange on
11 Helen King, The Disease of Virgins: Green sickness, Chlorosis and the Problems of Puberty (London,
2004).
12 See the rich assortment of both medical and non-medical examples in W.M. Fowler, “Chlorosis – an
History of Madness reveals that, in the late eighteenth century, the tradition had lost none of its force, for marriage offered women "considerable protection" not only against physical diseases, but also against "the two most inveterate (and often incurable) forms of alienation": namely, "idiocy" and "dementia." (cited by Foucault, HM, p. 494).

Freud, for his part, would eventually pour scorn on this tradition: "marriage has long ceased to be a panacea for the nervous troubles of women," he remarked. (SE, 9, p. 195). But the common thread linking Erasmus, Freud, and scores of medical writers on this topic, at the heart of the "hysterization" process Foucault identifies, is the assumption that nervous "troubles" are more likely to beset women (and a concrete example of "hysterization" involving Freud will be seen in the following chapter). The feminine body, qualified and disqualified as "thoroughly saturated with sexuality," was integrated into the sphere of medical practices "by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it." (HS, p. 104).

The tradition was all the more commanding in that its secular dimension colonized the religious understanding of the troubled or dangerous female body, to bring forth eventually the rudiments of a concept now essential to medical discourses: the "nervous system." That is, the eighteenth-century medicine of "nerves and vapours" took over a field of analysis that had already been "delimited" through the phenomenon of "possession" and the "obsessed woman" of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. (HS, p. 117). In the lecture series of 1974-1975 titled Abnormal, Foucault details how the Church, reluctantly, was forced to appeal to medical knowledge because "possession" constituted a grave crisis in convents of the sixteenth century.
The request for medicine’s help was “a fearful, contradictory and reticent appeal,” according to Foucault, since by bringing doctors into cases of possession, the power and knowledge of Christian direction will be overridden, and “the jurisdiction of medical knowledge will be brought into the very order of the flesh that the new ecclesiastical pastoral had constituted as its domain.” (ABN, p. 222). But recourse to medicine could not be set aside, for the Church had no answer to the “physical” character of the convulsions and other manifestations besetting the nun’s body. Once established in this field, medicine never let go of it:

Medicine did not discover the domain of illnesses with a sexual connotation, origin, or support by extending the traditional considerations of Greek and medieval medicine on the uterus or the humours. ... The importance of what was called the “nervous system” in eighteenth-century pathology is due precisely to the fact that it served as the first major anatomical and medical codification of the domain of the flesh that the Christian art of penance had until then explored merely with the help of notions such as “movements,” “tickling,” “titillation,” et cetera. The analysis of the nervous system and the fantastic mechanics attributed to it during the eighteenth century were a way of medically recodifying the domain of objects that had been isolated and constituted by the practice of penance since the sixteenth century. Concupiscence was the sinful soul of the flesh. Since the eighteenth century, the nervous type is the rational and scientific body of this same flesh. The nervous system takes the place of concupiscence by right. It is the material and anatomical version of the old concupiscence. (ABN, p. 222).

Let it not be thought that Foucault is merely “colonizing” a feminist position by this identification of a “hysterization” strategy. As affirmed before, feminists and phenomenologists have opposed Lacanian psychoanalysis from the side of the body and “true” sexualities. Foucault reproaches it from a new position, objecting to the inadequate account of “culture,” or power and knowledge relations, infusing psychoanalysis, and those feminisms inspired by it. In the process, Foucault certainly
presents a challenge to feminist philosophy. 13 Many simply dismiss it, in terms similar to those expressed by Juliet Mitchell. She is critical of historians of ideas influenced by Foucault who speak of the “decline” of religious sentiment in the modern world without making it clear that “Western religions are patriarchal,” and their replacements did not dismantle in any way these fundamental structures: the medical system “was likewise a patriarchal vertical model” superimposed on the previous religious configuration it superseded. 14

Foucault would not deny this, but it all comes down to how one incorporates power relations and their history into an ethnography or ontology of the “present.” To conceive of power as essentially “patriarchal” or “masculine” ignores the question of why bourgeois women were singled out for special education, and why medical knowledge and the “norm” have an potency in bourgeois society to dictate what constitutes femininity independently of wise women’s knowledge, religious beliefs or myths – indeed, often in contradiction of these other discourses. The “strategic unity” taking charge of the modern female body is above all a class-directed medical form of control beyond the workings of family alliances and religious beliefs: it involved a “thorough medicalization of [women’s] bodies and their sex,” and was “carried out in the name of the responsibility they owed to the health of their children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society.” (HS, pp. 146-147).

What is more, the “hysterization” strategy was the open door through which the doctor could enter into the domestics of the bourgeois couple and set up business there,

13 As Jana Sawicki argues, there is a need “to subject our feminist categories and concepts to critical historical analysis to expose their limitations and highlight their specificities.” Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault, p. 48.
cementing them as subjects and objects of “sexuality” rather than “flesh.” Themes of “death and everlasting punishment” were replaced by “the problem of life and illness.” (HS, p. 117). By attending to “nerves” and the “sexual physiology peculiar to women,” medicine made a “forceful entry into the pleasures of the couple” as a unit; it created “an entire organic, functional, or mental pathology arising out of ‘incomplete’ sexual practices; it carefully classified all forms of related pleasures; it incorporated them into notions of ‘development’ and instinctual ‘disturbances’; and it undertook to manage them.” (HS, p. 41).

Importantly, Foucault demonstrates that, without the whole-hearted belief in the superiority of its physical sex-body in contrast to the supposedly “degenerate” aristocracy, the bourgeoisie would never have been able to cohere as a class and, in turn, exploit “masses” once the property of the nobility. As Foucault put it: “With this investment of its own sex by a technology of power and knowledge which it had itself invented, the bourgeoisie underscored the high political price of its body, sensations, and pleasures, its well-being and survival.” (HS, p. 123).

The response to Van Ussel on the campaign against childhood masturbation provides another good illustration of the limitations of previous Marxist or Marx-Freud analyses, while not “denying” the relations of production identified by these traditions. The campaign constitutes the second of the four “great lines of attack along which the politics of sex advanced for two centuries,” and became the essence of what Foucault called the “pedagogization of children’s sex.” (HS, p. 146). The “very particular” discourse about masturbation, Foucault argues, here in agreement with Van Ussel, “is completely different from the Christian discourse on the flesh” and also differs from
“the future psychopathia sexualis of Heinrich Kaan” and his psychiatric colleagues that emerged in the 1840s. (ABN, p. 234). Also in accord with Van Ussel, Foucault considers the campaign to have been underestimated, and he likens it to the persecution of witches that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (ABN, p. 253). By the close of the eighteenth century, there was a range of instruments designed to prevent children masturbating as well as surgical procedures such as “acupuncture,” involving the “insertion of needles in the genital area,” and chemical therapies using opium. (ABN, p. 252). In the nineteenth century, practices such as cauterisation of the urethra with bicarbonate of soda and, for girls, cauterisation and removal of the clitoris, became, if not widespread, certainly not uncommon. (ABN, pp. 252-253). Foucault cites a doctor named Deslandes who, in 1835, gave a defence for the removal of the clitoris in terms of no “disadvantage” to the woman. (ABN, p. 253). Whatever else could be said about this, the interventions were hardly driven by “economic” concerns.

Thus, although Van Ussel acknowledges that adolescent energy was mainly channelled into “study” to combat masturbation, which implies a distinct bourgeois flavour, he fails to draw the consequences of this for the amalgamation of Marx and Elias (flavoured with Freud) at the centre of his analysis. If it were really a question of repressing the body of pleasure and celebrating the productive body, one would expect the working-class lad of the cities and towns to be the primary target. But the campaign was directed at children and adolescents from bourgeois and aristocratic milieux only. It was the child fussed over by “domestic servants, tutors, governesses” who was in danger of compromising “not so much his physical strength as his intellectual capacity, his moral fibre, and the obligations to preserve a healthy line of descent for his family and his social class.” (HS, p. 121).
What is more, both boys and girls were targeted, removing the male adult worker ever further from the bourgeois family scene: texts from the eighteenth century frequently speak of females masturbating, including statements from young girls “who confessed that they had masturbated before they were six years old.” *(ABN, p. 242).* In one of the earliest books of the anti-masturbation movement, the anonymous author of *Onania* of 1723 claims to have been “credibly informed,” that the habit has become “almost as frequent amongst Girls, as Masturbation is amongst Boys.” He consequently exhorts “Mistresses” of schools to follow the male pedagogical tradition and devote “a watchful Eye upon the Conduct of their Scholars.”

In short, we must return, says Foucault, “to formulations that have long been disparaged; we must say that there is a bourgeois sexuality, and that there are class sexualities.” *(HS, p. 127).* Largely unaffected by strategies concerning the medicalization of feminine sexuality and the pedagogization of childhood in the eighteenth century, working-class people were later subjected to a number of repressive and oppressive measures whereby “sexuality” was “foisted on them for the purpose of subjugation.” *(HS, p. 127).* The first of these was a moral campaign in the nineteenth century designed to promote marriage. It was necessary to employ certain strategies to prevent “mobility and agitation” of the working class, so a “broad campaign around marriage got under way in the period 1820-1840.” *(ABN, p. 270).* The movement was conducted “by means of pure and simple propaganda (the publication of books, etc.),

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15 On the different stresses applied to girls as opposed to boys in this history, see “CF,” p. 217; and *DE*, II, pp. 778-779, where he concludes with the important qualification: “But I am a man.”


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by economic pressure, (the creation of charitable organizations which gave aid only to those legitimately married), and through mechanisms like the saving banks, housing policy, and so on.” (ABN, p. 270).

These anonymous “matchmaking” techniques linked up with the general bourgeois drive to eradicate coitus interruptus within all legitimate marriages, at every level of society, including the middle classes – once it was discovered at the end of the eighteenth century that the “art of fooling nature was not the exclusive privilege of city dwellers and libertines, but was known and practised by those who, being close to nature itself, should have held it to be more repugnant than anyone else.” (HS, p. 121). By this time, medicine had joined forces with “pedagogy” and “economics” to create a “completely new technology of sex” which escaped, for the most part, “ecclesiastical institutions without being truly independent of a thematics of sin.” (HS, p. 117). Demographic campaigns apropos the birth-rate took over from the Christian control of conjugal relations, providing the context for various treatises on population, including those of Malthus and Moheau. The opposition to contraception criss-crossed the political spectrum in the nineteenth century, making a mockery of divisions between “left” and “right”: socialists were just as fierce in their condemnation as the most pious and reactionary priests.18

By the late nineteenth century, a political campaign designed to stamp out incest amongst the working classes came to dominate. Whether real or imagined, families suspected of practising incest, “through lack of space, dubious proximity, a history of debauchery, anti-social ‘primitiveness,’ or degenerescence,” were subjected to a

“systematic campaign.” *(HS, p. 129).*19 In a pertinent observation, unfortunately all too brief, Markos Zafiropoulos notes that, if Lacan introduced a “causal link” between the decline of the father and the discovery of the Oedipus complex, Foucault brought forward instead a “logic of counterparts” [*contrepartie*] between the bourgeoisie and the working class over the issue of incest.20 Zafiropoulos describes the two positions as “very different.” One can only agree, and take the statement further. For while Lacan locates Freud’s discovery historically, using the image of a melting pot in *fin-du-siècle* Vienna, this does not lead him, as it will Foucault, to question its validity as a principle for understanding human sexual behaviour in general. But, in Foucault’s view, it was no small coincidence that the “discovery” of the Oedipus complex was “contemporaneous with the juridical organization of loss of parental authority (in France, this was formulated in the laws of 1889 and 1898).” *(HS, p. 130).* At the moment when Freud was “uncovering the nature of Dora’s desire and allowing it to be put into words,” preparations were being made “to undo those reprehensible proximities in other social sectors.” *(HS, p. 130).*

The “machinery” of true discourses associated with the *dispositif* of sexuality has produced not so much an “eroticisation” of the body as some historians may contend, as an “implantation of perversion.” That is, different sexualities have multiplied, not contracted, in the modern period. Here again, it is important to draw a contrast between Foucault on the one hand, and the various Freudian tributaries on the other.

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19 Here, we are not concerned with whether it is right or wrong for the State to intervene in families. If we take Durkheim as the example, it went without saying for him that an increasing role of the State was a positive evolutionary tendency: “One could say that the State has become a factor in domestic life,” he said. Through the intermediary of the State, the father could be “corrected” when he exceeds the limits of his authority. See Emile Durkheim [1892], “La famille conjugale,” *Textes, 3: Fonctions sociales et institutions*, ed. Victor Karady (Paris, 1975), pp. 35-49, p. 38.

For the “polymorphous perversity” that historians associate with “repression” of natural and earthy sex, or that Freud attributes to the repression of universal drives beginning in childhood, or that Lacan had vaguely tried to attach to a “decadent” or “declining” Oedipus complex reflecting modern values, Foucault now places squarely at the feet of historical conditions: “Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its Puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and directly, perverse.” (HS, p. 47).

Once Western science triumphed in the nineteenth century, a plethora of minor discourses on specific acts, objects and subjects came to support a general heterogeneous inventory of all anomalies of the sexual “instinct”: fetishists, genontophiles, zoophiles, zooerasts, mixoscopophiles, and many others. The point is not whether these figures or acts existed before in other societies under different names, but that the determination on the part of Western culture to study them reveals something about that civilization. Namely, an understanding of erotic pleasure based on scientific conceptions of children’s sex, masturbation, abnormality, perversion, hysteria, and so on, became established. It is not unconnected to the non-existence of a sexual ethics based on adult pleasures, consensual relations, reciprocity, the common and the everyday.

This leads to the final discussion point of Foucault’s account, and perhaps the most important. The “dispositif of sexuality” is to be criticised above all for the type of discourses it brings to bear on today’s subjects. In History of Madness, Foucault called the classical age the “great confiscation of sexual ethics” by “family morality.” He now presents a more complicated picture, but the idea of a “confiscation” still stands.
It can be elucidated most simply by contrasting the "dispositif of sexuality" with the ethical unity and uniformity provided by the Christian theme of the flesh.

Although closed, rigid, dogmatic, saturated with constant "prescriptions" and "rules and recommendations," all directed at the long-suffering man and wife (HS, p. 37), the old Christian theme of the flesh had the advantage at least of encapsulating the spectrum of subjects and problems associated with bodies and pleasures, dispensing punishment and reward accordingly. Acts may have been relentlessly condemned in terms of a general "unlawfulness" – everything from bestiality to contraception, lovemaking postures, times and seasons, and so on. But this was set against a system that nevertheless recognised the sexual "needs" of both the husband and wife and tried to catalogue degrees of lawfulness and permissiveness within bounds.21

What characterises the dispositif of sexuality in stark contrast is that the old system was "broken apart, scattered, and multiplied" and "distinct discursivities" took the place of a unified Christian ethics. In other words, a sexual ethics centred exclusively on the legitimate married couple was replaced by no ethics at all. There was a "centrifugal movement" away from the legitimate married couple, towards scrutiny of "children," "mad men and women," "criminals," and homosexuals: "It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak." (HS, p. 39). Sexuality in the modern period became – dare we use psychoanalytic terminology – decentred; dispersed amongst "demography, biology, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, pedagogy, and political criticism." (HS, p. 33).

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21 One of the most extraordinary and explicit statements of Catholic sexual ethics is given by Père Féline [1782], Catéchisme des Gens Mariés (Bruxelles, 1881). It is interesting that he never used the terms "sexuality" or "desire" but only "needs" ["les besoins"].
The common thread linking these dispersed elements of sexuality is a “scientific” attitude: “scientia sexualis.” In Arnold Davidson’s description, “while *ars erotica* is organized around the framework of body-pleasure-intensification, *scientia sexualis* is organized around the axis of subject-desire-truth.”¹² That is, a particular scientific or “truth-seeking” conception of erotic practices was established, of which psychoanalysis provides one set amongst the various discourses of psychiatry and sexology. The development corresponded in Foucault’s view “to a wholly unprecedented type of medicalization of sexuality.” (“CF,” p. 221). Whereas “erotic art” employs medicine only as a means to “intensify pleasure,” one finds in Western societies “a medicalization of sexuality itself,” as though it were an area of “particular pathological fragility in human existence.”²³ As he put it in an interview from early 1977:

> Whereas in societies with a heritage of erotic art the intensification of pleasure tends to desexualise the body, in the West the systematisation of pleasure according to the ‘laws’ of sex gave rise to the whole *dispositif* of sexuality. And it is this that makes us believe that we are ‘liberating’ ourselves when we ‘decode’ all pleasure in terms of a sex shorn of all disguise, whereas one should aim instead at a desexualization, at a general economy of pleasure not based on sexual norms.²⁴

Moreover, if sex is considered the heart of *all* pleasure, the very “code-word” for pleasure itself, then probing the truth of sex will make an ethical elaboration of pleasure in general redundant. Only through what Foucault calls “desexualization” can eroticism be brought (back) to a place within philosophy and reformulated anew.²⁵ Foucault’s approach is thus allied to the recommendation for an alternative, ethical, domain of “bodies and pleasures” which draws on literary and ethnographic

²² Davidson, *Emergence of Sexuality*, p. 211.
²⁵ This issue of “desexualization,” with Jean Laplanche’s reaction to it, will return in chapter ten.
knowledge, rather than biological and medical sciences. For example, as part of a conference held in Japan during 1978, Foucault lamented that no “erotic craft” exists in the West:

In other words, we don’t learn how to make love, we don’t learn how to give ourselves pleasure, we don’t learn how to induce pleasure in others, and we don’t learn how to maximise, to intensify our own pleasure by the pleasure of others. All of that is not taught in the West, and we have no discourse, no initiation into erotic practices other than at the level of clandestine and purely inter-individual experience.  

