Anxiety and the Voice of Unreason: Reading Foucault with Freud

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I. Madness as Discursive Excess

Near the beginning of Part Two of *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (1961)\(^1\)—under the heading “La transcendance de délire”—Foucault contrasts the experience of madness in the classical period to the modern experience of the same. The latter is inflected through scientific positivism in a way that the former is not, and this fact, and explaining its significance, will occupy Foucault throughout much of the middle part of *Histoire*. More narrowly, Foucault at this point in the text contrasts the two epochal understandings of madness in order to make the following point: during the classical period there was not yet the modern readiness to identify, diagnose and treat madness as *either* an organic/materialist issue *or* as a disease of the “spirit” or “soul.” The separation of body from spirit is inaugurated in the modern period with the advent of the new science of psychology.

Voltaire’s entry for “l’âme” in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) is noteworthy in this regard since it seems to draw the very distinction between body and soul that Foucault claims does not occur until the modern era of scientific psychology. However, this initial impression is dispelled once we attend to the *form* of the passage. Voltaire’s reflections on the human soul are “ironique […] contradictoire […] abusif”\(^2\); it is in jest that Voltaire anticipates the modern depiction of madness as a convergent/divergent interplay between mind and matter.
By ironic means, according to Foucault, Voltaire’s dictionary entry on l’âme, “vers quelque chose qui déborde dans le temps cette expérience [au XVIII siècle] vers la position la moins ironique qui soit du problème de la folie”³ (Hf 230). By writerly, stylized means Voltaire both anticipates the mind/body scheme later employed by modern positivist-scientific psychology while remaining rooted in the classical framework(s) of “sens-cerveau”⁴ or “périphérie-centre”⁵ (Hf 230). It is Voltaire’s stylized language that enables this cross-epochal feat, and so it is by discursive means that anticipations of modernity are revealed from within the classical experience of madness.

Foucault’s interest in the historical moment between the classical era and the modern period is, then, Voltairean in the above sense. The key to discerning, critically, the modern experience of madness lies within the language used in the process of constituting that experience. The approach Foucault takes in Histoire is thus discursive, and more specifically, structurally discursive; the idea is to “[l]aisser […] de côté une problématique qui a été ajoutée, assez tardivement, à l’expérience de la folie”⁶ in order to “dégager les structures”⁷ that belong to it during the classical period. By “leaving aside” madness as a modern problematic, and by “disengaging” the structures from the actual experience of madness in the classical period, Foucault provides himself with a medium in which the excessiveness of madness, or more figuratively, the “voix de déraison” is discernible. The medium of note in this regard is the set of classical structures once disengaged from their lived, experiential rootedness in the particulars of their period. Tracing these structures from the outside in, Foucault marks first, “le cycle de la causalité,”⁸ and second, “le cycle de la passion et de l’image.”⁹ Finally, at the “creux” of the classical experience of madness is the image situated within a discourse of madness. It is this last structure that Foucault identifies as, “le moment essentiel du délire”¹⁰ (Hf 232).
Moving inward from the outer levels of the classical experience of madness, Foucault arrives, finally, at the “troisième cycle” at its innermost heart (Hf 250; HM 231). This third cycle centers on a phantasm or image, which is itself built up within a whole, mad discourse. The second cycle of madness consists of an excess of the passions from which this image arises; it is an intense corporeal experience that fragments the coherence of the delirious person in body and mind and leads to a breaking away of “tout un segment de l’unité de l’âme et du corps”\(^{11}\) (Hf 249). The chimerical overflow of the passions is what the Encyclopédie (1772), in its entry on “Manie,” identifies as “idée délirante.” A delirious image condenses the otherwise diffuse, frenetic energies wracking the madman’s body. In the physical overload of his passions, the madman imagines himself to be made of glass; or, he envisions himself as having a fragile clay skull.

The passions are not madness tout court since they exceed themselves in projecting a delirious idea from out of their psycho-somatic frenzy; for the same reason, the delirious image is also not the whole of the experience of madness: “La folie est [...] au-delà de l’image”\(^{12}\) (Hf 251). The “au-delà” of the image is figured in its affirmation or negation; in a belief or disbelief; generally, in a judgment of correctness or error. What exceeds the image is a “discours qui soutient l’image et en même temps la travaille”\(^{13}\); the discourse distends the image; reshapes it; organizes it around a particular segment of language (Hf 251). Accordingly, Foucault maintains the “[i]mage n’est point folie”\(^{14}\) (Hf 250).

If the idée délirante is not “all (of)” madness, as Foucault concludes here, then in what sense is the “third cycle” in which it appears the “essential” structure of the classical experience of madness? The answer to this question lies in the essential excessiveness of discourse and the fact, as noted, that the delirious image is built up within a discourse of judgment and error. The
more discursive significance built up around the image—as when the madman, who imagines himself made of glass, behaves as if he is translucent or rose-colored—the more the image exceeds its own “essentially” excessive character. This interplay between the idea of madness, i.e., the (reasonable, if unusual) self-image of the madman, and the madness of that idea, i.e., the (rational) discourse that the madman builds up around the image, driving him mad (Hf 252; HM 234), is the very essence of classical madness. Foucault describes the discursive “maddening” of the image as “la paradoxale vérité de la folie”\(^{15}\) or, in a slightly different formulation, “langage délirant est vérité dernière de la folie”\(^{16}\) (Hf 253). Once more, at the end of the section under consideration, Foucault makes the linguistic structure of madness explicit: “Le langage est la structure première et dernière de la folie”\(^{17}\) (Hf 255).

It is because of the structural coincidence between discourse and the three-fold classical experience of madness that Foucault is able to draw this last conclusion: language is the ultimate structure of madness because language is \textit{expressively} excessive; it exceeds itself in and through its expression. Foucault’s identification of the excessiveness of madness with the \textit{voice} of unreason is figured in this \textit{expressive} excess. A stylized, ironic use of language like that of Voltaire in the \textit{Dictionnaire philosophique}, as mentioned above, or Flaubert in the \textit{Dictionnaire des idées reçues} at the end of \textit{Bouvard et Pécuchet} (1881)—about which Foucault writes in “La Bibliothèque Fantastique” (1964)—is noteworthy in this regard in that it employs such linguistic excess to literary effect.\(^{18}\) It is as an ironist and comedic writer that Voltaire anticipates modernity in his still-classical dictionary definition of “l’âme.” Flaubert achieves a similar effect, ridiculing the nineteenth century bourgeois faith in progress by ironizing the encyclopedic, scientific language of the two copy-clerk protagonists of his novel \textit{Bouvard et Pécuchet}. 
Thus, the “third cycle” of the classical experience of madness is also its essential structure because it is the discursive maddening of an image that would otherwise seem rooted in the psycho-somaticism of passions and excited bodily impulses. What Foucault calls “le langage délirant,” and which we might gloss as the excessiveness of discourse, is the voice of unreason that is always faintly audible behind every linguistic expression.

The voice of unreason, recorded in the explanatory structures of the classical period, is the “discours qui libérait la passion de toutes ses limites”, it is this same discursively unreasoned excess that leads the image to “entraîner tout le monde des croyances et des désirs” (Hf 256). The classical figuration of madness as the passional excess to the cycle of remote and proximate causes, and this classical figuration of madness as the imagistic excess to the passions, are simply the formal excesses of discourse in general, expressed firstly as intense psycho-somatic energies, secondly, as a delirious idea, and thirdly, and essentially, in the discourse of judgments of truth and error.