So, to sum up, Lacan’s “desire” is not the cornerstone of all human sexuality, but is a modern Western fabrication excising a whole range of other possible understandings of eroticism and procreation. An ethnographic ensemble (the dispositif of sexuality) gains its intelligibility from scientific study of bodies and pleasures, tied to a history of power techniques impossible to grasp via the contours of Marxist or Weberian historiography. For those who would overlook the history of power relations, sexuality is in fact tied to the “recent devices of power” explicated in the previous chapter as “disciplinary,” “pastoral,” “biological,” and so forth; it has been expanding “at an increasing rate since the seventeenth century,” rather than being subjected to more rigorous repression as the advent of capitalism intensified the demands of the work ethic; it is not “governed by reproduction,” but by an obsessive search for the truth of sex; and it has been linked to an exploitation of the body as an “object of knowledge” and an “element of power relations” just as much as a producer of labour. (HS, p. 107).

This bold and original account has been duly recognised in many different quarters. However, due to the lacuna identified by this thesis, there is no doubt that Foucault’s

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26 Michel Foucault [1978], “Sexualité et pouvoir” [conference at the University of Tokyo, 1978, followed by a debate], DE, III, pp. 552-570, p. 556.
legacy in the area of sexuality is highly ambiguous. As argued throughout, poor understanding of Foucault’s critical relationship to the French psychoanalytic movement has led to an underestimation of the significance of power and sexuality within Foucault’s work as a whole. Let us conclude this chapter therefore on a somewhat negative note by highlighting briefly continued problems of interpretation.

On the one hand, “historacists” are said to have gained the ascendancy in academic writing, due almost entirely to Foucault’s influence: never has a single analytic framework “saturated the field of colonial studies so completely as that of Foucault.”

But when Foucault’s position is described here as supporting the view that, “contrary” to Freud, “desire follows from, and is generated out of, the law,” what is being paraphrased and attributed to Foucault is actually the Lacanian position. This was the very conception Foucault caricatured – “you are always-already trapped” – to pave the way for the introduction of power into the sexual field.

Likewise, according to Roy Porter’s assessment, most historians now “endorse” Foucault’s revision of the “old notion” that “industrialization demanded erotic austerity.” But the evidence Porter provides for this acceptance is meagre. From a different quarter, Jean-Louis Flandrin equates Foucault with the views of the British historian Edward Shorter: both support, according to Flandrin, the idea of increasing “eroticisation” of modern life. He thereby misunderstands the more complex Freudian

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27 Ann Laura Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things (Durham and London, 1995), p. 1. For the same observation less enthusiastically noted, see Copjec, Read my Desire, pp. 1-14. Neither Stoler nor Copjec come close to dealing properly with Foucault’s reformulation of power, sympathetic or critical.


argument taken up in divergent ways by both Foucault and Lacan that modern society is “perverse.” Restricting himself to Shorter as the representative of those who support undue historicism, Flandrin contends that the “desires” of young people (a term he does not explain) “may have been different [in the early modern period] from those nowadays; but there can be no doubt that they existed and were strong.”

So, in the end, to believe Porter, Foucault’s usefulness for understanding eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sexuality is limited to the debris he scattered over the historical field during his brief appearance there: after “exploding” the “repressive hypothesis,” Foucault then moved on to “slaughter the most sacred cows of the liberal recension,” finishing with the “demolition of the hoary myth of the Victorian Bourgeoisie.”

Curiously, the brave “empirical historian” emerged unscathed from the war zone, to resume methodological business-as-usual: sexual discourse is “ideology,” typically “recruited into the service of coercive power.” The “torrents of misogyny and homophobia” give ample evidence – all targeted “against the lower orders, the young, the aberrant, and, overwhelmingly, against women.” Thankfully, as Porter revealed elsewhere, “the age of Foucault” has “passed,” replaced by a new commitment “to historical rigour and accountable epistemological threshold.”

But failing to appreciate the Copernican significance of Foucault’s critical text is by no means restricted to historians. Jacques Derrida did not consider “power” to be an overly important aspect of Foucault’s critique of psychoanalysis; it can be left

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31 Flandrin, Sex in the Western World, p. 270.

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Similarly, in his notes from 1976, Gilles Deleuze resurrects the standard Marxist view that "power" only exists at a "macro" level and is therefore a secondary, superstructural, affect of bodily desire: "I am not sure that micro-dispositifs can be described in terms of power." Like Derrida, Deleuze did not see the need to overturn the critical apparatus and rearrange political understanding for something as trivial as erotic pleasure or making babies; after all, the body is just as much "biological" as "collective and political." At some level, implicitly, these are "private" affairs.

Unfortunately for Deleuze and others, it is not possible to put the power genie back in the bottle — that would be like "choosing" to return to a Ptolemaic conception of the universe. Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject as a "historical and cultural reality" necessarily extends into the private sexual — erotic and procreative — because these "acts" are always connected to the political, as feminism constantly affirms. It is hoped that the comparisons of Lacan and Foucault discussed so far have opened the way for a greater appreciation of the latter's alternative to the psychoanalytic account of desire. The confrontation can only be complete, however, by returning yet again to Freud and his place in the history of sexuality and scientific knowledge.

36 Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud," *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, pp. 57-96, p. 95.
37 Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure," *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 185.
38 Deleuze, "Desire and Pleasure," *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 189.
Part III

Unfinished Copernican Spirals
Chapter Nine

Foucault and the
Art of Returning Freud

It has been argued that Foucault’s singular methodology derives in large measure from an exteriority to French Freud that has never been properly explicated. To recall the content of chapter five, the unconscious as it was theorized within traditional psychoanalysis relied on a separation of the psychic domain into “primary” and “secondary” processes – necessary in order for psychoanalysis to claim a “primary” network of the mind and body governed essentially by universal drives. It was argued that the type of psychoanalysis developed in the French context, even though renowned for its “linguistic” and “cultural” focus, continued to enlist a medical ontology as the foundation of desire, likewise implying a “primary” structure set aside from historically-variable power relations, speech and discourse. In Lacan’s schema, the shared “code” of the Other gains its meaning from a primary signifier – the “phallus” – which in turn acquires its power from a transhistorical law of desire; all historical forces are secondary, identical to what is assumed by biological science proper. The differences Lacanian psychoanalysis introduced into the Freudian field have therefore been exaggerated in this respect at least, for Lacan ultimately failed in his quest to transform psychoanalytic knowledge into an ethical discourse centred on languages and literature.

But the most important difference between Foucault and the Freudians, and upon which other differences often hinge, has been put to one side until now: namely, Freud’s place in the history of science. As seen earlier, psychoanalysts like André Green take for
granted that Freud instituted an “epistemological break” with his nineteenth-century medical counterparts. If Freud’s discovery of the Oedipus complex is shown to be tied to social processes and political campaigns, well, so be it. Whether cast as “desire” as Lacan formulated it, or as “drives” in more traditional Freudian terms, sexuality will manifest itself independently in any “anthropological situation,” and Freud broke with his medical colleagues by uncovering the true reality of this phenomenon.

Beyond and outside of psychoanalysis, critics otherwise prepared to “assault” Freud still grant him a pre-eminent status in the critical understanding of sexuality. Jeffrey Masson, well known for his attempt to expose Freud’s “cover-up” concerning the widespread sexual abuse of children in Freud’s milieu, nevertheless credits the Viennese doctor for encouraging people “to speak about their sexual lives in ways that were impossible before his writings.”¹ A strong contingent of feminists of various persuasions have also remained loyal to the psychoanalytic cause: Freud “took the crucial step of actually listening to hysterical women and paying serious attention to their stories,” claims Elaine Showalter.² Freud’s critics “offer little to replace his insights or vision.”³ Juliet Mitchell has never wavered in her estimation that the Three Essays on Sexuality is a “revolutionary” text,⁴ and she explains the difference of Freud’s theory from “popular” conceptions comprehensively in the following passage:

The psychoanalytic concept of sexuality confronts head-on all popular conceptions. It can never be equated with genitality nor is it the simple expression of a biological drive. It is always psycho-sexuality, a system of conscious and unconscious human fantasies involving a range of excitations and activities that produce pleasure beyond the satisfaction of any basic

³ Showalter, Hystories, p. 45.
physiological need. It arises from various sources, seeks satisfaction in many different ways and makes use of many diverse objects for its aim of achieving pleasure. Only with great difficulty and then never perfectly does it move from being a drive with many component parts—a single ‘libido’ expressed through very different phenomena—to being what is normally understood as sexuality, something which appears to be a unified instinct in which genitality predominates.\(^5\)

For Jean Laplanche, too, Freud’s “great discovery” was “infantile sexuality”—as long as we understand, by “sexual,” a genuine polymorphous meaning in no way reducible to the genital, “enlarged beyond the limits of the differences between the sexes and beyond the sexualised.”\(^6\) Foucauldians, he suggests, have failed to appreciate Freud’s theory of sexuality, just as his original \textit{method} escapes them also, described by Laplanche as “unprecedented.” Where in the world, Laplanche asks, before psychoanalysis or beyond it (and don’t be fooled by the Catholic confessional), “was one permitted and invited to say everything, up to and including the most secret thoughts of carnage, racism or rape?”\(^7\) The process has been falsely portrayed, however—and by Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts themselves—as “reading codes whose names are \textit{symbolism} and \textit{typicality}.” The reality is very different:

It is a strictly individual method, favouring an individual’s way of connecting things, element by element, through ‘associations,’ to the detriment of all self-constructions and self-theorization. The method is ana-lytic, associative-dissociative, unbinding. One might call it ‘deconstructive’—and the term \textit{Rückbildung} is certainly there in Freud—if the word had not subsequently been monopolized, adapted by a philosophy elsewhere.\(^8\)

While Freud still manages to exercise the forces in his favour, it indicates amongst other things that Foucault has failed to displace psychoanalysis from the centre of gravity in the field of sexuality. Even commentators largely sympathetic to Foucault’s project fear

\(^7\) Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis as Anti-hermeneutics,” \textit{Radical Philosophy}, p. 10.
that he “underestimates Freud’s significance.”9 Not only Freud, but sexologists like Havelock Ellis displayed remarkable tolerance towards deviant behaviour, homosexuality above all; Foucault pays scant credit to this oppositional tradition. The historian and psychoanalyst Élisabeth Roudinesco dismisses Foucault because he “opted to bypass the question of Freud’s discovery,”10 while, in an explicit confrontation with the recent revisionist current to be considered shortly, she vigorously defends Freud in these terms:

At the end of the nineteenth century, all specialists of nervous diseases recognised the importance of the sexual factor in the formation of neurotic symptoms. But nobody knew what to do with this observation – a situation going back, after all, to antiquity. ... Freud was not content to note what everyone else knew: by “stealing” the ideas of his contemporaries, he was explaining given facts by new concepts. From this perspective, Freud was really the first scientist of his time capable of providing a theoretical solution to the notorious problem of “genital” causes.11

For Roudinesco, therefore, Freud shifted the site of hysteria from Jean-Martin Charcot’s organic [“genital”] causes to its proper psychological domain. But the precise novelty, if not “revolution,” Freud is said to have affected has never been satisfactorily settled even for those within the psychoanalytic movement. After all, Freud was quite happy to accord with conservative medical views and popular opinion when it came to condemning adult masturbation (SE, 10, pp. 202-204) and coitus interruptus.12 Lacan freely admitted that Freud was no “progressive”; he was a “knave” and not a “jester”; “there are even some extraordinarily scandalous things in his writings.”13 If Freud’s

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formulation of polymorphous infantile sexuality is taken as the true revolutionary feature of his thought, we are still none the wiser as to why Freud's method gave privileged access to this knowledge not available to anybody else. For the theory concerns a period of life nobody can remember and its experience is only "reactivated" through a method of adult psychoanalysis invented by Freud himself. As Lacan admitted, psychoanalytic truths are not "actually open to investigation" — except of course "in that special experience which we call psychoanalytic experience and which makes possible the exploration of the unconscious circuit."\(^{14}\)

On the basis of growing dissatisfaction with self-serving eulogies carefully cultivated by Freud himself and close disciples like his biographer Ernest Jones, several historians and philosophers external to the psychoanalytic movement have ventured to open up its history to greater scrutiny. This chapter is concerned to place Foucault's critique against these other recent "revisions" of Freud's position in the history of science, before moving on to an interpretation of Foucault's reading of Freud. The enterprise is not without its perils, according to Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, who, in addition to his critical expositions of both Freud and Lacan broached earlier in this thesis, has now turned his attention to the history of psychoanalytic concepts and techniques: "Whoever proposes to research the history of psychoanalysis should understand that he or she is about to enter a strange universe, one ruled by secrecy, rumour, and the manipulation of information."\(^{15}\)


Borch-Jacobsen is one of the main contributors to the recent collection entitled *Le livre noir de la psychanalyse* [*The black book of Psychoanalysis*] of 2005. The book represents an intellectual movement, the explicit aim of which is to undermine what its authors see as the unjustifiably entrenched authority enjoyed by psychoanalytic theory and practice. The movement has developed quite independently of Foucault’s work, which in itself confirms what was argued in chapter four: *Le livre noir* reflects a phenomenological heritage not comfortable with the Freudian unconscious, and this was a philosophical opposition to psychoanalysis that Foucault never identified with. *Le livre noir* provoked reviews and exchanges upon its publication in France, the nation said by the black book editor to nurture the most ardent Freudsians – matched only by Argentina. Have these various “black” analyses rendered Foucault’s critique redundant?

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Central to the tradition *Le livre noir* inhabits, though part of an earlier vintage, are the seminal studies of Henri Ellenberger from the 1960s and 1970s, beginning with his immense history of the “discovery of the unconscious.” He claims there is “hardly a single concept of Freud or Jung that had not been anticipated by the philosophy of

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16 *Le livre noir de la psychanalyse: vivre, penser et aller mieux sans Freud*, ed. Catherine Mayer (Paris, 2005). In the discussion that follows, only the first part of *Le livre noir* is considered, entitled “The Hidden Face of Freudian History,” pp. 32-184.


nature and Romantic medicine."¹⁹ Far from being a “discovery,” Freud’s “unconscious” had a philosophical genealogy going back at least to the seventeenth century, becoming a fashionable concept in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially in German and English-speaking cultural and scientific milieux.²⁰ Eduard von Hartmann’s (1842-1906) massive Philosophy of the Unconscious, situated at the confusing grey point where nineteenth-century Naturphilosophie intersects Western science, epitomises this interest.²¹

According to von Hartmann, Greek philosophy had no conception of the split between consciousness and unconsciousness,²² while a certain “naive” view of the division had held sway with Descartes and Locke. He then credits Leibniz in the seventeenth century as the first philosopher to recognise that the “mightiest influences in human life” are those that “take their rise in the sphere of the Unconscious.”²³ The weakness of Leibniz’ system was that these “petites perceptions” were “too low an intensity to affect consciousness”; by this move, claims von Hartmann, Leibniz “destroyed with one hand what he seemed to have built up with the other.”²⁴ There followed a long line of philosophical luminaries, mostly German, all deserving some form of due recognition in this area: Hume, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Herbart, Fechner, Carus, and others. Kant was singled out for special mention.²⁵ In the fifth section of his Anthropology, Kant had called “obscure” those innumerable ideas or sensations “in both man and animals,” of which we are not aware “but whose existence we can undoubtedly

¹⁹ Ellenberger, Discovery of the Unconscious, p. 205.
²⁰ See also Lancelot Law Whyte, The Unconscious Before Freud, (New York, 1960), p.170. According to Whyte: “It cannot be disputed that by 1870-1880, the general conception of the unconscious mind was a European commonplace.”
²² Hartmann, Philosophy of the Unconscious, p. 16.
²³ Hartmann, Philosophy of the Unconscious, p. 19.
²⁴ Hartmann, Philosophy of the Unconscious, p. 19.
²⁵ Hartmann, Philosophy of the Unconscious, p. 21.
Kant was also “the first who sought in the Unconscious for the essence of sexual love.” This was a topic to which von Hartmann himself devoted a chapter in the section concerning the “Unconscious in the Human mind”, coming to this conclusion amongst others: “the Unconscious constantly shows itself ... as the superior and master of Consciousness, and accordingly, the satisfaction of the conscious at the expense of the non-satisfaction of the unconscious Will causes more pain than the reverse.”

Surely music to the over-worked ears of psychoanalysts, this heritage has never been denied by them and their supporters. There has been a tendency, however, to accept uncritically Freud’s own version of events. According to Rosi Braidotti, Freudian psychoanalysis has demanded of philosophy, as “master-discourse” to the other “human sciences,” that it come to terms with “the subversive event that is a theory of unconscious thought.” Philosophy, however, has been “most stubborn in resisting the new practice of the unconscious.” This essentially confirms Freud’s view: when the investigation of “pathogenic repressions” and “other phenomena” forced the budding science of psychoanalysis to “take the concept of the unconscious seriously,” this provoked “a denial from the philosophers, for whom ‘conscious’ and ‘mental’ were identical, and who protested that they could not conceive of such an absurdity as the ‘unconscious mental’.”

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26 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. with intro. and notes Mary J. Gregor (The Hague, 1974), p. 17. He continued: “we ourselves are a plaything of obscure ideas, and our understanding cannot rescue itself from the absurdity in which their influence involves it, even though it recognizes them as illusions.”

27 Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, p. 22.


29 Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, p. 19. Later in her book, there is an attempt to implicate Foucault in this (male) philosophical conspiracy. See Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance*, p. 91.

30 Sigmund Freud [1925], *Autobiographical Study*, SE, 20, pp. 3-76, p. 31.
But who was protesting? Not Von Hartmann; he did not consider the idea of “unconscious mental” ridiculous at all. Neither, obviously, did Von Hartmann’s readers – in their thousands. The book survived 11 editions and numerous reprints, as well as translations into French and English, and it still reached a significant readership at the time of the author’s death some four decades later (the eleventh edition was published in 1904).\textsuperscript{31} It was reviewed in “professed philosophical magazines” as well as “ordinary literary journals”; “theological journals” and the “most influential political newspapers of Germany and Austria”; and even by “certain educational and medical papers.”\textsuperscript{32}

Rather, based on Ellenberger’s study, it seems closer to the truth that Freud was one of a long line of nineteenth-century medical practitioners and experimental psychologists who poached “the unconscious” from the “poets” and attempted to transform it into a respectable object. For them, “respectable” could only mean “scientific.” As argued throughout, in formulating a different project, Foucault inevitably demands the unconscious back from science. It was possible to conceive of a “logic” of the unconscious instead, forming the basis of a historical-philosophical field, or an ethnographic unconscious neither individual nor universally collective. But, however it may have been theorized, the “structural” unconscious developed by the human sciences in the 1950s, while not “Freudian” as such, is not a simple resurrection of von Hartmann’s Romantic unconscious (even if that were possible) because Freud intervened to revolutionize its meaning. Let us leave that for now and return to the critiques of \textit{Le livre noir}.

\textsuperscript{32} Hartmann [1875], “Preface to the Seventh edition,” \textit{Philosophy of the Unconscious}, p. xix. Von Hartmann went on to explain the success of his book by the “circumstances of the times”: first, a “fierce philosophical hunger on the part of the public at large”; and, second, a “state of unusual prostration of the Guild-philosophy professionally bound to satisfy this market”. Hartmann, “Preface,” \textit{Philosophy of the Unconscious}, p. xx.
Ellenberger is perhaps most famous for uncovering two documents, in 1972, which revealed startling new information about the treatment of Josef Breuer’s famous patient Anna O.\textsuperscript{33} Lest we forget: legend has it that Anna O, in the years 1880-1882, creatively invented the “talking cure” upon which Freud later based his whole “psychoanalysis.” Ellenberger noticed that Breuer’s original report of 1882 is radically different from the published case history of 1895, thirteen years later.\textsuperscript{34} Most importantly, the original account contains no “fourth period,” the time frame Breuer had described in the Studies as the “gradual cessation of the pathological states and symptoms up to June 1882.” (SE, 2, p. 22).\textsuperscript{35} Instead, there is a blunt follow-up report by a doctor named Laupus from the Sanatorium Bellevue in Kreuzlingen, Switzerland, where Anna O was transferred in 1882. He speaks of the patient’s struggle with “severe neuralgic pains” and the effort required to “wean her from the morphine addiction.”\textsuperscript{36} One interesting distortion therefore is Breuer’s failure to acknowledge drug dependency, a factor which no doubt played a part in Anna O’s “hysterical” symptoms, not to mention the difficulty addiction would have added to her recovery process. Letters from Breuer to the other doctors who took over her case after 1882 are peppered with discussion of her morphine and chloral habits.\textsuperscript{37} Lots of talk, not much cure.\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{34} Anna O was the first of the five reports comprising the Studies on Hysteria, the only one penned by Josef Breuer [1895], “Fraulein Anna O,” Studies on Hysteria. SE, 2, pp. 21-47.

\textsuperscript{35} According to Borch-Jacobsen: “The case of Anna O., far from being the empirical origin of Freud’s and Breuer’s new theory of hysteria, came to illustrate it after the fact, through a self-serving revisionism that was anything but innocent”, Borch-Jacobsen, Remembering Anna O, p. 60.

\textsuperscript{36} “D 23: Case History compiled by Josef Breuer,” Hirschmüller, Josef Breuer, p. 290.

\textsuperscript{37} Elisabeth Roudinesco now concedes that the story of Anna O is not to be read factually; rather, it provides a necessary founding “fantasy” through which the psychoanalytic movement can unite itself in the face of growing international and doctrinal diversity. See Roudinesco, Bataille de cent ans, p. 31.
Theorists of the “black book” traditions have pursued Ellenberger’s initial findings. In the 1980s, Peter Swales discovered that another patient in Breuer’s circle, known as Frau Cäcilie, had also been addicted to morphine since her youth.39 A minor figure in the Studies, Frau Cäcilie nevertheless gave Freud “very numerous and convincing proofs of the existence of a psychical mechanism of hysterical phenomena.” (SE, 2, p. 69, n. 1). She had also afforded ample evidence of the practice of “symbolization in hysteria” and Cäcilie was the subject of a four-page digression on this topic within the case study of Fräulein Elisabeth von R. (SE, 2, pp. 76-81).

Are we not justified therefore in demanding the meaning of “hysteria” in the early Freudian context when some of its star recruits were individuals dependent on opiates?40 After all, in Josef Breuer’s own terms: “If the chemical structure of the nervous system has been permanently altered by a persistent introduction of foreign substances, then a lack of these substances will cause states of excitation.” (SE, 2, p. 200). Elsewhere, Breuer mentions that the painful “withdrawal of morphine” precipitated an attack of what he labels “acute hysteria” in an unidentified patient. (SE, 2, p. 249). Freud, too, reports that, when called to the bedside of one his patients at the height of her “hysterical symptoms,” he was often forced to end the attack by “artificial means.” (SE, 2, p. 178).


40 As Swales asks rhetorically: “Was is not hazardous [for Freud] to generalize with respect to the psychological mechanism of hysteria on the basis of a woman addicted to morphine and therefore especially liable to alternating states of intense nervous excitation and sopor?” Swales, “Freud, His Teacher,” Freud, Appraisals and Reappraisals, p. 47. Unfortunately, Swales goes to the opposite extreme, at pains to portray Frau Cäcilie as an oddity, “actively given to fantasy” as her poetry will attest, “a highly atypical member of the human species” (p. 47), within a family background and milieu described as “aristocratic” and “pathogenic” (p. 27). This makes Cäcilie’s morphine addiction sound like a personal failing – part of her “inheritance” in fact – and nothing to do with medical practice at that time. Swales’s interpretation is absolutely contrary to the spirit of Foucault’s reading of Freud, as will be seen.
It is necessary to dwell momentarily on this issue, in order to bring forward a neglected topic in the history of psychoanalysis that Foucault's work does so much to illuminate: the relationship between psychoanalysis and nineteenth-century medicine and psychiatry. As the essential "alkaloid narcotic principle of opium," morphine was isolated in laboratories only in the early 1820s — reports started to filter through to doctors very soon afterwards. Morphine addiction was therefore unknown before this time. What is more, it was not a drug one could cultivate in the back garden: opium had first to be imported into Western countries, and, for each batch of opium, only a small yield of morphine resulted, and after a complicated technological extraction. The medical profession soon considered pure morphine crystals to have enormous advantages over standard opium. For a start, it was more potent — and "clean." Before long, the therapeutic use of morphine as an analgesic became widespread throughout Europe, England and the United States, dispensed to clients of the middle and upper classes. Its distribution was given an added boost after the invention of the hypodermic syringe in the 1860s. To take England as the example, one could cite the work of Francis Anstie, a highly respected physician of the Westminster Hospital who wrote extensively on narcotics and stimulants, was a campaigner for women's rights to enter the medical profession, and editor of Practitioner. He reported in that journal in 1868: "A country doctor should never start on his rounds without a syringe and a

41 For the early manufacture of morphine in England in the 1820s see Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England (London, 1981), pp. 136-138; a German company, Merck of Darmstadt, was the first to conduct the wholesale manufacture of the drug. See also David T. Courtwright, Dark Paradise: Opiate Addiction in America before 1940 (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).
42 For example, "Morphia, or Morphine," Lancet, 1 (1822-1823), pp. 67-68.
43 It was "three times" more powerful "for every therapeutic purpose". In addition, "the majority of the unpleasant symptoms which opiates can produce are entirely absent". See Francis E. Anstie, "The hypodermic injection of remedies," The Practitioner, 1 (1868), pp. 32-41, p. 40.
45 For example, Francis E. Anstie, Stimulants and Narcotics: Their Mutual Relations (London, 1864).
bottle of morphia solution. He gave clear and careful recommendations of doses of morphine based on his experience of “hundreds of injections I have made.”

Barely three years later, Anstie offered a more sober and defensive assessment. There was no need for “panic,” he said, nor for “distrust of one of the most valuable inventions of the century.” The problem resided in doctors giving doses too large, especially at the beginning of treatment: “I venture to say, that if practitioners generally will adopt the plan of always trying very small doses in the first instance ... very few of the ugly phenomena of the new-fashioned morphia habit will ever present themselves as the result of their prescriptions.” However, by the 1880s when Freud began his work (by which time Anstie had died), “morphinomania” was universally recognised as a serious problem. The withdrawal of morphine after habitual use was accompanied by a distinct set of symptoms as this account from 1887 details:

Just watch a morphia habitué deprived of the drug. The first slight uneasiness and sense of general discomfort gradually passes into extreme restlessness, accompanied by the most profound depression; the stomach becomes so irritable that nothing can be retained, and there is nausea and a distressing sensation of emptiness and sinking. The whole nervous system, which has been working so long under a deadening weight, abuses its liberty and runs absolutely riot; a breath of air which would bring relief to an ordinary sufferer is painful to him; so sensitive is the skin that a touch distresses, and even the eye and the ear are incapable of tolerating the most ordinary stimulations. To these troubles is added sleeplessness; the patient cannot get a moment’s rest; or, if he should close his

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47 Anstie claimed “one minim” (or “one-twelfth of a grain”) was “a very useful minimum dose in cases of slight neuralgic pain”, while “three minims” (or one-quarter of a grain) “is an unsafe dose to commence with: dangerous and even fatal results have been known to follow its use,” Anstie, “Hypodermic Injection,” Practitioner, pp. 37-38.
50 As reported in 1886: “It is now the exception, instead of the rule, to find a man or woman of middle age who is not more or less addicted to the abuse of morphia, chloral, bromide of potassium, or some one of the many sleep-inducers or pain-relievers which the nineteenth century has distinguished itself by evolving for the care and comfort of our less enduring and increasingly sensitive and excitable humanity”, “The Peril and Plague of Narcotics,” Lancet (1st May, 1886), pp. 845-846, p. 845.
eyes in sleep, horrible dreams and an indefinable terror take possession of him, and make him dread that condition which others look to for consolation and relief.51

It is reasonable to assume therefore that morphine consumption and addiction produced somatic effects, and a whole range of attendant ethical dilemmas, which were new to medical science in the latter half of the nineteenth century. At least, that was how Anstie viewed the problem in 1871: “I am under a strong impression that a particular kind of muscular atrophy, which especially attacks the facial muscles, is one of the results of large and long-continued doses of hypodermic morphia.”52 Facial neuralgia was one of the “hysterical” symptoms besetting both Frau Cäcilie and Anna O. As part of the erratic and uneven course of treatment Anna O received at the Bellevue sanatorium, “facial neuralgia made its presence known at the same time each evening.”53 These pains gradually got worse, “leading to tic douloureux”, and by seven o’clock “the whole left side of the face was affected by animated spasms.” Leeches, electricity, and arsenic, “were wholly ineffective”; before long, it was back to morphine.

Obviously, one would not want to suggest a facile set of circumstances whereby what was called “hysteria” in Freud’s day was really just biochemical reactions to a potent drug whose properties were not fully appreciated. Nevertheless, it is surely relevant that the growth of morphine dependency due to the hypodermic syringe, accompanied by ignorance of its addictive side-effects, then the decline of opiate treatments more generally in the wake of realization of its serious effects, prompting medical reforms in


the early years of the twentieth century, all of this coincided quite neatly with a particular middle-class “efflorescence” and then “disappearance” of “hysteria” in roughly those same decades: 1860-1910. Yet, in her detailed account of the history of psychoanalysis in France, Élisabeth Roudinesco remains faithful to the code of silence instituted by Breuer and Freud, and replicated by Jones et al., on the prevalence of morphine addiction, and so does not consider the role it may have played in determining what constituted “hysteria” amongst both patients and doctors of Freud’s medical milieu.

There is also the philosophical issue: at what point does the “medical” treatment of hysteria end, and its psychoanalytic version take over, if drugs are involved? What is the “object” under investigation? The question becomes especially imperative in light of Foucault’s claim that the “hysterization” of women’s bodies “ran wild” in the nineteenth century, leading to a “pathologicization” of those same bodies: “the female body become a medical object par excellence.” Morphine was more likely to be administered to women than to men. In the case of Frau Cäcilie, her habit had begun after an encounter with gynaecological medicine when she was barely a teenager; use of the drug continued “more or less sporadically” throughout her life. Doctors at ground

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54 Courtwright, *Dark Paradise*, pp. 52-53; Berridge and Edwards, *Opium and the People*, pp. 135-149.
55 There are various theories about the “disappearance” of hysteria in the early twentieth century, none of which consider medical reforms in regard to opiates as part of the equation. For a summary discussion, see Mark Micale, *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton, 1995), pp. 169-175. In the version of both Showalter and Micale, Anna O’s addiction to “pain-relieving drugs” coincided with her time spent in sanatoriums and therefore had nothing to do with her treatment for “hysteria.” See Showalter, *Hystories*, p. 39; Micale, *Approaching Hysteria*, p. 64.
56 Another account of Freud’s first patients similarly makes no mention of this issue. See Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester, *Freud’s Women* (London, 1992).
level gave short shrift to the distinction between the "somatic" and the "psychic"—especially when it came to feminine pathologies. One doctor in 1864 used the hypodermic injection of morphine, "with prompt and marked success," in "several cases of severe dysmenorrhea [period cramps], with or without hysterical complications, and in several others of uterine and ovarian neuralgia, and of facial neuralgia having a uterine origin."

Yet Freud's understanding of morphinomania was no less alarming, as he considered the phenomenon to be exclusively psychological, and interpreted its physical side-effects in those terms as well. He began to suspect early in his treatment of Frau Cäcilie that a whole set of bodily symptoms ordinarily "regarded as organically determined" were in her case "of psychical origin or at least possessed a psychical meaning." (SE, 2, p. 180). In particular, Freud was determined to prove that her longstanding facial neuralgia was not the result of physical causes. (SE, 2, p. 177). Freud even reported excitedly in a letter of 1885 that exposing the psychological basis of facial neuralgia would launch his career—which goes to show, amongst other things, how widespread the problem must have been. In the case of "Dora," whom he treated in 1900, Freud was not fooled by her "alleged facial neuralgia," and smiled knowingly when she recounted the circumstances of its appearance: it was a "self-punishment," he claimed.