From this distinctly linguistic/discursive vantage, we can see the double sense of Foucault’s phrase, “la transcendance du délire.” It refers to the historical, epochal conditions by which the classical period gives way to modernity; it also refers to the way that madness transcends or exceeds itself as a discursive phenomenon. When read together, these two senses of the “transcendance” of delirium prepare Foucault to take the next step in historically reconstructing the modern experience of madness. The end of the classical period is marked by the appearance of the mentally ill patient who expresses his/her madness; the medical institution responds in kind by first making that subject into a discursively identifiable, categorizable patient who is then to be treated through psychology as a science of documentation, record-keeping and prescriptive treatment.
This last point presents an opportunity to interrupt our close attention to the letter of Foucault’s text and step back to ask a more general question about his discursive assessment of madness in *Histoire*. Such an interruption also allows us to introduce the key concept of anxiety, which will figure prominently in the following sections of the essay. The question that arises at this point is: what compels Foucault to combine these last two senses of “*la transcendance du délire*,” namely, the “transcendence” of the classical (historical) period by modernity and the “essentially” transcendent discursive character of madness? Why identify the discursive excessiveness of madness with the historical structure of (classical-modern) epochal succession? Is there no other way to conceive of the “transcendence” of (discursive) madness than as an historical or temporal phenomenon? The stylized writings of Voltaire, noted above, seem to suggest the possibility of what might be called an “intra-discursive” form of excessive language; it is such “intra-discursive” excess that lends Voltaire’s encyclopedic entry its ironic tone. Voltaire can be read as capitalizing, to comedic effect, on the excessiveness of discourse, and as giving expression to that excess within the space of his own literary productions; that his writings also figure the transition from the classical period into modernity is a separate (or, at least, separable) matter.

In beginning as I have, namely, by articulating Foucault’s discursive treatment of madness in *Histoire*, I leave questions of the correctness of such an assessment aside. Foucault may be right or he may be wrong to conceive of madness in both the classical and modern periods along discursive lines. Further, we might challenge Foucault on his idea that discourse is excessively significant because of its expressive character. However, such questions are not of immediate relevance to the project of the present essay. What *is* of interest is the possibility of
considering the discursivity of madness on its own terms apart from Foucault’s historicization of this phenomenon.

As will be discussed in section three, early in his philosophical career Foucault was in possession of such an “intra-discursive” conception of the excesses of madness: it is the concept of anxiety as borrowed by Foucault from Freudian psychoanalysis. Why, then, does Foucault abandon his early insight into the anxious excesses of discursive madness? As I will argue in section three, Foucault silences the anxious voice of unreason in order to proceed as he does in *Histoire*, namely, by way of the *history* of the classical and modern discourse on madness.

It serves this general argument to begin as we have with a detailed study of the discursive analysis of madness in *Histoire*. By such means, by working backwards in Foucault’s corpus from *Histoire* to his early writings on psychology and mental illness, the strategic character of Foucault’s critico-historical approach comes into focus. In an effort to retrieve a psychoanalytic conception of anxious discourse from out of Foucault’s historicization of discursive madness, and thus to cast the text of *Histoire* in light of the early writings on psychology and mental illness, let us pick up again the textual thread of *Histoire*.

As noted above, the first discursive form in which madness deliriously exceeds itself is in judgments of truth and error: “Il y aura folie lorsqu’aux images, qui sont si proches du rêve, s’ajoutera l’affirmation ou la négation constitutive de l’erreur”\(^\text{22}\) (Hf 259); or, more succinctly, “[l]a folie commence là où se trouble et s’obscurcit le rapport de l’homme à la vérité”\(^\text{23}\) (Hf 259). As the “between” of “la vision et l’aveuglement,”\(^\text{24}\) that is, as the non-coincidence of seeing with what there is to see, or as the mistaken relation between “le fantasme et le langage,”\(^\text{25}\) Foucault concludes, “la folie, au fond, n’est rien, car elle lie en eux ce qu’ils ont de négatif”\(^\text{26}\) (Hf 261). Madness is not thereby insignificant for being the “nothing” that subsists
between seeing and the seeable or between the idea and the language in which it is expressed. In fact, Foucault concludes just the opposite: “[m]ais ce rien, son paradoxe est de le manifester, de le faire éclater en signes, en paroles, en gestes”\(^{27}\) (Hf 261).

Foucault’s focus in this last passage is on the “overflow” or “explosion” of madness in discursively significant speech and signs. It is on such an “éclater” that modern psychology capitalizes in making the modern subject into the mentally ill patient and in constituting itself as a positivist science. The moral/normative force of the classical judgment of madness as error is simply a conversion of the “eruptive” force of all discourse; that same discursive “overflow” is inflected in the modern period away from (explicit) moral normativity and into rational, scientific positivism.\(^{28}\)

Using Foucault’s formulation, slightly revised, we can put the same point as follows: there is a “delirium of language,” which is a matter of its expressiveness; such excess is the “nothing” that characterizes all discourse. Or, even more succinctly, since Foucault calls madness “nothing” because of its excessiveness: language in its expressiveness is essentially mad. As such, discourse as “la paradoxaile vérité de la folie” leads first the passions, then the delirious idea, and finally, the whole mind-body aggregate to exceed itself. Modern psychology then employs such discursive excess to its own end: it separates the mind from the body and in so doing constitutes for itself a patient as an object of positivistic, scientific study.

Madness cannot say itself because it is the “nothing” that language is, most fundamentally or essentially. For this reason, madness is articulated, implicitly, in every discursive act. Foucault announces this last, striking conclusion as follows: “[D]iscours est à la fois langage silencieux que l’esprit se tient à lui-même dans la vérité qui lui est propre, et articulation visible dans les mouvements du corps”\(^{29}\) (Hf 255-256). To claim, as Foucault does,
that madness is a “langage silencieux” of psycho-somatic processes is to signal that it can only come to full expression through other, borrowed channels. Madness as a discursive phenomenon is expressed through bodily affects, as fantastic images or, in the case of Foucault’s study of madness, through the critical investigation of the self-constituting positivism of modern psychology.

At this point, we can return to and clarify a potential confusion. Above, Foucault’s approach in Histoire was described as “disengaging” the structures of the classical experience of madness from the encumbrances of nineteenth century scientific positivism. Foucault realizes this aim by bracketing the material body/spiritual mind distinction made in modern psychology. In proposing to return to the classical experience of madness and “disengage” the structures that “rightly belong to it” Foucault might be taken to be operating according to a hermeneutical principle of historical/original propriety: the historian’s task is to be “true” to his or her source (material and time frame).

But, let us be clear on what is involved in such a hermeneutics. Discursivity in its expressive excess is the structure of madness; discourse thus “speaks” the truth of the nothingness of madness. Foucault’s hermeneutical task is to articulate this (discursive) truth without actually doing so: the unreason to which Foucault would give voice is silent and must remain so. If there is a hermeneutics of madness at work in Histoire, it is oriented toward the unsayable, inarticulate nothing of discourse itself. For now, I simply note this hermeneutics; in section two, I will consider at greater length its significance for Foucault’s history of madness.

Ultimately, Foucault’s goal in Histoire in retrieving the classical experience of madness from behind the shadows of its nineteenth century, scientized form, is to illuminate the latter by means of the former. Foucault aims to show that the (seemingly) merely descriptive force of
scientific positivism is rooted in the prescriptive force of moral value-judgments that are carried over from the classical period. The aim of the present essay, however, is not to explore these broader themes as they are developed through *Histoire*. Instead, I propose to read backwards in the Foucauldian corpus; to begin as we have with *Histoire* and then to return to *Maladie mentale et personnalité/psychologie* (1954, then 1962). Our initial study of the discursive conception of madness in *Histoire* relates to this goal since it is in *Maladie mentale* that Foucault first begins to develop his discursive conception of madness. The “failure” of *Maladie mentale*, which is the accepted scholarly appraisal of the work—Foucault’s included—would thus seem to bear on the success or failure of *Histoire*.

The question is: what implications are there for *Histoire* in the fact that *Maladie mentale* is deemed a “failed” discursive study of madness? More basically, in what sense is *Maladie mentale* a “failure”? Perhaps there are theoretical resources Foucault garners for himself by inaugurating this rhetoric of failure in reference to his own work; theoretical resources that conceal another possible approach to madness that Foucault either ignores or suppresses. It is these questions that motivate the present essay. It is to unearth, at least in outline, an alternate Foucauldian reading of madness that I now leave aside *Histoire* to consider, instead, Foucault’s early reflections on madness and psychology.