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60 Henry J. Bennet, "On the hypodermic treatment of uterine pain," The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, 70 (1864), pp. 302-304. Bennet is described here as the "late Physician-Accoucheur to the Royal Free Hospital."
61 "My object has a specific name, it is called 'neuralgia'—face-ache...The question is whether I shall succeed in curing it. I have already told you about one case which has very much improved;...I am so excited about it, for if it works I would be assured for some time to come of attracting the attention so essential for getting on in the world." See Sigmund Freud [1885], "To Martha Bernays," trans. Steven A. Edminster and Frederick C. Redlich, Cocaine Papers by Sigmund Freud, ed. Robert Byck (New York, 1974), p. 92.
the result of "remorse at having once given Herr K. a box on the ear, and at having transferred her feelings of revenge onto me." 62

Freud also underestimated the particular characteristics and potency of morphine, leading him, in the first instance, to be seduced by reports from the United States – the therapeutic drug capital of the world even then 63 – that a newly-discovered stimulant, cocaine, could alleviate morphine addiction. 64 But the same negligence was evident more generally, in that Freud classed morphinomania on a psychological continuum with addictions to other substances such as alcohol and tobacco, and these all gained their potency as substitutes for the “primary addiction” to masturbation: “The role played by this addiction in hysteria is enormous.” 65 It was only to be expected that hysteric would become addicted to medical drugs, according to this line of reasoning, given their predilection to masturbate rather than lead a “normal” sexual life: “The insight has dawned on me that masturbation is the one major habit, the ‘primary addiction,’ and it is only as a substitute and replacement for it that the other addictions – to alcohol, morphine, tobacco, and the like – come into existence.” 66 Or, as he expressed it in a published paper:

Not everyone who has occasion to take morphia, cocaine, chloral-hydrate, and so on, for a period, acquires in this way an “addiction” to them. Closer inquiry usually shows that these narcotics are meant to serve – directly or indirectly – as a substitute for a lack of sexual satisfaction; and whenever normal sexual life

63 According to an editorial from 1880: “Therapeutics is the forte of the American medical profession, and year by year the opinion of our practitioners on the therapeutic properties of drugs is becoming more and more respected abroad.” See Editorial [1880], “Erythroxylon Coca as an Antidote to the Opium Habit,” Detroit Therapeutic Gazette (June 15, 1880), Cocaine Papers, pp. 19-21, p. 20.
64 Freud listed this as one of cocaine’s four potential benefits. He claimed that there were “some sixteen reports of cases in which the patient has been successfully cured of addiction; in only one instance is there a report of failure of coca to alleviate morphine addiction,” Sigmund Freud [1884], “On Coca,” Cocaine Papers, pp. 48-73, p. 70. See also Sigmund Freud [1884], “Abstracts of the scientific writings of Dr. Sigmund Freud,” SE, 3, p. 233.
65 Freud, Complete Letters to Fliess, p. 287.
66 Freud, Complete Letters to Fliess, p. 287.
can no longer be re-established, we can count with certainty on the patient’s relapse.\textsuperscript{67}

If the tidy records compiled by Jones and company are designed to recount the titillating discovery of “hysteria” without these revelations of Freud’s unscientific beliefs, they of all people should have known that, one day, documents from the murky depths of nineteenth-century medical history would rise up and disturb them in the end: “\textit{Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo.}”\textsuperscript{68}

As well as uncovering opiate dependency existing in early psychoanalytic contexts, Ellenberger had pre-figured Foucault in debunking the myth that, until Freud, science and philosophy had not dared speak of sexuality. So-called nineteenth-century “Victorian society,” Ellenberger claimed, was a era when “popular books on sexual matters began to appear everywhere,” and even scientific studies by doctors such as von Krafft-Ebing provoked “a deep interest that soon reached a wide public.”\textsuperscript{69} Ellenberger contended that “the real meaning” of the opposition to this sexual literature at the time “is misunderstood today.”\textsuperscript{70} Thus, “Freud was not the first, nor the only one interested in sexuality, including perverse sexuality.”\textsuperscript{71} Or, almost every element of Freud’s theory of child sexuality “was exactly anticipated, or in some way implied or suggested, before

\textsuperscript{68} This line was the motto of Freud’s \textit{Interpretation of Dreams}. According to the editor’s note, it comes from Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid}, and is translated thus: “If I cannot bend the higher powers, I will move the infernal regions” (\textit{SE}, 4, p. 608, note 1).
\textsuperscript{69} Ellenberger, \textit{Discovery of the Unconscious}, p. 298.
\textsuperscript{70} He continues: “Contrary to the present-day legend that would have us believe that those were days of sexual obscurantism, on the Continent there were no barriers to the publication, distribution of, and access to such writings,” Ellenberger, \textit{Discovery of the Unconscious}, p. 298.
him."\(^{72}\) There was nothing in the "structure" of nineteenth-century medical discourse which could have "prohibited" the emergence of his concepts, and so on.\(^{73}\)

In these various endeavours to return Freud to his correct epistemological context, the most notable perhaps is Frank Sulloway’s massive investigation.\(^{74}\) According to Sulloway:

In the historical alliance of psychoanalysis with sexology, it is a reflection of Freud’s subsequent greatness that his name has become associated with many important ideas about human sexuality that he did not originate. Terms and constructs like *libido*, *component instincts*, *erotogenic zones*, *autoeroticism*, and *narcissism* ... were actually brought into scientific circulation between 1880 and 1900 by other contemporary students of sexology.\(^{75}\)

Sulloway, too, is a major contributor to *Le livre noir*. However, the fact that any consideration of Foucault’s counter history of sexuality is virtually absent from recent “black” analyses is enough of an indication that they derive from a different philosophical tradition.\(^{76}\) Let us now highlight these differences.

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Firstly, merging Freud with his “precursors” or contemporaries is not new; it too has a history. Already in the 1930s, Havelock Ellis claimed that Freud’s “cathartic” method was not so original after all,\(^{77}\) and that Freud was only more brazen than others when it came to promoting the importance of sex, an idea “implicit in the biological conception

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\(^{75}\) Sulloway, *Biologist of the Mind*, p. 277.

\(^{76}\) It is disappointing, for example, that Foucault’s work was not discussed in a recent interview with Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen. See *Constructivisme et psychanalyse : Debat entre Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen et Georges Fischmann* (Paris, 2005).

of life" anyway: "there can be no doubt whatever that the frank and open recognition of
sex would have been reached even if Freud had never been born."78 Also from the
1930s, Carl Jung had described the progress of psychological sciences in organic terms,
placing Freud in a "particular current of thought which can be traced back to the
Reformation,"79 one that flowed together like a river from many obscure sources,
"gaining rapidly in strength in the nineteenth century and winning many adherents,
amongst whom Freud is not an isolated figure."80 But with such a flood of ideas to
choose from, this only makes it all the more mysterious why Freud stayed afloat while
others sank – so much so that a film like Woody Allen’s Annie Hall of the 1970s owes a
considerable amount of its humour to implicit cultural knowledge of Freud’s theories
amongst its middle-class, educated audience. Where are the concepts, or even the
names, of Freud’s contemporaries, let alone his alchemist forebears? Can this really be
attributed to Freud’s self-promotion skills from beyond the grave?

What is more, Sulloway’s efforts to prove the “biological” basis of psychoanalysis and
therefore its continuity with nineteenth-century thought significantly fails to discuss one
Freudian concept that was precisely non-biological if not anti-biological: the castration
complex. Given that this concept formed the crux of Freud’s theory of sexual
difference, and occupies a fundamental place in his whole Oedipal system of infantile
development, one very much at odds with biological assumptions,81 this makes
Sulloway’s oversight all the more curious. The concept was unknown, and perhaps

80 Jung, Freud and Psychoanalysis, p. 326.
81 In Laplanche’s view, Freud’s postulation that children believe everyone at the beginning has a penis –
so those without one have must have had it cut off – is the “theoretical inversion of biological theory,” for
the latter posits the original sex as female, out of which the male develops as a variant. See Laplanche,
even impossible, outside of Freudian discourse, and it was repudiated internally by a long line of psychoanalysts headed by Ernest Jones and Melanie Klein, all of whom otherwise accepted the “Oedipus complex.” According to Juliet Mitchell, the “castration complex” was the key concept that “split” psychoanalysis in the 1920s and 1930s: “It stands as the often silent centre of all the theories that flourished in the decades before the war; the effects of its acceptance or rejection are still being felt.”

Would this topic not have been important for Sulloway’s study?

In one of his contributions to Le livre noir, Sulloway addresses Freud’s relationship to “science.” Here we can identify a definite contrast with Foucault. Not only does Sulloway think it perfectly normal that sexuality should be studied “scientifically,” but at the heart of his reproaches against Freudian psychoanalysis is its failure to be scientific enough. In this, Sulloway merely resurrects and relies uncritically on a version of Karl Popper’s hyper-inflated falsification theory. Sulloway claims Freud developed hypotheses “completely convincing and plausible for his time”, but “he never considered the second key stage of the procedure.” This second stage consisted of “testing hypotheses and abandoning them if they turn out to be false” – the crucial requirement for a “real science.” On this basis, Sulloway pronounces the practitioners of psychoanalysis “pseudo-scientists” espousing “pseudo-scientific ideas that they are incapable of questioning.”

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84 For a detailed critical exposition of Popper’s philosophy of science, see Chalmers, What is this thing called Science?, pp. 38-76.
This view ignores Freud’s awareness that psychoanalysis was situated in the intermediate regions between “medicine” and “philosophy.” It gained “absolutely no advantage” from these conditions: doctors, bought up “to respect only anatomical, physical and chemical factors” regard psychoanalysis suspiciously as a “speculative system,” while philosophers reproach it, and the concepts it develops, for lacking “clarity and precision.” (SE, 19, pp. 215-217). What is more, psychoanalysis involved the employment of techniques. Traditional philosophy could safely remain aloof from this “hands on” dimension, but, again, this did not necessarily align psychoanalysis with other types of “scientific” procedures. In the case of “Little Hans,” Freud argued that:

Psychoanalysis is not an impartial scientific investigation, but a therapeutic measure. Its essence is not to prove anything, but merely to alter something. In a psycho-analysis the physician always gives his patient (sometimes to a greater and sometimes to a less extent) the conscious anticipatory ideas by the help of which he is put in a position to recognize and to grasp the unconscious material. (SE, 10, p. 104).

True, Freud never renounced an uncritical reverence for the “scientist”, and, amongst these, the “doctor” held a special prestige in this mind. “Clinical evidence” remained the foundation of his theories; the more “speculative works” of his later professional life did not mean that he had turned his back on patient observation: “I have on the contrary always remained in the closest touch with the analytic material and have never ceased working at detailed points of clinical or technical importance.” (SE, 20, p. 59). His personal life reflected this attitude: far from cultivating alliances with the many musicians, artists, writers, painters and philosophers who, like himself, and to use Roland Jaccard’s terms, were concerned “to demystify the social imaginary of their

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times and overturn bourgeois taboos,"\textsuperscript{89} Freud scrupulously avoided these associations.

His encounter with the composer Gustav Mahler, for example, was prompted only by the latter's insistence.\textsuperscript{90}

However, Freud knew very well that to label psychoanalysis a "pseudo-science" was merely a political strategy. He was familiar with it: in 1917, Havelock Ellis had called Freud a great "artist" but no "scientist"; this represented for Freud the "most refined and amiable form of resistance."\textsuperscript{91} Foucault points out that using the term "science" to designate a global or comprehensive method did not exist prior to the nineteenth century; one spoke of "sciences" – in the plural – not "la science." (\textit{SMD}, p. 182).

Lacan, too, made reference to this distinction in his seminars of 1964-1965. Science, or "connaissance" had been a source of meditation "since Plato", but psychoanalysis is caught up in a different conception of "science," one that forms an integral part of its "conditions": "la science."\textsuperscript{92}

In any case, the general stance of \textit{Le livre noir} on this issue has nothing in common with Foucault's critical reading of psychoanalysis. Rather than chastise Freud for lack of scientific rigour, "it is surely necessary to question ourselves" about "the kind of power that is presumed to accompany such a science." ("\textit{TL}," p. 84; \textit{SMD}, p. 9). In the lecture series entitled \textit{Society Must be Defended} delivered in the winter of 1975-1976, Foucault offers one of the clearest signals that his own methodology has absolutely no pretensions to "scientific" status:

\textsuperscript{89} Jaccard, "Freud et société viennoise," \textit{Histoire de la psychanalyse}, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{91} Freud, cited in Mitchell, \textit{Psychoanalysis and Feminism}, p. 346.
\textsuperscript{92} Lacan, \textit{Four Fundamental Concepts}, p. 231. See also Sheridan's translator's note at the bottom of the page.
I would remind you how numerous have been those who for many years now, probably for more than half a century, have questioned whether Marxism was, or was not, a science. One might say that the same issue has been posed, and continues to be posed, in the case of psychoanalysis, or even worse, in that of the semiology of literary texts. But to all these demands [ ... ] the fault lies in your very determination to make a science of Marxism or psychoanalysis or this or that study. ... Which speaking, discoursing subjects – which subjects of experience and knowledge – do you then want to diminish when you say: "I who conduct this discourse am conducting a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist"? ... [Y]ou are investing [these] discourses and those who uphold them with the effects of a power which the West since Medieval times has attributed to science and has reserved for those engaged in scientific discourse. ("TL," pp. 84-85; SMD, pp. 9-10).

Foucault's relationship to science is one of the most fascinating and original aspects of his work. As is well known, concomitant to his appropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy, Foucault placed himself in the tradition of historical epistemology developed by George Canguilhem. According to Arnold Davidson, this approach presents "a very distinctive perspective about how to write the history of science." The essential feature for our purposes was the spotlight Canguilhem shone on sciences lacking what Foucault called "noble" blood. Whether based on a "discontinuist" epistemology (Gaston Bachelard in France), or a more continuitist and progressivist model (Karl Popper in England), traditions within the philosophy of science had been too enthralled by Einstein's revolution, having us believe that the problems raised by science are limited to the degree of "formalization" or "mathematization" reached by it. Canguilhem, who focused almost exclusively on the history of biology and

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93 Foucault, "Critical History/Intellectual History," Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p. 22.
94 Davidson, Emergence of Sexuality, p. 67. See also Davidson, "On Epistemology and Archaeology: From Canguilhem to Foucault," Emergence of Sexuality, pp. 192-206.
96 This is not to diminish the differences between the French and Anglo traditions. See Lecourt, "Introduction to the English Edition," Marxism and Epistemology, pp. 7-19, where Lecourt demolishes any temptation to equate Thomas Kuhn with the French epistemological tradition inaugurated by Gaston Bachelard. Foucault would agree, saying: "If we were to look outside of France for something corresponding to the work of Cavaillès, Koyré, Bachelard and Canguilhem, it is undoubtedly in the
medicine, affected a significant shift in French epistemology: he brought the history of science "down from the heights (mathematics, astronomy, Galilean mechanics, Newtonian physics, relativity theory) toward the middle regions where knowledge is much less deductive, much more dependent on external processes (economic stimulations or institutional supports) and where it has remained tied much longer to the marvels of the imagination."\(^{97}\)

Knowledge cannot be classed neatly as "science" or "ideology" here. In Plato's quarrel with "rhetoric," he contrasted *episteme* with *doxa*; the former produces real knowledge as opposed to mere opinion or belief.\(^{98}\) Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* concerns itself with the *doxa* of contemporary societies, as do many cultural and literary analyses.\(^{99}\) However, what about the area neither pure propaganda, yet not classed as science without qualification – the position Barthes himself is occupying as analyst? As Foucault described it in *The Order of Things*, "between the already 'encoded' eye and reflexive knowledge, there is a middle region which liberates order itself." (OT, p. xxi).

This middle region is probably the most fundamental of all, says Foucault, being "anterior to words, perceptions and gestures," yet also "more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more 'true' than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation." (OT, p. xxi).

The fundamental codes of a culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every person, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he or she will be dealing and within which he or she will be at home.

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At the other extremity of thought, there are the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established and not some other. But between these two regions, so distant from one another, lies a domain which, even though its role is mainly an intermediary one, is nonetheless fundamental... It is here that a culture [...] frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones ... (OT, p. xxi, trans. mod.).

Thus, while Freud recognised that psychoanalysis resides in this “middle” region (between “medicine” and “philosophy” in his terms), Foucault’s schema suggests in addition that psychoanalysis, along with ethnology, far from being disadvantaged by occupying this “middle” position, is also dependent on neither wing. Namely, psychoanalysis has been able to “free itself” sufficiently from both naive empiricism and strict science, to cast a critical eye on the dominant order itself. After all, even in the most abstract fields of physics and astronomy, there is a search for “man” and “life.” What are they not searching for? The regime of logic through which both the empirical and philosophical wings of today’s knowledges gain their coherency – namely, an order based on “man” – is by no means the “only possible” order, nor necessarily the “best” one. And, indeed, Foucault’s ontology of Western culture is also made possible by these conditions; by the undermining of “man” effected previously by psychoanalysis and ethnology. Foucault made the analysis of this terrain his home, relished the difficulties, and the rest, as we know and will meet again, is “history.”

So, to sum up this encounter with the “black book,” Arnold Davidson has observed that Sulloway and others merely replace one myth about Freud’s place in the history of science with another.\(^{100}\) Instead of the hero legends detailing a triumphant revolutionary, one now installs the myth of the “career discontents” and Freud becomes

\(^{100}\) Davidson, Emergence of Sexuality, p. 70.
nothing more than a “demagogue, usurper and megalomaniac.”¹⁰¹ In Davidson’s view, both myths depend on the “same kinds of historiographical presumptions.” Neither of these myths will allow us “accurately to ground the question whether he was an originator of thought or merely a conserver, and sometimes extender, of other people’s ideas.”¹⁰² Let us now begin to consider Foucault’s position in more detail.

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The main difference Foucault offers from other “revisionist” histories is that he does not single out Freud or psychoanalysis for special critical attention. Foucault’s object is the ethnographic conditions common to all, which is our history as well, and this is why he opened his text with the line “We Victorians” – meaning us now. In the lecture series of 1973-1974 entitled Psychiatric Power, Foucault set out to investigate institutional psychiatry from the point at which he had suspended his earlier history of madness – that is, on the threshold of the nineteenth century. Psychoanalysis has only a marginal presence in these lectures. But Freud’s work was dependent on a prior process: namely, the rise and consolidation of “psychiatric power.” Had psychiatry not first “manoeuvred” itself into a secure position as a sibling to medicine, psychoanalysis would not have been possible. This relationship between medicine and psychiatry did not happen spontaneously nor inevitably, and not overnight. It was achieved through three main avenues (though Foucault stresses that this is not an “exhaustive list”). (PP, pp. 234-235).

¹⁰¹ Davidson, Emergence of Sexuality, p. 71.
¹⁰² According to Davidson: “Whether Freud did or did not discover infantile sexuality, whatever his own changing assessment of his indebtedness to Fliess, whether he was the first, second or third to use the word Trieb when speaking of sexuality, all of these claims, both pro and con, are radically inadequate if we want to understand his place in the history of psychiatry. Both myths rely on an inappropriate invocation of his name; both misplace the role that such invocation should have in writing the history of psychoanalysis”, Davidson, Emergence of Sexuality, p. 71.
First and foremost, there was the “ritual of questioning and the extortion of confession,” a process that has “not changed much within psychiatric practice” up to today and, of course, occupies a crucial role in psychoanalysis. Second, there was “magnetism and hypnosis,” the latter being a technique Freud employed at one point, as did many medical practitioners in the 1880s and 1890s. (PP, p. 235). Hypnosis was “very clearly used as an adjunct of the doctor’s physical, corporal power.” (PP, p. 235).103 Thirdly, and finally, “a well-known element about which the history of psychiatry has been significantly quiet”: drugs. The resort to drugs during “the first eighty years of the nineteenth century” was just as widespread as it is today: there was “an enormous use of drugs in psychiatric hospitals” at that time, “the main ones being opium, amyl nitrate, chloroform and ether.” (PP, p. 278). Like “drugs still today”, their chief purpose was “disciplinary”: they were instruments for “maintaining order, calm, and keeping patients quiet.” (PP, p. 235). From around 1850, another application arose, whereby drugs were also used to determine “real” mental illness as opposed to simulation. Thus, “massive doses of opium” were dispensed to certain asylum patients in order to determine whether the subject really was or was not mentally ill: opium became “an authority for deciding between madness and its simulation.” (PP, p. 280).