II. The Failure of *Maladie mentale et psychologie*

Between the 1954 first edition and the 1962 second edition, *Maladie mentale* underwent significant revisions; the bulk of the edits were made to deuxième partie: “Folie et culture” (Mm 71ff.). As Todd May describes Foucault’s editorial changes, “[t]he second edition radically
revises the second part from a Marxist-oriented discussion of mental illness to something of a précis of *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*” (FRP 293).32

Foucault’s move away from the Marxist-orientation of the second part of *Maladie mentale et personnalité* (1954) to the historical approach taken in the second part of *Maladie mentale et psychologie* (1962) corresponds to his turn away from a socio-technological understanding of institutions to a conception of the same in terms of their discourse. In this way, the first part of the book, which treats discursively the existential component of madness, that is, it conceives of the personal experience of madness through the signs, expressions and narrative devices used by the mentally ill patient to articulate his/her experience of madness, fits more seamlessly with the revised second part of the book, which now treats the institution of psychology in similarly discursive terms.

If, following May, we describe the revisions to *Maladie mentale* in negative terms, then it is fitting to see Foucault as moving away from the influence of Marx and Canguilhem; here, in positive terms, I would like to consider the revisions to the text in the context of the Freudian influence on the young Foucault. My interest in *Maladie mentale*, and in the revisions Foucault makes to the text between 1954 and 1962, is to show how, in the midst of a discursive analysis of mental illness not unlike in *Histoire*, Foucault strikes upon the discursively basic notion of anxiety. Since it is only from a Freudian, psychoanalytic vantage that this feature of Foucault’s concept of anxiety is apparent, namely, its fundamental character with respect to discourse in general, the approach taken throughout the present section is to read together Foucault and Freud on the topic of the discourse of madness.

The revised version of part two of *Maladie mentale* finds Foucault engaged in an historical study of madness; thus, the text becomes a site of competing critical approaches. On
the one hand, there is the Freudian, psychoanalytic approach to discourse through the concept of anxiety; on the other, there is madness as a historicized, discursive phenomenon. As we will see, it is by resolving this conflict in favor of a critico-historical approach, and this by containing the discourse of anxiety within *Maladie mentale* and then counting the work a theoretical failure, that Foucault enables his early philosophical project. Here, in response to Foucault’s own strategic gesture of confining anxious discourse to his early reflections on mental illness and psychology, the aim is instead to reconsider what is lost to a form of discursive analysis when it distances itself from Freud and the anxious voice of unreason. To accomplish such a retrieval it will be helpful to work through some of the details of *Maladie mentale*, which is a text that has received little critical attention in the secondary literature.

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Under the introductory heading “*Médecine mentale et médecine organique,*” Foucault begins the first part of his study by canvassing the modern scientific literature on the topic of mental illness. The focus of Foucault’s literature-review is on the specific, terminological distinctions drawn between various psychological theories. For instance, Foucault quotes Jean Dupré’s definition of “*hystérie,*” André Delmas’ account of “obsession” and Emil Kraepelin’s description of “*catatonia*” (Mm 4-6; MI 4-6). Foucault’s emphasis on the texts and terminology of these psychologists announces his interest in conceiving of madness as neither a neurological disease, as is exemplified by the work of Dupré in this list, nor as a potentially systematized set of symptoms and treatments; it is Kraepelin who represents such scientific Freudianism in Foucault’s review of the psychological literature. Rather, Foucault is interested in madness as a distinctly discursive phenomenon: “*Nous voudrions montrer au contraire que la pathologie*
mentale exige des méthodes d’analyse différentes de la pathologie organique, et que c’est seulement par un artifice de langage qu’on peut prêter le même sens aux ‘maladies du corps’ et aux ‘maladies de l’esprit’” (Mm 12).

The language used by therapists and the terminological distinctions drawn in the scientific literature are only half of the discursive account Foucault gives of madness and psychology; the other half of the conversation is supplied by madness itself. Throughout the première partie of Maladie mentale—“Les dimensions psychologiques de la maladie”—Foucault returns again and again to the “monologue fragmentaire” that characterizes the speech of the madman.

The two halves of the discursive experience of mental illness—the monological language of the patient and the dialogical speech of the therapist—come together for Foucault in Freudian psychoanalysis. Accordingly, the “genetic” or “evolutionary” processes of psychological development identified and studied by psychoanalysis, which might be conceived of in organic or biological terms, Foucault instead insists on treating in distinctly linguistic terms. The exchange between analysand and analyst stages this evolutionary, linguistic accomplishment: “Il a fallu toute une évolution sociale pour que le dialogue devienne un mode de rapport interhumain [...] C’est toute cette évolution sociale que remonte le malade incapable de dialogue” (Mm 27-28). Continuing this line of reasoning, Foucault writes of the mentally ill patient, “Au dialogue, comme forme suprême de l’évolution du langage, fait place une sorte monologue où le sujet se raconte à lui-même ce qu’il fait, ou bien dans lequel il mène, avec un interlocuteur imaginaire, un dialogue” (Mm 28). By introducing the analyst into the monological discursive scene of the analysand, psychoanalysis attempts to reanimate the dialogical character of language.
The outcome of the dialogical breakdown suffered by the patient is a loss of “la maîtrise de son univers symbolique; et l’ensemble des mots, des signes, des rites, bref tout ce qu’il y a d’allusif et de référentiel dans le monde humain, cesse de s’intégrer dans un système d’équivalences significatives” (Mm 28). Foucault privileges Freudian psychoanalysis as a discursive practice because it responds in kind to this dialogical breakdown; the analyst engages the mentally ill patient at the point where language is fractured into an “ensemble of words, signs [and] rituals.” As an institutionalized form of discourse, psychoanalysis enters into an equal exchange with the patient by admitting the significance of dreams, parapraxes, and the symbolic equivalences within freely associated words and signs.

Freud’s “coup de génie,” according to Foucault, consists in his ability to “dépasser cet horizon évolutionniste, défini par la notion de libido, pour accéder à la dimension historique du psychisme humain” (Mm 37). In so doing, Freud succeeds in joining a general account of evolutionary psychic development to the personal way a patient experiences his or her illness. Such “personalization” of disease stems from the analyst attending to what Foucault refers to as “l’histoire individuelle” of the patient: the personally and discursively constituted past of the individual on which s/he draws in erecting a regressive defense against a present disorder.

Psychoanalysis as a discursive therapy traffics in disconnected signs, words and symbols, and works within the disorganized temporal horizon affected by the individual patient’s symbolic fragmentation of his/her own past. Foucault sees the psychoanalytic interest in fragmentary language in such temporal, historical light because, as noted above, he thinks of the Freudian analyst as operating with a genetic, evolutive model of language. Thus, within a fragmented, disconnected discursive space, the individual history of the mentally ill patient coincides with the
evolutionary history of the language in which he or she articulates that experience to the psychoanalyst.

It is through regressive analysis that Freud accomplishes this last, temporal transformation of the dialogical exchange between patient and analyst. Drawing on a case history from Freud’s Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse (1915-16), namely, the case of a woman whose “jalousie obsessionnelle” toward her husband is shown to be a regressive identification with her own daughter who is about to marry (Mm 38; MI 32), Foucault notes with approval Freud’s regressive method: “c’est que cette régression a chez la malade de Freud un sens bien précis” (Mm 39). The “precise meaning” of regression in this regard is the “fuite intentionnelle” from the present into a past that is, “n’est pas le sol originaire auquel on revient comme à une patrie perdue, c’est le passé factice et imaginaire des substitutions” (Mm 40).

When the patient’s symptom is seen as an “intentional flight” from a present situation, whether accurately perceived or not, then the past that reemerges within the present is imaginatively de-structured, and marked by terms, images and ideas that the patient treats as all equally significant. Yet, it is only when the defense mechanism is conceived of as an intentional strategy that the individual history of the patient appears in this light and so can coincide with the evolutionary structure of discourse adhered to within the analytic setting.

As defensive mechanisms, intentionally adopted, the regressive strategies used by the patient are primarily appeals to “signification défensive”; only secondarily or derivatively are such strategies regressions to or reiterations of pathological forms, e.g., past libidinal fixations or the death instinct (Mm 46; MI 38).
Foucault draws on another case history from Freud’s Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse to exemplify these “other explanations” available within psychoanalysis: “[Quand une malade de Freud écarte de sa chambre, dans un souci obsessionnel, toutes les pendules et toutes les montres dont le tic-tac pourrait troubler son sommeil, elle se défend à la fois contre ses désirs sexuels et elle les satisfait mythiquement” (Mm 48). Emphasis should be placed in this last sentence on the term “mythiquement.” Whatever pathological or libidinal forces underlie the patient’s hiding all the clocks and watches in her room, they are secondary to the mythic and thus defensively significant motives for her regressive behaviour. By attending to the stories, narrative devices, and linguistic forms used by the patient, Freud is able to discern the quiet voice of unreason barely audible within the patient’s report on her individual experience of madness.

Given his attention to the language used by the mentally ill patient, Freud is in a position to recognize the primacy of the discursive character of regressive behaviour and defensive strategies against present threats. Foucault cites, for example, the case history of Little Hans to show Freud at the scene of the formation of “[l]a symbolique la plus élémentaire” of a pathologically symptomatic behaviour—in the case of Little Hans it is a fear of being bitten by horses (Mm 41). Nevertheless, and despite his presence at the scene of Hans’ formation of a significant regressive strategy, Freud quickly abandons the discursive scene in appealing to the “Kastrationskomplex” (GW VII: 246) as a basic explanatory scheme.

Positivist-scientific failings aside, i.e., disregarding the tendency of Freud to reify certain structures as psychologically explanatory, Foucault considers psychoanalysis at length
throughout the first part of *Maladie mentale* as an example of the primacy of discourse in defining the two sides of madness as a psychological phenomenon: there is the discursively active and defensively regressive patient (analysand), and there is the responsive therapist (analyst) who is present at the moment of the formation and exercise of these “intentional” defensive strategies. By countenancing mental illness and psychology, and Freudian psychoanalysis in particular, as corresponding discursive forms, Foucault is able to transition in the second part of *Maladie mentale* to a discursive analysis of the institutions that have constituted, historically, “l’expérience contemporaine de la folie” (Mm 76ff.; MI 64ff.).

For instance, the institutionalization of the mad during the seventeenth century is in the second part of *Maladie mentale* presented in distinctly discursive, linguistic terms: “[La folie] entre dans un temps de silence dont elle ne sortira pas de longtemps; elle est dépouillée de son langage; et si on a pu continuer à parler sur elle, il lui sera impossible de parler elle-même à propos d’elle-même” (Mm 82). Similarly, in discussing Pinel’s late eighteenth century reform of French institutions of confinement, Foucault again emphasizes the discursive character of such reforms: “Dans le nouveau monde asilaire [...] [la folie] s’inscrit désormais dans la dimension de l’intériorité; et par là, pour la première fois, dans le monde occidental, la folie va recevoir statut, structure et signification psychologiques” (Mm 86).

The historical moment when madness is “psychologized,” when the madman is conceived of as a treatable, mentally ill patient and separated from the general population of criminals and miscreants, and when the early modern institutions of confinement are replaced by asylums, is an historical or epochal manifestation of a shift in the discourse on madness. Further, the changed significance of madness marked by the birth of the modern asylum and the beginning of modern psychology is, according to Foucault, the same meaning madness retains in
our contemporary world (Mm 87; MI 73). Despite Freud’s efforts to, “à rouvrir la possibilité pour la raison et la déraison de communiquer dans le péril d’un langage commun” (Mm 82), Foucault concludes, we (late) moderns continue to speak in the (early) modern language of madness.51

Freudian psychoanalysis holds out the promise of a “langage commun” in which madness and psychology might address one another across the long historical divide of nineteenth century positivism that separates them. In order to arrive at this conclusion and thereby re-envision the possible exchange between the voice of unreason contained in the speech of the madman and the institutionalized discourse of psychology, Foucault needed to overcome the influence of his early teacher and mentor; Canguilhemian/ Marxist analysis of socio-cultural institutions blocked one half of this possible exchange. As such, in revising Maladie mentale for its second printing, Foucault adopted a fully discursive approach to institutions.52

The whole field of Foucault’s study must be discursively leveled, so to speak, so that human experience as a discursive phenomenon can be impacted by, and in turn impact, the discursively determined social institution of psychology. Throughout the revised edition of Maladie mentale, it is through Freud that Foucault accomplishes such discursive “leveling” of his object of study. By abandoning the Marxism of the second half and instead working with a Freudian/psychoanalytic conception of language and discursive exchange, Foucault is able to treat both halves of the equation, the patient and the institution of psychology, as comparable, and potentially interactive, forms of discourse.
Despite the changes Foucault made to *Maladie mentale* between its first and second editions, he subsequently disowned the work. Hubert Dreyfus cites a note Foucault left, “categorically refusing all reprint rights to the first version”; Foucault also “tried unsuccessfully to prevent the translation of the radically revised 1962 version.” From our study of the text above, it is clear why Foucault disavowed the first edition of the book: its Marxist theory of institutions obstructs an interaction between the discursively constituted, lived experience of the mentally ill patient and socio-institutional forms of discourse as embodied in the medical sciences. However, Foucault’s conclusion that the second edition of the work is also a failure is not accounted for by the same line of reasoning. After all, the limiting effects of a Marxist approach to social, technological and institutional forms of normativity have been overcome. Why, then, does Foucault reject the 1962 edition of *Maladie mentale* as readily as he does the 1954 edition?

Dreyfus answers this question in Heideggerian fashion. There is an “instability” within *Histoire*, which Dreyfus traces back to the “unstable synthesis” Foucault maintains between, on the one hand, the “early Heidegger’s existential analysis of *Dasein* as motivated by the attempt to cover up its nothingness,” and on the other hand, the later Heidegger’s “historical interpretation of our culture as constituted by its lack of understanding of the role of the clearing in both making possible and limiting a rational account of reality” (FCE, viii). The methodological tension within *Histoire* is, in fact, inherited from a similar instability already present in the revised second part of *Maladie mentale*. According to Dreyfus, the failure of *Histoire*, is ultimately already figured in the Heideggerian failure of *Maladie mentale* (FCE xxvii).
We find a similar account of the failure of *Maladie mentale* and *Histoire* in Dreyfus and Rabinow’s book, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*.54 The manner in which Foucault approaches “madness” in both texts, namely, as an “unsaid” truth behind or within the discourse of madness that runs through the modern period—and, in particular, through the positivistic language of psychology as a modern science—comes precariously close to a “hermeneutics of depth.” Such a hermeneutics, Dreyfus and Rabinow continue, remains within the “part of the humanistic tradition that [Foucault] was seeking to overcome” (BSH 12). Foucault is thus guilty of adhering to a philosophical approach that has roots in the humanist tradition that he is seeking to move beyond.

Foucault’s effort throughout *Maladie mentale* to unearth the silent voice of unreason leaves the early work mired in a hermeneutical search for the “secret ontological sources” of madness. Implicitly, Foucault struggles in *Maladie mentale* to overcome the same failing he finds in Freud. Just as Freud succumbs to the (positivist) tendency to reify an explanatory structure of human psychological development, so Foucault seems to admit the coalescence of a single “*voix de déraison*” behind all the various expressions of madness articulated through “publicly available,” socio-institutional practices. To the extent that the second part of the 1962 edition of *Maladie mentale* abandons the idea of a “secret ontolog[y]” of madness, and instead deals only with explicit institutional forms and discursive practices, Foucault is credited by Dreyfus and Rabinow with inaugurating a workable critical methodology (BSH 12); to the extent that it fails to take this critical step, the early work must be dismissed as a failure.