It should be mentioned that the parameters of morphine administration discussed earlier were strictly medical – that is, within the range of the everyday physician, the sole aim being the relief of pain. Morphine did not have a presence in asylum institutions – at least not according to Foucault’s presentation – and was instead distributed to wealthy clients, precisely those that Freud and Breuer encountered and treated. One of the

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103 Elisabeth Roudinesco notes that, in Mesmer’s original schema of magnetic treatments dating from the early nineteenth century, “only men possessed the magnetic power to put women into a trance and provoke strong erotic agitations” – not vice versa. This would suggest that “physical, corporal power” was understood by the hypnotisers to be masculine only. See Roudinesco, Bataille de cent ans, p. 52.
features of Freudian psychoanalysis has been its attempts to move away from reliance on drug treatments of any kind, but this does not give licence to ignore the proximate relationship between early psychoanalysis and gynaecological medicine, to which patients like Frau Cäcelia and Anna O testify. This connection has never been properly investigated or analysed by historians of psychoanalysis.

If professional rivalries and struggles for originality marked the territory of Freud’s research, this only provides further proof of the weight sexuality carried in these scientific and medical milieux. Again, in contrast to the “black” analyses, Foucault’s preoccupation is to explain this very “will to know” in the first place, an ethnographic complexion he claims can be distinguished from cultures endowed with an *ars erotica*. Foucault will ask: why such importance for everyone, not just Freud? Rather than making pleasure or babies with our sexes, we make truth – at least, over and above babies and pleasures. In a lecture delivered in Japan in 1978 – entitled “Sexuality and power” – he reiterates this contrast between the two civilizations, Japanese and European, and stresses that his “history of sexuality” is “precisely the history of this sexual science” (my italics). (*DE*, III, p. 556). In other words, not just Freud, but *all* scientific pretensions in this area must come under scrutiny.

Foucault began the lecture in Japan by noting a seeming “contradiction” in the late nineteenth-century cultural and scientific milieux inhabited by Freud and his contemporaries. On the one hand, the phenomenon known as “hysteria” fascinated doctors and dominated the landscape of psychiatric reasoning. It was defined at the

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104 As a critical aside in his review of August Forel’s book on hypnotism, Freud contends that psychiatrists and doctors were in the habit of “suffocating” the mental activity of their patients “with large doses of bromide, morphine and chloral”. See Sigmund Freud [1893], “Review of August Forel’s Hypnotism,” *SE*, 1, p. 94.
time by "forgetfulness" and "massive misunderstanding" of oneself, by a subject who ignored "an entire fragment of his or her past or an entire part of his or her body." (DE, III, p. 554). Yet, simultaneously, there was a phenomenon of equal importance overlooked by Freud and his colleagues because they were themselves too caught up in the whole process: this was the "over-production" of knowledge about sexuality, a historical process going back at least to Augustine and the Church fathers in the early centuries of Christianity. The formation of hundreds of scientific concepts – "libido" being one of a "veritable encyclopaedia" – was the logical consequence of a will to "know" in this area, leading to distinctly Western types of sexual understanding, orientation and difference.

Foucault states here that he is not offering an "anti-psychoanalysis": to study the overproduction of knowledge about sexuality is "not to say that psychoanalysis is mistaken"; that there is not in our societies "a misunderstanding by the subject of his [or her] own desire." (DE, III, p. 555). However, one cannot deny that the lack of recognition occurring on the level of the individual and his or her body is, curiously, set amongst a hyper-development of scientific knowledge on the cultural plane; the two phenomena must surely be related. The "overproduction of socio-cultural knowledge of sexuality" needed to be studied in order to appreciate to what extent psychoanalysis – "which justifiably presents itself as the rational foundation of a knowledge about desire" – is nevertheless "without a doubt part of this huge economy." (DE, III, p. 555). As he expressed it elsewhere, psychoanalysis is situated at a point where "two process" – confessional procedures and the medicalisation of sexuality – "intersect":

One can say certainly that psychoanalysis grew out of that formidable development and institutionalisation of confessional procedures that has been so characteristic of our civilization. Viewed over a shorter span of time, it forms
part of that medicalisation of sexuality, which is another strange phenomenon of the West: ... All sexuality runs the risk at one and the same time of being in itself an illness and of inducing illnesses with number. It cannot be denied that psychoanalysis is situated at the point where these two processes intersect.\(^{105}\)

Whether Freud informed himself properly as to his colleagues’ statements and theories on matters of sexuality, the point is that he paid just as little attention as they did to the cultural context pulling the strings from behind the scientific scenes. Famously promoting himself as a lone crusader, Freud’s stress on sexuality was in reaction to what he perceived to be an underestimation of this dimension by the medical profession: “Psychoanalysis has done justice to the sexual function in man by making a detailed examination of its importance in mental and practical life – an importance which has been emphasized by many creative writers and by some philosophers, but which has never been recognised by science.” (SE, 8, p. 180). Once “the blinkers of partiality and prejudice had been removed, observation had no difficulty in revealing that sexual interests and activities are present in the human child at almost every age and from the very first.” (SE, 8, p. 180).

Yet the tendency to ridicule previous medical “silence” about sexual organs, while advocating the need for an explicit discourse, is an old scientific theme according to Foucault. He gives the example of Jacques Duval, a doctor whose expert opinion in the case of “the Rouen hermaphrodite” of 1601 became the basis of a treatise written on the subject in 1612. Duval, too, already speaks dramatically of the “shameful silence” that has marred investigation in this area, almost weeping at the “supreme impiety” preventing souls from seeing the light in this area. (ABN, p. 70). Foucault comments that it was during this period that literary language began to be subjected to “a regime of

censorship or displacement” in the expression of sexuality discussed in the previous chapter; but, nonetheless, in the same period, “there was an exactly opposite movement in medical discourse.” (ABN, p. 70). Thus, even as early as the seventeenth century, the need for a proper science of sexuality was recognised: detailed descriptions of the “anatomical organization” of sex organs “appears and is theorized, with the case of the Rouen hermaphrodite.” (ABN, p. 71).

For Foucault, neither Freud nor any other scientist (and we would add: or “feminist”) can be seen as producing, individually, a “break” in the understanding of “bodies and pleasures” – it is the movement as a whole is that is significant in cultural terms. As Foucault put it: “the mere fact that I’ve adopted this course undoubtedly excludes for me the possibility of Freud figuring as the radical break, on the basis of which everything else has to be re-thought.” (“CF,” p. 212). In the discussion with Lacanian theorists that took place in 1977, Foucault stated his position unequivocally:

[I]n the usual histories one reads that sexuality was ignored by medicine, and above all by psychiatry, and that at last Freud discovered the sexual aetiology of neurosis. Now everyone knows that that isn’t true, that the problem of sexuality was massively and manifestly inscribed in the medicine and psychiatry of the nineteenth century, and that basically Freud was only taking literally what he heard Charcot say one evening: it is indeed all a question of sexuality. The strength of psychoanalysis 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. (“CF,” p. 212).

Put broadly therefore, Foucault’s view implies that historians of ideas have focussed too keenly on Freud’s role, whether positive or negative, in the discovery of the sexual aetiology of neurosis to the detriment of his place in the development of the concept of
the unconscious. Although Foucault never characterised his own work as an attempt to correct the undervaluation of the “unconscious” within philosophy and the history of ideas, by relieving us of ahistorical “sexuality,” Foucault gives the “unconscious” a philosophical prominence not apparent in today’s psychoanalytic discourses. He forces the unconscious to go it alone as an independent entity; to free itself from its dominant “sexual” partner. Such a divorce is not possible in Lacan’s reading of Freud. Let us focus once more on the unconscious and determine how Freud used this concept in his early writings to bring about a revolution in the field of cultural knowledge.

106 This is quite different to the authors of the “black analyses” who are just as contemptuous of Freud’s “unscientific” endeavours in the area of the everyday unconscious. Peter Swales, for example, argues that the forgetting of the name Signorelli and its replacement by two other names – Botticelli and Boltraffio – could not possibly have taken place in the way Freud described it in the famous opening example of The Psychopathologies of Everyday Life. But Swales’s point is irrelevant, for the story, fact or fiction, is only meant to serve as an illustration for the reality of “forgetting” generally. See P. J. Swales, “Freud, Death and Sexual Pleasures: On the Psychical Mechanism of Dr. Sigmund Freud,” Arc de Cercle. An International Journal of the History of the Mind-Sciences, 1:1 (2003): 6-74.
Chapter Ten

Freud's Unconscious Revolution:
Confined to Normal Sexuality

This final chapter will attempt to interpret Freud's "revolution" in a novel way, based on Foucault's preliminary explorations of this history. It will be argued that Freud's originality lies in effecting a new political shift in the history of truth by his particular employment of the "unconscious" – a non-medical, even "non-scientific" concept. Demonstrating that everyday lapses are on a continuum with "neurosis," or that dreams present, in Freud's words, "a striking analogy to the wildest productions of insanity," he transposed a liberal political philosophy into a medical register: regardless of race, class, gender, we are all a little "neurotic," all equally susceptible to infectious "ideas" no less than physical "germs." It will then be demonstrated, through a brief exposition of Jean Laplanche's enhancements of Freudian theory, that this political revolution Freud initiated, almost despite himself, was always held back, and mortally, by the conservative idea of "normal sexual constitution" propagated by psychoanalysis.

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Right from the beginnings of his career, Freud insisted that neuroses were "acquired" – meaning they were not hereditary. Freud was not straying from medical boundaries here: a disease arising from an infection, for example, is an "acquired" condition. Namely, through lifestyle or environment, the body may be altered from a normal to a pathological state, while, importantly, one's genetic make-up or family history is of no relevance. Although conformist to a medical conception of hysteria, Freud's insistence on its "acquired" status represented the fundamental core of his disagreement with his
“master” Jean-Martin Charcot, something that cannot be underestimated. For Foucault, this produced a monumental break in the history of science: “Freud turned the theory of degeneracy inside out, like a glove.” ("CF," p. 212). Let us attempt to construct what Foucault meant by this.

As detailed, Foucault’s lectures of 1973-1974 entitled *Psychiatric Power* were concerned to investigate institutional psychiatry in the nineteenth century. Foucault argued that psychiatric power was established in this period through three main avenues: the “ritual of questioning and the extortion of confession”, “magnetism and hypnosis,” and “drugs.” (*PP*, pp. 234-235). In the final lecture of the series, from February 1974, Foucault presents a fascinating discussion of the problem of hysteria in the context of Freud’s intellectual relationship with Charcot. (*PP*, pp. 297-333). Although Freud has a minor place and Foucault does not explicitly address the question of degeneracy here, nor how Freud turned it all “inside out,” the lecture furnishes additional details consistent with the arguments in *La volonté de savoir*, enabling clarification of Foucault’s critical understanding of psychoanalysis.

To summarize Foucault’s discussion, the issue revolved around simulation. In the 1880s and 1890s, Freud had supported Charcot’s neurological theories (the Salpêtrière model) against the medical explanations associated with the Nancy School, represented primarily by Hyppolyte Bernheim. Charcot’s “revolution” consisted in taking the symptomatology of hysteria seriously and cataloguing all its various forms. This was being undermined by the Nancy School: Bernheim accused Charcot of demonstrating, through hypnosis, little more than the hysterics’s particular susceptibility to the doctor’s influence. Charcot retaliated against these attacks with the concept of “trauma”: this
was the name given to those injuries resulting from work accidents or railway crashes, bodily damage not seen before by medical science. (PP, p. 313). The elaboration of this concept, “trauma”, enabled Charcot to place the symptomatology of hysteria in the same basket as accidental physical malformations. For a brief time, this rescued hypnosis, and the hysterics, from the attacks of the Nancy school: here was real physical evidence of hysterical illness, identical to what we see in organic disturbances from accidents; the doctor does not invent them. As Foucault put it: “if someone who is not hypnotized [i.e., an accident victim] can be found with symptoms similar to those obtained in a hysteric by means of hypnosis, then this really will be the sign that the hypnotic phenomena obtained in hysterics are indeed natural phenomena.” (PP, p. 314).

In essence, Freud was to take Charcot’s concept of “trauma,” mate it with “sexuality,” and produce a new entity: “acquired hysteria.” How was this achieved? Initially, before he could use the concept of “trauma,” Freud had to oppose Charcot on the issue of the hereditary predisposition to neurological symptoms. For Charcot as for Freud, a hysteric could be male or female, young or old, rich or poor, French or German (or any other nationality for that matter). But in Charcot’s schema, every case was always a sign of family degeneracy. By contrast, Freud realised that diseases such as tabes and

1 It is interesting to compare this to Jean Laplanche’s discussion of the concept of trauma. “Trauma,” Laplanche says, is “an extremely old concept, present at the origins of medicosurgical thought.” Perhaps, but railway crashes were unknown at these “origins”; does this not effect the “concept”? According to his version, Charcot introduced three novel elements into the concept of “trauma”: the idea that it could exist independently of neurological damage, even following a violent physical shock; secondly, that there often exists a period of “incubation” or “elaboration” that cannot be traced to a physiological sequence; and, finally, that one could reproduce experimentally, under hypnosis, the same paralytic states. This account may be plausible, See Laplanche “The Derivation of Psychoanalytic Entities,” Life and Death, pp. 127-139, esp. pp. 128-129.

2 In Freud’s assessment: “When it was objected that the four stages of hysteria, hysteria in men, and so on, were not observble outside France, [Charcot] pointed out how long he himself had overlooked these things, and he said once more that hysteria was the same in all places and at every time. He was very sensitive about the accusation that the French were a far more neurotic nation than any other and that hysteria was a kind of national bad habit.” Sigmund Freud [1893], “Charcot,” SE, 3, pp. 11-23, p. 22.
general paralysis had a syphilitic and not hereditary aetiology; in other words, they were caused by an *acquired* “infection” due to lifestyle and not family history.

In his early work, Freud often invoked the idea of environmental “infection” to convey what he meant by “acquired” hysteria. When explaining “conversion,” for example – an “incompatible idea” rendered innocuous by being “transformed into something somatic” – Freud used the analogy of a “parasite.” He asserted that, often, the memory-trace of the repressed idea has not been properly “dissolved”; therefore, the ego “has burdened itself with a mnemonic symbol which finds a lodgement in consciousness, like a sort of parasite, either in the form of an unresolvable motor innervation or as a constantly recurring hallucinatory sensation.”

Likewise, in the collaborative effort between Freud and Breuer, the authors describe an “unconscious” idea as “like a foreign body” that continues to operate “for years” unknown to the subject. (*SE*, 2, p. 221).

Thus, Freud agreed with Charcot that anybody was susceptible, but the manifestation of hysteria did *not* indicate a familial legacy of degeneracy. There is “no excuse for regarding as a consequence of degeneracy” features one meets with every day in hysterical people. (*SE*, 2, p. 161).

Importantly, Freud’s capacity to see this was not the result of any “discovery” he made, but because he viewed the problem from a different political perspective, derived in no small measure from his Jewish heritage. This notion – “degeneracy” – is worth dwelling on briefly. It was first formulated in psychiatric theory in the mid-1850s and given coherence by Benedikt Morel in a treatise of 1857. (*ABN*, p. 315). It amounted to a “scientific ideology” in widespread circulation well before the idea was taken up as a

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political tool by the Nazis. Foucault details how degeneracy gave a "considerable boost" to psychiatric power: "it became possible for psychiatry to link any deviance, difference, and backwardness whatsoever to a condition of degeneration," making it possible for an "indefinite intervention in human behaviour." (ABN, p. 325). Let it not be imagined, Foucault warns, that degeneracy "was nothing more than a medical theory which was scientifically lacking and improperly moralistic." On the contrary:

Its application was widespread and its implantation went deep. Psychiatry, to be sure, but also jurisprudence, legal medicine, agencies of social control, the surveillance of dangerous or endangered children, all functioned for a long time on the basis of "degenerescence" and the heredity-perversion system. (HS, p. 119)

What is more, at its most grotesque point, a "modern, biologizing and statist" type of racism developed out of the theory, of which Nazism was the most extreme form:

Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the thematics of blood was sometimes called upon to lend its entire historical weight toward revitalizing the type of political power that was exercised through the devices of sexuality. Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, "biologizing", statist form): it was then that a whole politics of settlement, family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their colour and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race. Nazism was doubtless the most cunning and the most naive .... (HS, p. 149).

A classic statement of the degeneracy position is found in the text *L'Hérédité psychologique* of 1875, by Théodule Ribot (1839-1916). When discussing national characteristics, the author claims heredity "transmits and fixes certain psychological characters in a people as in a family." Jews especially present evidence of natural heredity at work: they display a "predominance of sentiment and imagination," which

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their interest in music and poetry gives proof, leaving them "ill-endowed with all that relates to scientific culture." To the general considerations offered by quoting Renan, Ribot adds the following:

Heredity seems to have exerted on the Jewish race a baleful influence, by sowing the seed of sundry mental disorders, the result of intermarriage. The number of Jewish deaf-mutes is enormous. Idiocy and mental alienation are also very frequent.