Taken together, these two related assessments of the failure of Foucault’s early work on madness and psychology attribute to it a confused, unworkable Heideggerianism. From Division I of *Sein und Zeit* Foucault borrows Heidegger’s idea of a social (worldly) context of public
practices. Foucault historicizes the Heideggerian world and treats both the (discursive) context and the practices carried out within that context as equally discursive and so reciprocally determining. At the same time, however, there is a hermeneutics of depth present in the pages of *Maladie mentale*; Dreyfus traces this feature of the text back to the influence on Foucault of Heidegger’s early conception of “Angst” from Division II of *Sein und Zeit*. Under the influence of this second approach, Foucault searches, in error, for the silent voice of unreason within or beneath the social discourse on madness.

What Dreyfus overlooks in confirming the failure of *Maladie mentale* in this way is the relation between a critical theory of discursive practices and such practices as objects of critique: the relation, that is, between a theory and its object. In the process of interpreting historically the ways scientific-positivist discourse falters in realizing its own project of rational explanation, a “deep” discursive object forms on which a hermeneutics can be exercised. Were this not the case, Foucault could not arrive by the discursive path he follows through the classical experience of madness at the formation of the modern, mentally ill subject. While it is socio-historical practices that promulgate, shape, and direct the experience of madness, and lead to the formation of the mentally ill modern subject, Foucault is able to trace this trajectory and identify this form of modern subjectivity only because his study critically participates in the same discursive process (and leaves open a “deep hermeneutical” place for the formation of the object of its study).

The reflections in the first part of the present essay on the excessive character of discourse help explain this characteristic of Foucault’s thought. Once socio-cultural, institutional practices are treated discursively, as Foucault begins to do in the revised second part of *Maladie mentale* and throughout *Histoire*, the (discursive) excessiveness of those practices begin to
accumulate within the theory that has assumed the task of critically investigating those practices. This occurs because the directedness of the “overflow” of discourse, within its original discursive situation, is disrupted. Again, to draw on my earlier discussion of the excess of discourse (see section one, above), insofar as it is theorized by Foucault, and theorized in discursive terms, the (discursive) excessiveness of the psycho-somatic image—i.e., the “second cycle” of the classical experience of madness—is no longer equal to the “idée délirante” at the heart of that same classical experience. Some amount of that discursive excess is thus borrowed by Foucault’s own discursive, critical theory.

A consequence of the discursive theorization of socio-institutional discursive forms and practices is that the excessiveness of such discourse is in part disengaged from that form or those practices and instead accumulates within the critical theory that has effected this “disengagement” of the discursive structures. The force of the critique Foucault conducts on his various different objects of historical study is borrowed from those objects themselves. More precisely, the force of Foucault’s critique is derived from the historicization of the objects it studies: the expressive excess gleaned by Foucauldian discursive analysis is leveraged as critique through the historicization of the source discourse.

These last points are in accord with Derrida’s reflections on Foucauldian historicity in “Cogito et histoire de la folie.” Derrida here reads together the beginning of Descartes’ first Meditation with Foucault’s interpretation of Descartes near the beginning of Histoire. The aim is to show that Foucault sequesters the hyperbolic character of Cartesian doubt in order to situate Descartes’ theoretical “confinement” of madness within a historical framework. Derrida’s claim is that Foucault reproduces the early modern confinement of madness through his own critico-historical reading of a text that he is otherwise using to exemplify such confinement.
Details of the essay aside, and of Foucault’s response in “Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu” (1972), Derrida’s interest is in the way Foucault’s gesture of confinement (of Cartesian hyperbole) is a means of constituting the critical force of his own historical methodology. Generalizing from the specifics of his reading of Foucault, Derrida can be read as problematizing the way in which philosophy constitutes itself as a critical discourse and does so by constructing itself as an historically determined object of study: “By separating, within the cogito, on the one hand, hyperbole (which I maintain cannot be enclosed in a factual and determined historical structure, for it is the project of exceeding every finite and determined totality) and, on the other hand, that in Descartes’s philosophy [...] which belongs to a factual historical structure [...] [what is in] question is a way of accounting for the very historicity of philosophy” (CHM 60).

I agree with Derrida’s assessment of philosophical historicity as self-constituted and share his wont to question Foucault on his preferred critico-historical approach. Still, the present essay differs from Derrida in finding a second moment in the theoretical or textual “confinement” by which Foucault arrives at his philosophical method: Foucault practices a confinement on himself, or rather, on one of his own texts. It is by assessing Maladie mentale as a failure, and in so doing, debarring it from the body of work that constitutes his œuvre, that Foucault secures the critical force of his historical approach. But it is only by leaving open the space of a deep hermeneutics as an accompaniment or addition to an analysis of discourse that we are able to see this self-constituting gesture take shape, first in the pages of Maladie mentale and then more fully in Histoire.57

It is in the context of this interplay between the object of a hermeneutics of depth and a critico-historical philosophy that we are able to grasp, finally, the failure of Maladie mentale. Such failure is not a matter of the text containing an incompatible, dualist methodology
between a “hermeneutics of depth” and a social theory of discursive practices. A critical theory of discourse depends precisely upon such a hermeneutics for its prescriptivity. The failure of *Maladie mentale* is instead that it prevents the form of discourse proper to the “deep” object of its own approach from impacting and shaping its own critical discourse.

While Foucault allows the voice of unreason as expressed in madness to influence and shape the discourse of psychology—and in so doing disrupt the latter’s pretensions to positivistic scientism—he bars the discursive form that characterizes that exchange from impacting his own study of mental illness and psychology. Foucault, in short, keeps what is in a hermeneutical sense, “proper to” the exchange between madman and therapist from influencing his own critical study of that exchange. The discursive form in question, the one that defines the discursive exchange between madness and psychology, and the one that Foucault debars from his own critical discourse on madness and psychology, is the anxious voice of unreason.

**III. Foucault, Freud, and the Discourse of Anxiety**

Foucault introduces “angoisse [anxiety]” toward the end of Chapter Three of *Maladie mentale*. The context of the discussion is Foucault’s consideration, noted above, of the case from Freud’s *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* in which a woman turns off all the clocks and watches in her bedroom in order to satisfy “mythically” her sexual desires. Noting the difference between “l’expérience de la contradiction”\(^{58}\) of “l’individu normal” and the “expérience contradictoire”\(^{59}\) of the mentally ill subject, Foucault relates both forms of contradiction, normal and pathological, to anxiety. Leaving “normal” anxiety aside, Foucault continues with its pathological form; of the “contradictory experience” of *la malade*, Foucault
writes, “On peut donc dire, en un sens, que c’est par l’angoisse que l’évolution psychologique se transforme en histoire individuelle” (Mm 50).

As we have seen in section two, Foucault treats both psychological evolution and individual history in discursive terms: dialogue is the highest evolutive accomplishment of psychological development; the mentally ill patient regresses through primitive discursive forms, thereby devolving into monological speech; and the mentally ill patient draws on his/her discursively self-constituted personal history in order to develop a regressive strategy against a present threat. If, as Foucault now claims, anxiety is the point at which evolutionary psychological development meets personal history, then it is central to the whole theoretical landscape that Foucault traverses in Maladie mentale. The central role of anxiety consists in its being the basic discursive form that is common to both the developmental history of the psyche and the individual history of the mentally ill patient; Foucault, in fact, makes just this point in continuing on with the topic of anxiety: “Avec l’angoisse nous sommes au cœur des significations pathologiques” (Mm 49). Anxiety thus lies “[s]ous tous les mécanismes de protection qui singularisent la maladie”; and Foucault presents hysteria, obsessional neurosis, and paranoia as, in their own respective way, significant responses to anxiety (Mm 49).