This was the very "scientific" air Freud breathed. As Toby Gelfand has shown, even in personal communications to his younger colleague in Vienna, Charcot, speaking from a position of authority in the scientific community, was not at all embarrassed to implicate "Jewish families" as prime candidates for the degeneracy model: take a look around you, Charcot said, "the exploration is easy, especially in Jewish families" and "you will see ataxia, general paralytics and epileptics in their hereditary descent." These comments no doubt insulted Freud, and Gelfand rightly suggests that earlier remarks of this kind may have been the trigger for Freud's critical aversion to the whole degeneracy system. There is no reason to question this interpretation. After all, not only was Freud himself Jewish, but the overwhelming majority of his patients were, in fact, Jewish people – due entirely to circumstance of course.

6 Ribot, Heredity, p. 113.
7 Ribot, Heredity, p. 114.
9 Charcot, "Mon Cher Docteur Freud," Bulletin History of Medicine, p. 574.
10 According to Gelfand: "The Charcot letter of 1892 ... repeated a specific argument or evidentiary claim – that Jews had a marked predisposition to la famille névropathique – which he had made frequently at his Tuesday talks. Although one can here only speculate, it is plausible that the alleged Jewish clinical example may have contributed at some level to Freud's doctrinal rift with Charcot. Despite the fact that neither Charcot, an anti-clerical Catholic, nor Freud, an assimilated Jew, formally adhered to the religious faiths into which they were born, both men identified strongly with different ethnic backgrounds during a period of intensifying anti-Semitism in France as in Europe generally." See Toby Gelfand, "Charcot's Response to Freud's Rebellion," Journal of the History of Ideas, 50:2 (April-June, 1989), pp. 293-307, p. 297.
Increasingly, therefore, Freud wanted to distance himself from the notion of "degeneracy." In terms of our general argument, Freud's bold stance was to have profound effects on the notion of the "unconscious." To defer again to Gelfand, Freud, as translator of Charcot's work from French into German in the early 1890s, exploited the opportunity to include several "sharp" critical footnotes, dismembering the concept of *famille névropathique* - much to the surprised annoyance of Charcot.\(^\text{11}\) As Freud put it in his otherwise respectful and glowing tribute in the wake of Charcot's death in 1893:

The aetiological theories supported by Charcot in his doctrine of the *'famille névropathique'* ... will no doubt soon require sifting and amending. So greatly did Charcot overestimate heredity as a causative agent that he left no room for the acquisition of nervous illness. To syphilis he merely allotted a modest place among the *'agents provoqueurs'*,; nor did he make a sufficiently sharp distinction between organic nervous affections and neuroses, either as regards their aetiology or in other respects. (*SE*, 3, p. 23).

After Charcot's death, Freud promoted his critical views further in an explicit address to the "disciples of J.-M Charcot" of 1896, written in French to reduce misunderstanding, entitled "Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neurosis."\(^\text{12}\) There has been "too little research into these specific and determining causes of nervous illness," writes Freud, because "the attention of physicians has remained dazzled by the grandiose prospect of the aetiological precondition of heredity." (*SE*, 3, p. 144).

Opposition to degeneracy also explains Freud's enthusiasm for presenting a case history like "Katharina" in his *Studies on Hysteria* of 1895. (*SE* 2, pp. 125-134). It was the

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\(^{11}\) This can be seen most clearly in an important and lengthy letter Charcot wrote to Freud on June 30, 1892, where he strongly rebuked Freud's views, albeit under the friendly flag of *"vive la liberté"*. "Mon Cher Docteur Freud," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, p. 574. Elsewhere, Gelfand argues that the "vigorouse" and "striking" disagreement between Freud and Charcot revolved around Freud's serious reservations about "the hereditary determination of nervous and a variety of other metabolic diseases." See Gelfand, "Charcot's Response," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, p. 296.

third and shortest of the four reports Freud contributed to the Studies. Here, supposedly, was an example of nervous "hysteria" in someone who did not fit the usual profile: a country girl whom Freud just happened to encounter one day on a mountaintop while he was holidaying in the Alpine region East of Vienna. Freud marvelled that neuroses could "flourish" even at a height of 6000 feet — and in a "strong, well-built girl" speaking a distinct regional "dialect." (SE, 2, p. 125). He stressed she was a refreshing change to the "prudish ladies" of his city practice, those "who regard whatever is natural as shameful." (SE, 2, p. 132). Caught unawares, he was forced to dispense with the usual sophisticated techniques of his consulting room and rely instead on "simple talk": "I could not venture to transplant hypnosis to these altitudes." (SE, 2, p. 127). The case is clearly contrived to portray Katharina as a contrast to his usual clientele of bourgeois, effeminate, city-dwelling Jewish people, thereby providing further "proof" against Charcot's theories.

In a fascinating and vivid reassessment of the case, Peter Swales has revealed a whole other set of historical details about the young woman's family and situation. Most importantly, he claims Katharina's "character and sensibility" are "not to be comprehended in terms of any such lower class stereotypes." However, if we place the Katharina story in the context of Freud's power struggle with Charcot it makes more sense and becomes interesting: to diminish class as a factor in the formation of neuroses was synonymous for Freud with downplaying ethnic and religious differences. It was another way of putting distance between the problematic of hysteria and the thematics of degeneracy — something Swales does not consider. In the view of Swales, Freud had already judged Katharina's case long before she had uttered a word — candid or not —

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under the influence of the “endopsychosexual bias” intrinsic to his theory: “Freud remained oblivious to a traumatic yet nonsexual interpretation of [Katharina’s] condition.”15 But as will be explained in due course, Freud did not have an endogenous theory of sexuality at this stage of his career (the 1890s); he assumed the child to be innocent. Instincts were certainly present, but they were dormant and benign: “pre-sexually sexual.”16 Even after the boost given them by puberty, sexual drives were only really awakened when initiated or corrupted by an agent of “sexuality” in the external environment. Freud’s language is telling of this: Katharina’s anxiety was typical of a “virginal mind” overcome “when it is faced for the first time with the world of sexuality.” (SE, 2, p. 127).

In presenting this kind of “novella,” Freud had more serious objectives: everyone, regardless of “race” or background, are equally susceptible to corruptive “ideas” no less than infectious diseases. From this light, the Katharina case is an example of psychoanalysis setting itself against degeneracy. A thorough repudiation of this particular aspect of Charcot’s work was necessary for Freud to develop his own theory: namely, hysteria was an “acquired” sexual “infection,” caused by a shocking trauma analogous in psychological terms to a railway accident, in no way traceable to the patient’s family tree. Let us now establish more clearly what Freud meant by “sexuality” at this point.

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16 According to Laplanche and Pontalis: “If it can be described as sexual, it is only from the point of view of the external agent, the adult. But the child has neither the somatic requisites of excitation, nor the representations to enable him to integrate the event; although sexual in terms of objectivity, it has no sexual connotation for the subject, it is ‘pre-sexually sexual’.” See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, “Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality,” The International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 49 (1968), pp. 1-17, p. 4. We will return to this article again.
Like all spectators attending Charcot's clinics, Freud had heard of and then witnessed dramatic scenes involving women patients. We owe to Foucault the fact that the women were given “inhalations of amyl nitrate,” before being bought, intoxicated, for Charcot to hypnotise and manipulate before his audience. (“CF,” p. 218). The women would be induced to adopt certain postures consistent with “trauma,” to demonstrate the “real” physical qualities of hysterical illness. Here Foucault's original interpretation becomes manifest. In Foucault's view, Charcot set up the very conditions that would bring down his theoretical system by whipping both the patients and his audience into a kind of sexual “maelstrom” despite himself. Charcot's exhibitions were a “superb gadget” by means of which sexuality was “actually extracted, induced, incited and titillated in all manner of ways.” (“CF,” p. 218).

Moreover, the women patients played an important part in this “maelstrom.” Foucault stresses this point quite forcefully: going far beyond the carefully constructed scripts and directed poses, the women took advantage of the opportunity, bringing forth sordid stories of abuse and misery suffered in their lives, revealing more than Charcot wanted to hear. (PP, pp. 318-319). Foucault called these women the “true militants of anti-psychiatry.” (PP, p. 254).17 Their actions can be seen as a form of “resistance” to the psychiatric power attempting to subdue them. Into the breach, “they will push their life, their real, everyday life, that is to say their sexual life.” (PP, p. 318). Often, it was necessary to hurry them away because their “deliriums” were too explicit or confronting for the genteel audience. (PP, p. 322).

Freud’s reaction? Instead of dismissing the scenes as gratuitous titillation, Freud was convinced that profound facts about the nature of human sexuality were unfolding before his eyes; that here was sexuality in its “raw” state, freed from the artificialities of parlour games and other social niceties. Charcot had confessed to Freud informally: “Hysteria? Oh, everyone knows it’s all a matter of sexuality,” (PP, p. 321) and Freud was astonished that, if this connection was so clear, why did Charcot not talk about it in his lectures? According to Foucault, the reason stemmed from Charcot’s determination to prove that hysteria was a real illness exhibiting the same natural symptomatology as physical malformations caused by accidents. To incorporate “sexuality” was to take away this simultaneous organic and traumatic quality, making it too much like mundane everyday life, and less and less a topic worthy of noble “medicine.” It would only give ammunition to those critics who did not take hysteria seriously. As Foucault put it: “If one really wanted to succeed in demonstrating that hysteria was a genuine illness, ... then it had to be entirely shorn of that disqualifying element which was just as harmful as simulation, namely “lubricity” or sexuality.” (PP, p. 321).

This is what Foucault means when he says that Freud took Charcot “literally”: “Freud doesn’t need to go hunting for anything other than what he had seen chez Charcot. Sexuality was there before his eyes in manifest form, orchestrated by Charcot and his worthy aides...” (“CF,” p. 218). After the demise of Charcot and the Salpêtrière School in the 1890s, the study of hysteria followed two distinct paths, according to Foucault’s account. On one side, Charcot’s successors effected a “retrospective devaluation of hysteria,” no longer regarding it as a serious phenomenon, while, on the other hand, Freud was to be one of the leading proponents of the “the medical, psychiatric and psychoanalytic take over of sexuality” through which hysteria was to occupy a regal
position – at least for a time. (PP, p. 323). One could say that Freud was disappointed that the episodes at Charcot’s clinics were cut short; he wanted to see and to hear the limits of what uninhibited women patients could reveal about their sexuality; what if they were given similar free reign in the privacy of a consulting room...

In terms of therapeutics, Freud put forward his “sexual” perspective in various scientific papers during the 1890s, based, he said, on “laborious” investigations of neurotic patients.18 These views are of course well known, under the name of the “seduction theory,” and the story of Katharina was one example. Freud posits an innocent child knowing nothing of these matters until corrupted by an already sexualised other person. In some cases, the event equates to the “trauma” of an accident, which is reawakened at a later stage of life when issues of sexuality have to be confronted again, leading to the “functional” types of neurological disorders Freud and others were concerned with: “these functional pathological modifications have as their common source the subject’s sexual life, whether they lie in a disorder of his contemporary sexual life or in important events in his past life.” (SE, 3, p. 149).

For historians within the psychoanalytic tradition, the “sexuality” Freud found, developed and treated was “real” – timeless and universal. Freud was the first scientist to provide “a theoretical solution to the notorious problem of ‘genital’ causes.”19 This view ignores the ethnographic context: a situation where groups of young male medical students, curious about sexuality, witness a master’s manipulation of drugged female bodies, ostensibly to discover the relationship between hysterical stigmata and organic traumatic disturbances. Would this not be something that people from another culture

18 For example, Sigmund Freud [1896], “The Aetiology of Hysteria,” SE, 3, pp. 191-221.
19 Roudinesco, Bataille de cent ans, p. 32. For her discussion of the intellectual relationship between Charcot and Freud, see pp. 72-76.
would wonder at when they come to study Western societies, finding it difficult to understand how a civilization "so intent on developing enormous instruments of production and destruction found the time and the infinite patience to inquire so anxiously concerning the actual state of sex?" (HS, p. 157). In other words, Foucault's position states that what Freud witnessed was part of a very real historical event, but nevertheless a construct of forces wherein the investigation of the truth of sex in its bourgeois and scientific guises produced quite bizarre episodes. In short, Freud's determination to know sexuality reflected a general cultural disposition, blinding him to the contrived nature of Charcot's "raw" sexual scenes.

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Freud's revolutionary insights about the unconscious can nevertheless be traced to a parallel line of circumstances. In order to construe hysteria and other nervous illnesses as "acquired" and not hereditarily, the most important thing for Freud at this stage was to insist that sexuality came from outside of the subject - that is, from the environmental context within which the person lives. As stated, Freud enlisted the "germ theory" then prevalent in medical circles to explain hysteria, and, by implication, acquired "sexuality." In a valuable explication, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis describe how, in these preliminary formulations, an "external event" - presumed to be a rape or seduction by an older person that the victim experiences passively - becomes an interior process, "an inner 'foreign body,' which now breaks out from within the subject." Or, more precisely:

With the theory of seduction, we may say that the whole of the trauma comes both from within and without: from without, since sexuality reaches the subject from the other; from within, since it springs from this internalised exteriority,
this 'reminiscence suffered by hysterics' (according to the Freudian formula) reminiscence in which we already discern what will be later named fantasy.\(^{20}\)

For sober historians of ideas like Henri Ellenberger, it was here that Freud surpassed the philosophers by offering "the dynamic unconscious of the repressed," a move "anticipated by Charcot, Bernheim, Janet and Flournoy," but "explored and described" as a whole only by Freud.\(^{21}\) Not only did Freud "draw the map of this new continent, but he integrated the unconscious into psychiatry and made of it a powerful field of battle for the psychotherapist."\(^{22}\) Other critics, in a similar vein to Frank Sulloway, say that Freud's "originality" has been exaggerated because the germ theory was part of a general "theoretical strategy" of late nineteenth-century medicine, insofar as the bulk of Freud's contemporaries likewise presented "functional" aetiological theories of neurological conditions.\(^{23}\)

But both views – seeing Freud as breaking with his medical colleagues or, alternatively, continuing along the same path – misunderstand the political originality and significance of Freud's particular use of the germ theory: we are all a little bit "infected" by the "germs" of culture, not just "sick" people from "degenerate" families. The border between the "normal" and the "abnormal" is a "fluid one," Freud writes: "we are all a little neurotic." (SE, 6, p. 278). Breuer and Freud as a team had spoken of unconscious ideas that the subject somehow "own" or possesses; Freud on his own speaks of the unconscious as a transindividual, transfamilial, cultural force. Only in Freud's hands can the "unconscious" become, not an individual attribute of the mind,


but an external source of ideational “infections” touching all human beings, “normal” or not so “normal.”

For proper appreciation of Freud’s move, one must follow him beyond his medical texts and into the terrain of cultural logic and meaning production. According to Freud, “We shall not be able to form a correct picture of the strange psychical work which brings about the occurrence of both parapraxes and dream images until we have learnt that psycho-neurotic symptoms, and especially the psychical formations of hysteria and obsessional neurosis, repeat in their mechanism all the essential features of this mode of working.” (SE, 6, p. 278). This is the conceptual elaboration developed in Freud’s major non-medical studies: The Interpretation of Dreams, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious and The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. Freud explains:

By parapraxes, then, I understand the occurrence in healthy and normal people of such events as forgetting words and names that are normally familiar, forgetting what one intends to do, making slips of the tongue and pen, misreading, mislaying things and being unable to find them, losing things, making mistakes against one’s better knowledge, and certain habitual gestures and movements. (SE, 8, p. 167).

Even in an early text such as On Aphasia,24 when discussing “paraphasia” (mistaken use of words), Freud places phenomena formerly belonging strictly to the category of disease under the more general and cultural heading of “parapraxes.” These were the mundane erroneous events experienced everyday: “Paraphasia observed in aphasic patients does not differ from the incorrect use and the distortion of words which the healthy person can observe in himself [or herself].”25 Parapraxes can be distinguished subtly one from another in their capacities and intensities. Dreams, for example, which

occupied for Freud a special, even regal, position amongst other “symptoms,” have an essentially conservative function: the avoidance of _un_pleasure. Were it not for dreams, psychic conflict would keep us awake for much longer than our somatic bodies could endure: dreaming represents, in “a hallucinatory fashion,” a wish as having been “fulfilled,” fooling our bodies into believing that there is no need for the psychic anxiety. (SE, 8, p. 171). Jokes, on the other hand, are more positive and activist in their pursuit of pleasure. 

This is a far more “democratic” psychological theory than anything his predecessors or contemporaries (and heirs?) could come up with. The theory of degeneracy was turned “inside out” by a liberal political perspective, neatly translated into psychological theory by the very “germ” metaphor then reigning supreme in medical discourses and easily understood. Freud’s theory of the unconscious shows that all “minds” are fundamentally equal beneath differences of intelligence, personality, ethnicity, class or gender. The psyche knows no aristocracy.