Further, as a discursive phenomenon, or more precisely, as the basis of discourse and signification in general, anxiety should, for Foucault, fall within the purview of Freudian psychoanalysis. In section two above, we saw how Foucault pairs his discursive assessment of mental illness and psychology with an acknowledgement of psychoanalysis as the discursive science of the pathological psyche par excellence. If with anxiety Foucault has arrived at the very heart of mad signification, then we would expect psychoanalysis to be present at the same,
discursive scene. Continuing his discussion of *angoisse*, we find Foucault on familiar, if uncited, psychoanalytic ground.

Implicitly then, I am reading “Angst” in Freudian rather than Heideggerian fashion, and this despite Foucault leaving Freud uncited at this key textual juncture of *Maladie mentale*—the moment when Foucault finally arrives at the discursive form (of anxiety) in which the voice of unreason expresses itself. To continue the “Freudian” reading of Foucault begun in section two, and to explore the Freudian influence on Foucault’s thoughts on anxiety, it is useful to mark a number of similarities between the text of *Maladie mentale*, on the one hand, and Freud’s essay “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst” (1926) on the other. The outcome of this textual comparison is to throw Foucault’s “failed” early work on mental illness and psychology in a different light than the Heideggerian one proposed by Dreyfus and Rabinow.

“Angst,” conceived psychoanalytically, poses a significant threat to the critico-historical approach that Foucault inaugurates in the revised version of part two of *Maladie mentale*. If he is to take such a philosophical approach, as he does in *Histoire*, Foucault’s only option is to contain the threat posed by anxiety as a basic discursive form, and to do so by disowning as a failure the text in which such anxiety first appears. By casting Foucault’s comments on *angoisse* in a Freudian rather than Heideggerian light, we are able to make out Foucault’s efforts at this methodological level.

Faced with a contradictory, or “ambivalent” experience of the present, the pathologically anxious patient, according to Foucault, “provoque le jeu de la protection névrotique” (Mm 50). The defensive mechanism on which *la malade* anxiously draws to protect against his/her present circumstances is a constituent part of his/her individual history. The patient, in short, anxiously recalls the past in defense against the present. However, the situation is not so simple. By
Foucault’s own account the mentally ill patient does not experience the present with l’ambivalence or as a contradiction, but rather, s/he has a contradictory experience of the present. Moreover, the contradictoriness of this experience is figured in anxiety: “Le malade se défend-il avec son présent contre son passé, ou se protège-t-il de son présent avec l’aide d’une histoire révolue?” (Mm 50). This question, which captures the central issue of the “contradictory experience” of pathological anxiety, seems unanswerable. Since the pathologically anxious patient has a contradictory experience of the present (rather than experiencing a contradiction in the present), his/her past is indistinguishable from his/her present. With a decisiveness that belies how obscure the situation of anxiety is, Foucault concludes: “Il faut dire, sans doute, que c’est dans ce cercle que réside l’essence des conduites pathologiques” (Mm 50).

The constant “cercle” around which the mentally ill patient moves is the one that stretches between a psychological strategy devised in the past that can be used as a present mechanism of defense and a present threat that recalls, to anxious effect, a past traumatic situation. Yet, there is no clear temporal marker within the contradictory experience of the patient that would allow us to decide between these two possibilities: the past may be the cause of, or a defensive response to, a present anxiety; or, a present anxiety may itself be projected back into the past so as to seem like a possible means of regressive defense against the present. Again, belying the complexity of his topic, Foucault ends his reflections with the empty conclusion, “cette monotonie circulaire est le trait de l’histoire pathologique” (Mm 50).

In content, Foucault’s brief remarks on angoisse at this point in Maladie mentale recall Freud’s analysis of anxiety in “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst” (1926). In form or tone the two texts are significantly different. Unlike Foucault, who momentarily reveals the discursive and
temporal complexity of anxiety only then to re-conceal it behind a definitive, if empty, conclusion, Freud’s essay leaves open the problem of anxiety. Freud, as it were, succumbs to the anxiety of his own study while Foucault distances himself from such anxiety by trying to contain it within the interplay between mental illness and psychology. Such decisiveness on Foucault’s part, and his abandonment of Freud at this point in *Maladie mentale*, inaugurates the containment of anxiously signifying madness; such decisiveness, such “containment,” is then the ground on which Foucault erects the critico-historical approach practiced in the second part of *Maladie mentale* and throughout *Histoire*.

Just as Foucault presents paranoia, hysteria and obsessional neurosis as different forms of significant response to anxiety, and thus as primarily a discursive phenomenon, so Freud, in “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst,” draws what he calls “Angstsignal” to the foreground of his reflections on anxiety. In his “Supplementary Remarks on Anxiety,” Freud identifies *Angstsignal* as seemingly both the cause of and the response to the confused temporal situation that the patient faces:

> **Dies will besagen: ich erwarte, daß sich eine Situation von Hilflosigkeit ergeben wird, oder die gegenwärtige Situation erinnert mich an eines der früher erfahrenen traumatischen Erlebnisse. Daher antizipiere ich dieses Trauma, will mich benehmen, als ob es schon da ware, solange Zeit ist, es abzuwenden.**

( GW XIV: 198)

Unable to decide whether the anxiety-inducing threat is present and the signal is responding to it by recalling something from the past, or whether a possible future trauma is being signaled in anticipation, and this signal is what is causing the present anxiety, Freud concludes both: “**Die Angst ist also einerseits Erwartung des Traumas, anderseits eine gemilderte Wiederholung desselben**” (GW XIV: 198). The signaling of anxiety turns out to be the only consistent feature of anxiety whether in the presence of an anxiety-inducing threat (*Realangst*), the remembrance of
such a threat, or in the anticipation of a threat in the future; *Angstsignal* characterizes the situation, as well, when there is no real and present threat and it is only in signaling (the possibility of such a threat) that the patient feels anxious.

Further, what is thereby signaled is nothing; this is true, for Freud, both in the case of *Realangst*, and when the patient faces only the thought, memory, or anticipation of a possible threat. The “nothingness” of anxiety for Freud recalls us to Foucault’s claim, noted in section one, that madness as the excess of discourse is itself nothing. Madness is, for Foucault, the expressive excess of discourse or what might be thought of as the remainder to all signification. In the context of *Histoire* this “nothing” that is the discursive truth of madness was left unnamed. Now, with the basic discursive concept of anxiety from *Maladie mentale* in hand, we can think of the nothingness of madness, i.e., the voice of unreason, as the expressiveness of anxiety—the Freudian term for this same expressive nothingness is *Angstsignal*.

There is in Freud a “nothingness” to anxious signification comparable to that in Foucault: there is no object of anxiety; no signified that corresponds with the signifying of anxiety. Freud claims as much in distinguishing anxiety from fear: “[Angst] *haftet ihr ein Charakter von Unbestimmtheit und Objektlosigkeit an; der korrekte Sprachgebrauch ändert selbst ihren Namen, wenn sie ein Objekt gefunden hat, und ersetzt ihn dann durch Furcht*”\(^70\) (GW XIV: 197).

Combining, then, the temporal and discursive features of anxiety, we can conclude that for both Foucault and Freud pathological anxiety is a signifying of nothing in an undecidable past, present, and future. Further, if with Foucault we treat *angoisse* as basic to signification, as his thoughts on the madness of the expressive character of discourse in general seem to imply, then all discourse is marked by an empty significance expressed within a fragmentary and confused past, present, and future.
Faced with the obscure discursive and temporal circumstances posed by anxiety, Foucault, like Freud, should only be able to draw an equivocal, uncertain conclusion about the nature of anxiety and its place in the psychological life of the mentally ill patient. Despite the rhetorical tone, again, of Foucault’s “[i]l faut dire” and “sans doute” concerning the “circ[ularity]” of the pathological experience of anxiety, the vacuousness of his conclusion remains. Foucault is certain that the mentally ill patient signals his anxiety from somewhere within a circle connecting a present real threat, a recollected trauma and a non-present threat that is merely anticipated as yet to come.

What kind of certainty is this? Of what does Foucault have “no doubt”? It remains unclear whether there is a real present threat of trauma, or a remembered trauma signaled as if in anticipation of a threat that may or may not materialize. Further, there is nothing in the “expérience contradictoire” nor in the signification itself that would enable Foucault to focus in on one point of the circumlocution of the anxious patient. For a discursive theory, like the one Foucault would exercise on madness, and moreover for an historicizing discursive theory, the circle of anxious signification is vicious indeed.

Freud, by contrast, acknowledges the uncertainty of his psychological findings on anxiety. Though the topic of Angst occupies him across his intellectual career—from the early “Zur Kritik der ‘Angstneurose’” (1895), through the case histories of “Der kleine Hans” (1909) and the “Der Wolfsmann” (1918), to “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst”—Freud, in the end, admits to being bested by the topic. “Hemmung, Symptom und Angst” is noteworthy in this regard in the long record of Freud’s reflections on anxiety since it is here that Freud seems finally to admit to the insurmountable complexity of the nature and origin of anxiety.71 There is
tentativeness to the essay; Freud draws together particular strands of evidence only subsequently to allow them to unravel again under the weight of further counter-evidence. 72

The claim here is that Foucault cannot follow Freud in drawing this last, anxious conclusion. The minimum condition of a critico-historical philosophical approach, like the one Foucault inaugurates in the revised second part of *Maladie mentale*, is discourse that is specifiable, in time and significance. A basic discursive anxiety that is undecidably (in)significant within a confused temporal framework must be reputed if such an approach is to be followed. This is just what Foucault does first, within the text itself, by drawing a definitive conclusion about the temporal and discursive character of anxiety and then, subsequently, in counting *Maladie mentale* as a whole a failure (thereby confining the anxiety of discourse to the rejected text). In disowning this, his earliest reflections on mental illness and psychology, what Foucault gains is a significant form of discourse that is mappable to a historical timeline; it is on such a model of discourse that Foucault then erects and practices the critico-historical method of the revised second part of the text and of *Histoire* in general.

This last point again brings the present essay close to a Derridean reading of Foucault. In a series of questions from “‘To Do Justice to Freud’: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis” (1994), 73 Derrida wonders what gains Foucault derives by distancing himself from Freud and psychoanalysis:

Would Foucault’s project have been possible without psychoanalysis, with which it is contemporary and of which it speaks little and in such an equivocal or ambivalent manner [in *Histoire*]? Does the project owe psychoanalysis anything? [...] Would [psychoanalysis] define the very thing from which the project [of *Histoire*] had to detach itself, and in a critical fashion, in order to take shape? (TDJ 233).
In response to Derrida, we can answer that it is the critico-historical character of Foucault’s project that is gained by the disownment of its own link to psychoanalysis; that link is figured here in prominence in both theories of anxiety as a basic form of signification.

By confining a basically anxious form of discourse to his first major work on madness and psychology, Foucault derives the means of proceeding critically and historically with the history of madness. The results of this confinement are as evident as they are impressive. In repudiating his first foray into a discursive study of madness, Foucault provides himself the conditions for his own critico-historical approach, which he practices to such great effect in *Histoire*. Section one above shows some of the great theoretical resources Foucault gains in abandoning a model of discourse as basically or essentially anxious, but it also hints at a kind of Voltairean or stylistic loss that Foucault suffers in subjecting his own work to retrospective critical dismissal. What Foucault forsakes by this means is a basically Freudian approach to the irregular processes through which psycho-social phenomena develop both in individuals and in cultures, and he deafens himself to the stylized, ironic manner in which those irregularities are expressed in discourse. In Derridean terms, what Foucault’s critico-historical approach conceals (or confines) is the essentially “hyperbolic” or “excessive” character of every philosophical claim, his own included.

Perhaps, though, this “Freudian” Foucault is still figured in the topic that has concerned us throughout, namely the idea of a theoretical approach as failed and susceptible to alternate approaches. Accordingly, one could read the “failure” of *Maladie mentale* back into Foucault’s *œuvre* at a stylistic level (and thus in keeping with the Voltairean irony noted at the beginning of the present essay). In this way, each successive Foucauldian methodology—hermeneutics, archaeology, genealogy, and a sexual ethics of (care of) the self—and Foucault’s unease with the
very notion of a philosophical methodology, is essentially “ironized” or rendered discursively anxious. The restlessness with which Foucault moves between these different theoretical approaches would then be an anxious repetition of the first, inaugural failure that he stages retrospectively in the pages of Maladie mentale.

Notes


2 “ironic […] contradictory […] excessive” (HM 212).

3 “reaches beyond the time of that experience [in the eighteenth century], towards the least ironic position available concerning the problem of madness” (HM 212).

4 “sense-brain” (HM 212).

5 “periphery-center” (HM 212).

6 “leav[e] aside […] a set of problems that were added at a fairly recent date to the experience of madness” (HM 214).

7 “disengage the structures” (HM 214).

8 “the cycle of causality” (HM 214).

9 “the cycle of passion and image” (HM 214).

10 “the essential moment of delirium” (HM 214).

11 “a whole segment of the unity of soul and body” (HM 231); an excerpt from the *Encyclopédie* captures well the mechanism of such energetic projection and identifies the part of madness jettisoned from its psycho-somatic experience: “[l]es pulsations rapides et désordonnées des artères […] impriment le même mouvement aux fibres (que dans la perception); elles représenteront comme présents des objets qui ne le sont pas, comme vrais ceux qui sont chimériques [the rapid and disordered pulsing of the arteries […] transmits the same movement
(as in perception) to the fibers; they represent as present objects that are not there, and make the chimerical appear real]” (Hf 249; HM 231).

12 “Madness is [...] beyond the image” (HM 232).

13 “discourse that sustains the image while working it” (HM 233).

14 “image is not at all madness” (HM 232).

15 “the paradoxical truth of madness” (HM 234).

16 “delirious language is the ultimate truth of madness” (HM 234-235).

17 “Language is the primary and ultimate structure of madness” (HM 237).


19 “delirium of language” (HM 237).

20 “discourse that liberated passion from all its limits” (HM 237).

21 “carry off the whole world of beliefs and desires” (HM 237).

22 “Madness begins when images, which are so close to dreams, are compounded by the affirmation or the negation that are essential to mistakes” (HM 240).

23 “[m]adness begins where man’s relationship to the truth becomes cloudy and unclear” (HM 241).

24 “vision and blindness” (HM 242).

25 “phantasm and language” (HM 242).

26 “madness at bottom is nothing, for all that it unites in them is their negative aspects” (HM 242).

27 “[the paradox of madness] is that it manifests this nothingness, causing it to overflow with signs, words and gestures” (HM 242).

28 By historically reconstructing this discursive self-constitution of positivistic scientific discourse, Foucault aims to reclaim such “explosiveness” for a discourse of alterity or otherness—and this, ultimately, toward a discursive ethics or politics that is, at this early stage in

29 “[D]iscourse is a silent language in which the spirit addresses itself in its own truth and [is] at the same time visibly articulated in the movements of the body” (HM 237).

30 By pairing accurate/inaccurate judgment(s) with delirious images, the classical period sets the stage for conflating what Foucault terms judgments of the “*vrai physique* [physically true],” that is, judgments concerning the (in)correct correlation of internal sensations with external, physical objects, and judgments of the “*vrai moral* [morally true].” In the context of the relationship between the image and erroneous or accurate judgments, what is “physically true” is the (ability to discern the) non-correspondence between the image and empirical objects; what is “morally true” is the (ability to) treat discourse and employ language solely within the confines of what is discernible as either accurate or erroneous. The judgment that an image does or does not correspond with reality is one matter, and it is what the classical period terms a physical truth. Allowing questions concerning the correspondence or non-correspondence of images to empirical reality to encroach upon the discursive space not defined within the parameters of accuracy and error is a moral failure; it is a failure of character; and, ultimately, in the classical period it is taken for a sign of madness (Hf 260; HM 241).