When it came to giving examples of parapraxes in _The Psychopathology of Everyday Life_, one of the reasons Freud often had to rely on his own self-observation, and steer clear of the “much richer material provided by my neurotic patients,” was precisely to guard against the impression that these phenomena were manifestations of neurosis only. (SE, 6, p. 12). Havelock Ellis, who wrote on dream theory in addition to his works on sexuality, objected that “the great body of the material accumulated by

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26 One of the very few discussions of wit and jokes as they are treated by both Freud and Lacan can be found in a general “textbook” of Freud’s work. See Jean-Michel Quinodoz, _Reading Freud: A chronological exploration of Freud’s writings_, trans. David Alcorn (London, 2005), pp. 50-56.

[Freud] and his school is derived from the dreams of the neurotic."\(^2\)\(^8\) Although he acknowledged that Freud made "interesting" analyses of his own dreams, Ellis uses Stekel's work to show that the hysteric dreams in a manner "differently" to the obsessive, and goes on to say: "we are certainly justified in doubting whether conclusions drawn from the study of the dreams of neurotic people can be safely held to represent the normal dream life, even though it may be true that there is no definite frontier between them."\(^2\)\(^9\) Sleeping consciousness is such a "vast world," Ellis said, that a single formula such as Freud's (wish fulfilment based on desire) cannot cover all the "manifold varieties" of dreaming as well as its "degrees of depth."\(^3\)\(^0\) Moreover: "Whatever may be the case among the neurotic, in ordinary normal sleep the images that drift across the field of consciousness" are "quite explicable without resort to the theory that they stand in vital but concealed relationship to our most intimate self."\(^3\)\(^1\)

But Ellis fails to realize that Freud's achievement lies right here. In blurring the border between the normal and the pathological, Freud "updates" medical science, giving it a philosophy of mind consistent with the broad medical assumption of equal flesh beneath different bodies, compatible also with the tenets of "democracy" and modern life. It shows that the boundary between the normal and the pathological is as much political as medical – something taken for granted today by numerous scientists, doctors, historians, philosophers, feminists, psychoanalysts, cultural theorists, many of whom may not consider themselves Freudian disciples.

\(^2\)\(^8\) Ellis, *World of Dreams*, p. 168.
\(^2\)\(^9\) Ellis, *World of Dreams*, p. 169. Freud sometimes answered this objection. See, for example, *SE*, 12, p. 264.
\(^3\)\(^0\) Ellis, *World of Dreams*, p. 171.
\(^3\)\(^1\) Ellis, *World of Dreams*, p. 169.
Ellis is not the only one to overlook Freud’s move. Despite the steady, not to say persistent, stream of retrospective accounts of “psychoanalysis” and its history throughout his career, Freud scarcely drew attention to this political innovation, even though it represented a clear contrast to other doctors at the time. Freud assumed that “science” was separate from “politics,” that knowledge is divorced from power. Historians of psychoanalysis follow this trend by scrutinizing Freud’s “medical” and “scientific” texts in an effort to discover his epistemological difference. When Jean Allouch asks defiantly, “what is psychoanalysis?” having decided it cannot be “science, madness, art, religion, magic,” he, too, fails to consider “politics” as the defining feature. Yet, interestingly, Josef Breuer mentioned late in his career that Freud’s goal may have been simply to “rattle the Bourgeoisie” from their complacencies. By overturning the degeneracy theory, psychoanalysis is as much a politics as an art or science. Freud’s system of knowledge was always “in theoretical and practical opposition to fascism,” as Foucault puts it. (HS, p. 150).

Moreover, Freud’s attitude towards the degeneracy schema can be contrasted directly with socialist equivocations, at least according to Foucault. While he admitted that “to speak in such terms is to make enormous claims,” Foucault nevertheless asserted that, because of the influence of the degeneracy theory, “until the Dreyfus affair, all socialists, or at least the vast majority of socialists, were basically racists.” (SMD, p. 263). It was the socialists, Foucault claimed, who first took advantage of the degeneracy theory politically: anti-Semitism in its modern forms arose in the latter half

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32 Allouch, Réponse à Michel Foucault, p. 24.
34 He discriminates between the various forms of socialism – Blanquism, the Commune, and anarchism – and claims these were racist “much more so” than “social democracy,” the “Second International,” and “Marxism itself.”
of the nineteenth-century first in socialist milieux, and “out of the theory of degeneracy,” before being taken over by the right in the twentieth century, to culminate in Nazism. (CF, p. 223). Since then, “socialism has made no critique of the theme of biopower,” nor “re-examined its basis or modes of working,” (SMD, p. 261) and this can be seen reflected in leftist quietism in the face of the Soviet Union’s attitude towards the “mentally ill, criminals, political adversaries, and so on.” (SMD, p. 262).

What originally appealed to the socialists in the nineteenth century about degeneracy was the capacity to isolate the main enemy as a “rotten, decadent class” at the top, and oppose it to an idealized socialist society that would be “clean and healthy” instead. (CF, p. 223). Reading between the lines (though Foucault does not actually make this leap himself), “clean and healthy” could just as easily mean no homosexuals as no Jews. According to Sander Gilman: “Jews and perverts are virtually interchangeable categories at the fin de siècle.” The practice of circumcision identified male Jews, who were targeted as effeminate, prone to “sentiment and imagination,” and therefore perverse, while Jewish people as a whole were necessarily degenerate, “firstly because they are rich, secondly because they intermarry.” (CF, p. 224). Jews were thus inevitable breeders of homosexuals, and while the early socialist model only dreamed what the later Nazi version actually tried to make a reality, it is fair to assume that many different strata or groups of bourgeois society shared the vague hope that, by excluding or destroying one, the other would quietly disappear as well.

36 For some colourful examples, see Gilman, “Freud, Race and Gender,” Psychoanalysis in Cultural, p. 30.
One could say therefore that Freud attacked the right wing of socialism from the bourgeois centre of medical rationality, moving everybody a little more to the left as a result. In this way, the Freudian revolution can be explained without detaching Freud from the intellectual and cultural milieux he inhabited. It even demands his presence there, because, without Freud engaged in power struggles with contemporaries such as Charcot, and later dissidents like Jung, the introduction of the everyday unconscious—"we are all a little neurotic"—lacks some of its force. Foucault ensured that this point would not be lost when expounding his own critique of psychoanalytic theory and practice, paying tribute to the significant political difference of psychoanalysis in this respect:

It is all very well to look back from our vantage point and remark upon the normalizing impulse in Freud; one could go on to denounce the role played for many years by the psychoanalytic institution; but the fact remains that in the great family of technologies of sex, which goes far back into the history of the Christian West; of all those institutions that set out in the nineteenth century to medicalize sex, psychoanalysis was the one that, up to the decade of the forties, rigorously opposed the political and institutional effects of the perversion-heredity-degenerescence system. (HS, p. 119).

By exposing the connection between racism—specifically anti-Jewish sentiment—and the dispositif of sexuality, including its particular scientific gloss on long-standing homophobia, and the critical role psychoanalysis played in undermining this nexus, Foucault demonstrates an original attitude both at odds with the general position in Le livre noir and one the diametric opposite to the way his critique is generally portrayed. Rather than protesting its conservative politics, on the contrary, Foucault celebrated the radical political divergence of psychoanalysis from the theory of degeneracy, and then

37 Jung’s anti-Jewish sentiments, and apparent sympathy for Nazism, along with Freud’s reactions to it in his letters and published writings, are the topics of a recent collection of essays. See Lingering Shadows: Jungians, Freudians and Anti-Semitism, ed. Aryeh Maidenbaum and Stephen A. Martin (Boston & London, 1991).
he attempted, through his own “history of sexuality” to take this unconscious revolution beyond the confines of bio-medical understandings.

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Crucial to Foucault’s position, however, and consistent with the arguments pursued throughout this thesis, is the view that Freud betrayed the revolution he instigated by not taking the “germ” metaphor far enough when it came to sexuality. In Foucault’s terms, the *fourvoiement biologisant* [biologicizing tendency] of Freudian theory as a whole was an inevitable development of Freud not grasping the true epistemological connections between his work and that of nineteenth-century medicine and psychiatry; psychoanalysts continue to ignore this relationship today. As a final discussion point, and by way of summing up the whole thesis, let us propose a possible Foucauldian interpretation the *fourvoiement biologisant*.

Freud’s shift away from Charcot and towards the idea of “acquired” hysteria remained incomplete without recasting the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality, because the degeneracy theory could still be used to “explain” these orientations. Although other “perversions” are sometimes mentioned (fetishism, for example), severing the link between homosexuality and degeneracy was really Freud’s main concern. Indeed, probably the whole point of Freud’s *Three Essays on Sexuality* of 1905 is to account for perversion outside of its usual framework of the “perversion-heredity-degenerescence” system – even if he had only the male version in mind. Thus, Freud was always adamant that “perversion,” if not linked to “degeneracy,” must be on a continuum with “normality” instead:
We surely ought not to forget that the perversion which is the most repellent to us, the sensual love of a man for a man, was not only tolerated by a people so far our superiors in cultivation as were the Greeks, but was actually entrusted by them with important social functions. The sexual life of each one of us extends to a slight degree – now in this direction, now in that – beyond the narrow lines imposed as the standard of normality. The perversions are neither bestial nor degenerate in the emotional sense of the word. (SE, 7, p. 50).

In addition, if we leave aside Freud’s conservative political views on women, which have often been attacked, it was imperative to conceive of gender as a fluid category, consistent with his overall philosophy of the mind. Masculinity and femininity were not divided areas of human experience but were manifestations of a common bisexual disposition: “In all of us, throughout life, the libido oscillates between male and female objects.” Freud, and those colleagues espousing similar views, were up against formidable opposition in this regard; let us make no mistake about that. There was still an impenetrable barrier dividing the normal and the pathological, and the masculine and the feminine, in all areas pertaining to sexuality that had to be criticised and re-negotiated.

Not only historical studies, but contemporary ethnology gave Freud considerable support for his oppositional stance: “inversion is remarkably widespread among many savage and primitive races” – an argument he used specifically against the degeneracy theme in the Three Essays. (SE, 7, p. 139). Similarly, Arnold Davidson has drawn attention to an important footnote to this text, where Freud makes the following admission: “the pathological approach to the study of inversion has been displaced by the anthropological.”

38 See Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, esp. pp. 303-355.
39 Freud, cited in Mitchell, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, p. 69.
40 For a taste of this moment, try sampling the delicacies of Otto Weininger’s Sex and character (London, 1906).
41 Freud, cited in Davidson, Emergence of Sexuality, p. 80.
Freud solved the problem of divorcing perversion from degeneracy by widening the meaning of "normal" childhood. Activities previously seen as purely biological or developmental were now classed as "sexual" and perverse. As Freud put it in the conclusion to the *Three Essays*:

[A] disposition to perversion is an original and universal disposition of the human sexual instinct and that normal sexual behaviour is developed out of it as a result of organic changes and psychical inhibitions occurring in the course of maturation ... Among the forces restricting the direction taken by the sexual instinct we laid emphasis upon shame, disgust, pity and the structures of morality and authority erected by society. We were thus led to regard any established aberration from normal sexuality as an instance of developmental inhibition and infantilism. (*SE*, 7, p. 231).

The actual childhood events – thumb sucking or toilet training – have not changed in terms of what they represent for biological theories; even today, these activities continue to be milestones of a child's "development." Freud has merely sexualised these activities – or, more correctly, perverted them. By doing so, Freud believed that he was challenging "popular" conceptions of sexuality:

Popular opinion has definite ideas about the nature and characteristics of [the] sexual instinct. It is generally understood to be absent in childhood, to set in at the time of puberty in connection with the process of coming to maturity and to be revealed in the manifestations of an irresistible attraction exercised by one sex upon the other. ... We have every reason to believe, however, that these views give a very false picture of the true situation. (*SE*, 7, p. 135).

The *Three Essays*, however, made no mention of an external sexual agent, and it is necessary to dwell on this problem momentarily. As Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis explain in their joint study, the years 1897 to 1906 represented a "transitionary" period in Freud's work: he had abandoned his seduction theory – writing

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famously to Fliess in 1897 that he no longer believed in his “neurotica”\textsuperscript{43} — but a viable alternative place for external sexuality had yet to be found. To recall the case of “Katharina” discussed above, Freud had assumed, as the very crux of his “seduction theory,” that the child begins life with no “sexuality.” Instincts were certainly present, but sexual \textit{drives} were only awakened after being initiated or corrupted by an agent of sexuality in the external environment. Although Freud eventually recognised this theory to be inadequate,\textsuperscript{44} the proper formulation of an alternative model proved to be an obstacle Freud never surmounted. Incidentally, this gives a thoroughly different spin to the accusation of “pansexual”: everything is sexual — except Freud’s theory of “acquired” sexuality.

Thus, the \textit{Three Essays} continued Freud’s lack of clarity in the area of “seduction” while also failing to explain the mysterious disappearance of the “external” agent of sexuality. Laplanche and Pontalis freely admit that, as a consequence, one of the perspectives “suggested” by the \textit{Three Essays} is a “description of a spontaneous infantile sexuality, basically endogenous in development,” whereby libidinal stages succeed one another “in a natural and regular evolution,” and fixation is considered “as an inhibition of development.”\textsuperscript{45} Freud explicitly confessed to Fliess that dropping the idea of childhood sexual trauma opened up these kinds of problems: “It seems once again arguable that only later experiences give the impetus to fantasies, ... and with this

\textsuperscript{43} Freud, \textit{Complete Letters to Fliess}, p. 264.
\textsuperscript{44} As Freud reported to Fliess: “Then the surprise that in all cases, the \textit{father}, not excluding my own, had to be accused of being perverse – the realization of the unexpected frequency of hysteria, with precisely the same conditions prevailing in each, whereas surely such widespread perversions against children are not very probable,” Freud, \textit{Complete Letters to Fliess}, p. 264.

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the factor of hereditary disposition regains a sphere of influence from which I had made it my task to dislodge it.”

To cut a long story short, what eventually replaced an external sexual agent within psychoanalysis was “inherited” primal fantasies. Namely, certain ideas find their source in the “prehistory” of the “species,” (SE, 16, p. 396), rather than from “the structures of morality and authority erected by society,” in Freud’s words, or what has been called in this thesis “the ethnographic landscape.” Freud’s primal fantasies are thus similar to DNA information transmitted from one generation to another. Freud took up his own “suggestion” quite forcefully, coming to focus more and more on “primal fantasies” in the two decades after 1900. It was partly in response to colleagues. This was the period when, according to Laplanche, “the great schemas of the typical” began to dominate psychoanalysis. Analysts on opposite sides of the Freudian divide, Ernest Jones facing Carl Jung, were all equally enthralled by the “symbolic” potentials of psychoanalysis; so, while “typical dreams” (of nakedness, failing exams, and so on) occupied only a minor place in the original 1900 edition of The Interpretation of Dreams, they are “considerably amplified thereafter” in subsequent editions.

From 1906 onwards, and under the influence of the idea of primal fantasies, seduction traumas were now interpreted as “attempts at fending off memories of the subject’s own sexual activity (infantile masturbation),” while castration anxiety in males was an inevitable result of growing up: “the child puts a threat of this kind together in his imagination on the basis of hints, helped out by the knowledge that auto-erotic

46 Freud, Complete Letters, p. 265.
satisfaction is forbidden and under the impression of his discovery of the female genitals.” (SE, 16, p. 369). In the end, consistent with medical theory generally, heredity shorn of its degeneracy component was not that bad after all, as this text from late in Freud’s career indicates:

We must not exaggerate the difference between inherited and acquired characters into an antithesis; what was acquired by our forefathers certainly forms an important part of what we inherit. When we speak of an ‘archaic heritage’ we are usually thinking only of the id and we seem to assume that at the beginning of the individual’s life no ego is as yet in existence. But we shall not overlook the fact that id and ego are originally one; nor does it imply any mystical overvaluation of heredity if we think it credible that, even before the ego has come into existence, the lines of developments, trends and reactions which it will later exhibit are already laid down for it. The psychological peculiarities of families, races, and nations, even in their attitude to analysis, allow of no other explanation. 49

Moreover, armed with these data of development, the stages of Freud’s “childhood” could then be made analogous to “primitive states of society,” and “early periods of history.” The evident differences of Greek homoeroticism, or other sociological, anthropological or historical deviations from the modern Western norm, can all be placed within the enlarged meaning of “sexual,” conveniently covering both the ontogenetic (organic developmental) and phylogenetic (evolutionary) dimensions. That is, like an individual in his or her development, all societies are part of a continuous sexual evolution and will exhibit a preference for certain instinctual traits at the macro level of civilization that are also played out in micro form in the life of any individual. Freud’s statements in this regard are few and far between, but, for example, the Greeks, closer to nature than us apparently, were wont to “glorify the instinct” in itself, while modern societies valorise the “object” instead. (SE, 7, p. 149, n. 1).


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In the view of Jean Laplanche, Freud’s attitude represents not only tolerance but continues to challenge those “popular” conceptions of sexuality that persist today. Knowledge grows in spirals, rather than linear progressions: if Freud was “led astray” by his “primal fantasies” to an “ever clearer recentering of the human subject,” it is up to those after him to reclaim the “Copernican” significance of Freud’s discovery of the unconscious in the 1890s. In his joint effort with Pontalis, Laplanche was responsible for a major direct application of Lacanian theory in the 1960s, for they base their own development of Freud’s seduction hypothesis on an equation between “fantasy” and “structure”:

Freud’s so-called abandonment of the reality of infantile traumatic memories, in favour of fantasies that would be based only on a biological, quasi-endogenous evolution of sexuality, is only a transitional stage in the search for the foundation of neurosis. On the one hand, seduction will continue to appear as one of the data of the relationship between child and adult; on the other hand, the notion of primal (or original) fantasies (Urphantasien) of “inherited memory traces” of prehistoric events, will in turn provide support for individual fantasies. [We] propose an interpretation of this notion: such a pre-history, located by Freud in phylogenesis, can be understood as a pre-structure, which is actualised and transmitted by parental fantasies.  

Laplanche then took this earlier formulation into a further critical “spiral” – to use his terminology – by dropping the idea of “structure” in favour of “enigmatic messages.” We cannot hope to do justice to Laplanche’s enhancements of Freud here, but, basically, if the seduction theory was to be “generalized” and applied to any anthropological situation, this is equivalent to saying that “enigmatic messages” are transmitted from an adult who possesses an unconscious to an infant yet to generate one.  

Laplanche chooses the term “message” for a number of reasons, foremost to stress that it may apply equally to “pre-verbal” as to “verbal” forms and, second, to

50 Laplanche and Pontalis, “Fantasy,” p. 17.
distinguish his view from entrenched ideas, post-Lacan, about “language” as
“structure.” These alien “messages” remain forcefully present throughout life, are
fundamental to all forms of communication, and later become confirmed and “de-
translated” by the unique method the psychoanalytic experience brings into being.

Laplanche’s attempts to enhance Freudian theory are found in various writings on
sexuality, encapsulated in two locations. They are mentioned here because Laplanche
has remained doggedly faithful to the Freudian cause since the 1950s, repeating time
and again that “sexuality” in the Freudian sense is completely at odds with popular and
common meanings. For example, Foucauldians are not saying anything new by their
“desequalisation” strategies, argues Laplanche. If critics would only bother to read
the *Three Essays*, they would find their cherished non-genital “pleasures” all over the
place.

Laplanche is even “perplexed” by the approach of Foucault who, “after having relegated
Freudian sexuality to the field of heterosexual genital union, glorifies the discovery of
‘non-sexual,’ even ‘anti-sexual,’ pleasures – all nevertheless amply described by Freud
in 1905.” Likewise, Juliet Mitchell considers Freud’s view far more radical than the

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53 The first derives from the early 1990s, and constitutes the seventh of his “Problématiques”
[Problematics]. See Jean Laplanche, *Le fourvoiement biologisant de la sexualité chez Freud* (Paris,
1993). Republished with the addition of a lecture Laplanche delivered at the University of Buenos Aires
of writings on sexuality is a series of essays and lectures produced between 2000 and 2006, and gathered
under the name of *Sexual*. See also Jean Laplanche, “From the Restricted to the Generalized Theory of
54 For example, David Halperin interprets Foucault’s “desequalisation” as the eroticisation of “non-
genital regions of the body” whereby pleasure is detached from “sexual intercourse narrowly defined.”
“vagaries of any de rigueur tolerance,” for it undermines the very notion of “normativity.” As she expresses it:

Instead of accepting the notion of sexuality as a complete, so to speak ready-made thing in itself which could then diverge, [Freud] found that ‘normal’ sexuality itself assumed its form only as it travelled over a long and tortuous path, maybe eventually, and even then only precariously, establishing itself. ... He realized that instead of a pool from which tributaries ran, the tributaries were needed in the first place to form the pool; these tributaries were diverse, could join each other, never reach their goal, find another goal, dry up, overflow and so get attached to something quite different. There is no nostalgic normality, nor (implicit in such a notion) any childhood bliss when all is as it should be. 56

Nevertheless, Freud is forced to widen the endogenous dimension only because he must find a place for homosexuality independent of degeneracy, but one that still removes it from the range of normal adult behaviours. Freud stopped short of including homosexuality (and perhaps female sexuality, certainly female generative capacities at least) in the spectrum of adult normality: these were given a place by expanding the meaning of childhood – and not, as with the introduction of the everyday unconscious, by making the end-pool of adult “normality” more complicated and profound.

When conceding publicly in a brief essay of 1906 that he no longer believed in his “neurotica,” Freud claimed that there was a big difference between “my views” and “those prevailing in other quarters,” because the “normal sexual constitution” (my italics) has now taken the place of a “general neuropathic disposition.” (SE, 7, p. 274). But Freud’s conception of this “normal sexual constitution” in its adult form is identical to that of his colleagues and critics. Freud’s difference merely consists in saying that “deviancy” finds its source in individual development rather than perverse family history, but the idea of what constitutes normal adult life is the same as that found in the

general psychiatric *milieux*: namely, the husband and wife living together in the Biblical sense of that term, while they raise their children.

In other words, "normal sexual constitution" contradicts, politically, the "fluid" meaning of normality that the introduction of the everyday unconscious had insisted on through the study of parapraxes and jokes, and what has been identified as Freud's true revolutionary contribution. Freud was not prepared to disturb the boundary between the normal and abnormal through a different ethical account of the inter-relationships between heterosexuality, homosexuality, marriage, child-rearing, contraception, and so on. Moreover, as Lacan had observed, Freud refrained from specifying the nature of the penetration/reception pleasure that defines adult heterosexuality; but this does not mean that Freud equated it to "extra-marital" or polymorphous eroticism at this level. On the contrary, heterosexual activities are described by Freud as "ethically objectionable" precisely on those occasions when they deviate from the adult ideal of male and female genital union – *coitus interruptus*, oral pleasures, even condoms. (*SE*, 9, p. 194).

Moreover, renegade analysts such as Wilhelm Reich were only too happy to spread the word of the "normal" sexual constitution as far as possible over the political landscape, by his conservative idea of "orgastic potency." Reich reported enthusiastically on the findings of Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the first ethnographers to study directly the private lives of non-Western groups. Malinowski had demonstrated, said Reich, that neuroses and perversions were found only in capitalist patriarchal organizations with their accompanying "compulsory" sex morality; people indigenous to the Islands north

of Australia, for example, knew none of these phenomena. Manifestations such as
"sodomy, homosexuality, fetishism, exhibitionism, and masturbation are to the natives
only miserable substitutes for the natural genital embrace." They are acts "worthy
only of a fool"; the native "despises perversions as he despises one who eats inferior or
impure things instead of good clean food."

While Reich's statements in no way reflect Freud's views, the idea of "normal sexual
constitution" undermines the unconscious revolution in a theoretical sense as well,
because it annuls the claim that sexuality and the neuroses are "acquired." What
Mitchell and Laplanche see as the overturning of "popular" conceptions of sexuality is
in fact Freud's confirmation of the popular view that internal "drives," and not "power
and knowledge" relations, determine what we understand to be "sexuality." If
"hysteria" is defined as a subject's "forgetting" of significant parts of his or her body or
past, and if obsessional neuroses are characterized by a vacillation between the mother's
love and the father's power (or in any other way one chooses, it matters little for this
purpose), it cannot be claimed that these disorders are "acquired" if there is no way of
differentiating the causative "germs" beyond individual biographical contingencies. We
would all be equally sick and mentally paralysed all the time; that is, unless one wants
to argue à la Charcot that some people are more likely to get "infected" than others.

In short, without the ethnographic dimension as the primary force, we are back home
with Charcot's famille and all his blood relatives and descendents. For different reasons
and from a different struggle, Foucault, too, was determined to "rattle the bourgeoisie"
from their complacencies. He shows that psychoanalysis joins hands despite itself with

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59 Reich, Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality, p. 31.
60 Reich, Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality, p. 32.
its biological, psychiatric and psychological foes by readily subscribing to the game of
putting out the ontological truth of sex. In Foucault’s words:

The idea that one must indeed finally have a true sex is far from being
completely dispelled. Whatever the opinion of biologists on this point, the idea
that there exists complex, obscure, and essential relationships between sex and
truth is to be found – at least in a diffused state – not only in psychiatry,
psychoanalysis, and psychology, but also in current opinion. We are certainly
more tolerant in regard to practices that break the law. But we continue to think
that some of these are insulting to the “truth”: we may be prepared to admit that
a “passive” man, a “virile” woman, people of the same sex who love one
another, do not seriously impair the established order; but we are ready enough
to believe that there is something like an “error” involved in what they do. An
“error” as understood in the most traditionally philosophical sense: a manner of
acting that is not adequate to reality.61

As argued throughout this thesis, Foucault does not waste time proving that sexuality is
a cultural product. Freud had already said that with “acquired” hysteria. In fact, many
people said it and continue to say it, and, much earlier than Freud, in a famously
“unenlightened” text on masturbation from the early eighteenth century, the author
consistently reminds his readers that females practise “self-pollution” as well: “to
imagine that women are naturally more modest than men is a mistake,” he says, “all the
difference between them depends on custom and education.”62 What Foucault does is to
take statements like these “literally, at face value” – what he argues Freud did, though
unconsciously, in relation to Charcot:

Freud’s great originality wasn’t discovering the sexuality hidden beneath
neurosis. The sexuality was already there, Charcot was already talking about it.
Freud’s originality was taking all that literally, and then erecting on its basis the
Interpretation of Dreams, which is something other than a sexual aetiology of
neuroses. If I were to be very pretentious, I would say that I’m doing something
a bit similar to that. I’m starting off from an apparatus of sexuality, a

61 Michel Foucault [1980], “Introduction,” Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of
p. x [ « Le vrai sexe », DE, IV, pp. 115-123].
62 Anonymous [1723], Onania; or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution. And: A Supplement to the Onania
Trumbach].
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fundamental historical given which must be an indispensable point of departure for us. I’m taking it literally, at face value: I’m not placing myself outside it, because that isn’t possible, but this allows me to get at something else. ("CF," p. 219).

If “all the difference” depends on “custom and education,” then the essence of Western practices lies not in their divergences from “biology,” because that could be applied to any regime of “bodies and pleasures.” One must seek out instead their variations from other cultural forms – be it modern Japanese eroticism, or ancient Greek idolizations of boys, or Medieval courtly love, and so on. Foucault cannot be assimilated with the French Lacanian moment of the 1950s to the 1980s, and all offshoots arising from it, for this reason: a proper recognition of the ethnographic dimension.
Conclusion

To have written a thesis about Foucault, yet another, seems to violate an unwritten maxim in Foucauldian studies. Appalled by the idea of "dictating" how his books should be read,\(^1\) Foucault nevertheless recommended a certain path others should follow in his wake: "do what I do, and not what I say." An anecdote cited by David Halperin neatly illustrates this point. After being told that a student had just finished writing a dissertation on his critique of "humanism," an embarrassed Foucault responded, in all seriousness, that the man should not have wasted energy talking about him, and, instead, should "do what he was doing, namely, write genealogies."\(^2\)

But how does one distinguish a Foucauldian genealogy from traditional history? Paul Veyne's lively essay on Foucault's methodology nevertheless contains significant gaps, including the one identified by this thesis.\(^3\) By not isolating Foucault's difference from Lacanian psychoanalysis properly, Veyne reinstates the universal subject of desire by default and, with it, the universal subject full stop, because no subject can be properly "historical" without a sexual or reproductive identity of some form or another. It is all very well for Veyne to claim that, in Foucault's schema, "the prediscursive referent is not a natural object,"\(^4\) but this represents Lacan's view also. What Veyne calls Foucault's historical "practices" are doomed to remain secondary reflections of a primary "sexual" construction of identity (with or without a biological prop) unless he factors into his account the four main historical subjects of "sexuality" Foucault

\(^1\) See especially Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 52.
\(^4\) Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionizes History," *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 170.
proposed in *La volonté de savoir* as the critical alternative to the universal subject of desire. This cultural dispositif exists ontologically prior to any sexual subjects, and is able to be contrasted to other systems of practices elsewhere [*ars erotica*, or ancient Greek *aphrodisia*].

Especially in those areas of the history of sexuality involving women, there has been no rush to suspend “universals” post-Foucault, quite the contrary. Peter Gay’s concrete historical analysis of heterosexual relations in *The Bourgeois Experience* can serve as an example.⁵ Although singular, revealing, impressive, and arguing against stereotypes of the “Victorian” couple, Gay makes no apologies for an approach entirely derived from and thoroughly imbued with a Freudian understanding of married partners, set within the general contours of traditional historiography.⁶ Despite the discontinuities that have taken place in scientific, economic, moral and philosophical conceptions bearing on relations between men and women, non-historical notions of power implicit in the terms “patriarchy” or “phallocentrism” continue to be employed across the spectrum of critical thought, whether feminist, Marxist, Derridean or psychoanalytic.

Thus, the main goal of this thesis has been to take a step towards clarifying Foucault’s methodological difference in this area. First and foremost, this meant addressing the problem of how to read the *History of Sexuality* “project” itself. The idea that Foucault’s work is characterised by radical disjunctures and “crises” was rejected in favour of the argument that he presents a series of critical ethnographic sketches of Western culture that can be set against the medical conception of the person proposed

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⁶ There is a brief bibliographical reference to Foucault. See Gay, *Education of the senses*, p. 468.
by psychoanalysis. Although Foucault did not give modern sexuality the attention it deserved, at least not according to what he had forecast, and while he never elevated the unconscious to the forefront of critical thought, nevertheless, commentators by and large have not paid enough attention to "sexuality" and the "unconscious" as recurring themes in Foucault's work. As a result, his critical relationship to psychoanalysis is too hastily interpreted as a political opposition to "normative" and "confessional" practices, rather than the concerted effort that it really was to wrest these concepts from all vestiges of "science" and transform them into separate areas of philosophical investigation - roughly, "power" and "knowledge" and the relations between the two.

In order to disentangle his position, Foucault's differences from "French Freud" were highlighted, first by dispelling certain assumptions about this field that may show a superficial affinity (such as a "non-medical orientation," and, second, by placing Foucault more accurately within an alternative "anti-Oedipus" movement contemporaneous with French Freud. Theorists as diverse as Georges Bataille, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean-Pierre Vernant, or Gilles Deleuze, and now joined by a blatantly anti-Freudian contingent in the form of The Black Book of Psychoanalysis, shared with each other and with Foucault a resistance to psychoanalytic assumptions - sorely needed, for example, to challenge Freud's original interpretation of Oedipus The King.

But Foucault goes beyond these other anti-Oedipal tendencies. Not least, Foucault reinterprets Freud's place within the history of science in a highly original way, by turning the spotlight onto the psychiatric theory of degeneracy, and the critical role psychoanalysis played in undermining the nexus between racism - specifically anti-Jewish sentiment - and sexuality. Moreover, unlike other critiques, Foucault never
denied the reality of the Freudian unconscious, nor the “sexuality” with which psychoanalysis deals. What he questions is the claimed universality of these phenomena, and the methods based on this assumption employed to analyse them. By supporting the development of a “structural” version of the unconscious neither individual nor universally collective, and combining this with Nietzsche’s claim that the desire for knowledge is not a natural instinct of humankind, Foucault gives this concept a philosophical prominence it potentially had but soon lost in Freudian and even Lacanian discourse. In effect, Foucault invented an “ethnographic unconscious,” one of many “cultural unconsciouses” (in the plural) that exist or potentially exist, and provide the genealogical conditions for the analysis of any subject as a “historical and cultural reality” — not ignoring, importantly, the sexual and reproductive dimensions of this subjectivity.

What sustains Foucault’s resistance to psychoanalysis and makes it quite different to other anti-Oedipal theorists is the reformulation of “power.” It was argued throughout that the real problem in secondary commentaries is their collective failure to grasp Foucault’s “power” critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Almost without exception, commentators have sought to “explain,” even psychoanalyse, Foucault’s relationship to psychoanalysis, without showing the same attention, strangely, to the actual content of his argument. Yet it is here that Foucault exposes, in an unprecedented way, the climax of his work: that if the same political conception of power (juridical and negative) is taken to act in all manifestations of “power” relations, including those within the family, then different identities would be impossible. Through historicizing relations of power and knowledge, a new ontology of modern society and a productive model of
power emerge, where the individual is not just a product of patriarchal capitalism, but is a reality fabricated by specific technologies of power.

It was suggested that the intellectual lacuna generated in the wake of Foucault’s reformulation of “power” may have played a part in his decision to “retire” from the original project. Let us conclude this thesis therefore by noting an example of miscomprehension. In a lecture delivered in Japan during 1978 (DE, III, p. 535), Foucault made reference to a review of La volonté de savoir that had appeared some time before in Le Monde, France’s “leading” evening newspaper. The author was Roger Pol-Droit, a journalist, who had recently co-authored a series of studies dealing with contemporary sexual practices and who had previously interviewed Foucault over several sessions in 1975, producing fifteen hours of tape recordings, some excerpts of which were published later.

In his review, Pol-Droit claimed that “power” was very much in fashion at the moment. So much so that issues of “sex” were now subordinated to “power.” Foucault’s book was a perfect example of the trend, he said, reflecting an author so carried away by “power” that he even disregarded the existence of “two sexes.” Pol-Droit concludes by inverting Foucault’s thesis, wondering whether, in years to come, people may not be amazed to look back and see how passionately we believed “that the secret of our truth resides in power.”

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9 For example, Michel Foucault: entretiens, ed. Roger Pol-Droit (Paris, 2004).
Without mentioning the author’s name, Foucault admitted that the comments had left him flabbergasted. In a century overshadowed by the two “great sicknesses” of power, fascism and Stalinism, how on earth could intellectuals and philosophers not be concerned. These political systems had prolonged and exploited “a whole series of mechanisms” already existing in the “social and political” landscape of the West, even though they also reflected local and concrete conditions. To ignore this “technological” dimension that the history of power and knowledge relations can capture is to construct a false picture of these historical events. It can only be added that the problems will not have gone away for that.
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