32 Todd May, “Foucault’s Relation to Phenomenology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault: Second Edition*. Ed. Gary Gutting (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 284-311. Hereafter FRP; It was the influence of Georges Canguilhem on the young Foucault that accounted for the original Marxist orientation of part two of the book. In *Le normal et le pathologique* (1943), Canguilhem approaches the related concepts of “normality” and “norms” from a Marxist perspective to show that the social process of “normalization,” that is, specifying and enforcing norms, is not a neutral activity: there are socio-economic interests motivating the classification scheme “normal-abnormal.” Further, such interests are coded within the technologies used to impose that scheme (Cf. Georges Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2009). In English, *The Normal and the Pathological*. Trans. C. R. Fawcett (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 245ff.). Since normalization is a two-part process of technological enforcement and the effects of such enforcement on the lived experience of the subjects of those norms, Canguilhem’s text also includes an “existential” component. By this means, Canguilhem rejects the positivistic assumption of the possibility of an anatomical or purely physiological account of pathology since what is thereby left out is the crucial matter of how a patient lives and experiences their disease (Cf. 203ff.). It is as a living, feeling patient, which is itself a socio-technologically determined construct, that the subject experiences his/her disease. Since the determination of the subject as a *patient* and their
pathology as a *disease* is in both cases governed by social and technological means, the physiology of the disease harbours a deeper, socio-technological determination and enforcement of normal and abnormal human experience.

33 See respectively, Jean Dupré, *La constitution émotive* (1911); André Delmas, *La pratique psychiatrique* (1929), and Emil Kraepelin, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* (1889).

34 “My aim, on the contrary, is to show that mental pathology requires methods of analysis different from those of organic pathology and that it is only by an *artifice of language* that the same meaning can be attributed ‘illnesses of the body’ and ‘illnesses of the mind’” (MI 10; emphasis added).

35 For example, Foucault presents the inhibited ego-function of a psychotic as a dialogical failure: “[L]e langage intérieur envahit tout le domaine d’expression du sujet qui poursuit à mi-voix un monologue décousu sans s’adresser jamais à personne [[T]he internal language invades the entire expressive domain of the subject, who pursues under his breath a disconnected tongue without addressing anyone]” (Mm 19-20; MI 16); similarly: “A la synthèse complexe du dialogue s’est substitué le monologue fragmentaire; la syntaxe à travers laquelle se constitue un sens est brisée, et il ne subsiste plus que des éléments verbaux d’où s’échappent des sens ambigus, polymorphes et labiles [The complex synthesis of dialogue has been replaced by fragmentary monologue; the synatx through which meaning is constituted is broken, and all that survives is a collection of verbal elements out of which emerge ambiguous, polymorphic, labile meanings]” (Mm 20; MI 17).

36 “A whole social evolution was required before dialogue became a mode of interhuman relation [...] The patient who is incapable of dialogue regresses through this whole social evolution” (MI 23).

37 “Dialogue, as the supreme form of the evolution of language, is replaced by a sort of monologue in which the subject tells himself what he is doing or in which he holds a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor” (MI 23).

38 “the mastery over his symbolic world; and the ensemble of words, signs, rituals, in short, all that is allusive and referential in the human world, is no longer integrated in a system of meaningful equivalences” (MI 23-24).

39 “go beyond the evolutionist horizon defined by the notion of libido and reach the historical dimension of the human psyche” (MI 31).

40 “in the case of Freud’s patient this regression has a very precise meaning” (MI 32).

41 “not the native ground to which one returns as to a lost country, but the factitious and imaginary past of substitutions” (MI 33).
“A pathological inertia in behaviour? The manifestation of a repetition principle that Freud extrapolates into the biological reality of a paradoxical ‘death instinct’ [...] This, no doubt, is to give to the facts a name [...] But in Freud’s work and in psychoanalysis, other explanations can be found for this derealization of the present than the mere repetition of the past” (MI 34).

When one of Freud’s patients, with obsessional thoroughness, removed from her room every clock or watch whose ticking might disturb her sleep, she was at the same time defending herself against her sexual desires and satisfying them mythically” (MI 39).

Foucault’s use of the term “mythiquement” in reference to the patient’s discursive constitution of his/her own past is significant in that it signals the excessiveness of this discursive strategy. The patient flees his/her present circumstances by telling him/herself a story of their life and past. The story that is told, and in whose telling the analyst participates, always contains and means more than the present situation against which it is constructed as a defense. Though here presented in a highly condensed fashion, namely, in passing reference to the “mythologized” past of the patient, Foucault’s account of the mythical discourse of la malade accords with the account he gives of discourse (as expressive/excessive) throughout Histoire.

“the most elementary symbolism” (MI 34).

Castration, at least, Freud links in the case of Little Hans to myth and story-telling (Cf. GW VII: 246ff.); other pathological explanatory structures to which Freud appeals, such as libido or the death-instinct, are even more remote from the primacy of discursive techniques of regression.

This is “le grand renfermement,” which occupies Foucault throughout much of the first half of Histoire (Hf 56ff.; HM 44ff.).

“[Madness] entered a phase of silence from which it would not emerge for a long time; it was deprived of its language; and although one continued to speak of it, it became impossible for it to speak of itself” (MI 68-69).

Foucault treats at length the historical moment of Pinel’s “liberation” of the mentally insane in part three of Histoire; the aim, there, is to reveal the way such “liberation” effects a moralistic condemnation of madness under the pretext of granting the madman his inalienable human rights (Hf 363ff.; HM 344ff.).

“In the new world of the asylum [...] [madness] was now inscribed within the dimension of interiority; and by that fact, for the first time in the western world, madness was to receive psychological status, structure and signification” (MI 72).

“re-open the possibility for reason and unreason to communicate in the danger of a common language” (MI 69); Foucault carries this positive, linguistic assessment of Freudian psychoanalysis forward into the pages of Histoire; in the last two chapters of the text, Foucault
turns to an explicit discussion of Freud and psychoanalysis and here credits Freud with “renou[velant] prudemment l’échange, ou plutôt se mettra[nt] à nouveau à l’écoute de ce langage [de déraison] [reinstitut[ing] the exchange in psychoanalysis, or rather beg[inning] to listen once more to the language [of unreason]]” (Hf 517; HM 497); further, Foucault writes of Freud, “Freud a démystifié toutes les autres structures asilaires: il a aboli le silence et le regard [Freud demystified all the other asylum structures: he abolished silence and the gaze]” (Hf 529; HM 510). The influence of Freud on Foucault, discernible throughout *Maladie mentale*, is thus carried over, in reduced fashion, into the late sections of *Histoire*. Further, as in Foucault’s early work on mental illness and psychology, the Freudian aspects of *Histoire* are explicitly discursive or linguistic.

52 Returning for a moment to Todd May’s reading, noted above, of the editorial changes Foucault makes to the book between its first and second editions, we can put the same point in terms of what May sees as a Foucauldian “rejection of phenomenology” (FRP 293). There is in phenomenology an idea of subjectivity that is not fully constituted in and through socio-cultural or historico-institutional discourse. There is a form of subjectivity that is pre-conscious; or, at least, there is the possibility of a primitive sense of self-consciousness, even if only as a temporally determined phenomenon on the order of the Kantian transcendental subject. The “anti-phenomenological” gesture Foucault makes in revising *Maladie mentale* is that this idea of a residual (non-discursive) subjectivity must be abandoned if institutions as discursive enterprises—i.e., as social forms that constitute themselves and their practices through documentation, statements and the production of official literatures—are to interact with and be reciprocally determined by the discursively constituted subjects with which they are engaged.


57 There is evidence in *Histoire* of this meta-textual program that Foucault is carrying out; an appearance of the conditions of his own historical method within the space of the practice of that methodology. The textual evidence in question is the role Nietzsche plays in the history of mental illness and madness. It is Nietzsche who embodies for Foucault a viable form of critique
of the modern discursive practices that constitute subjectivity. Yet, such critical (Nietzschean) subjectivity forms only at the juncture between the widespread social practices that constitute a subject discursively, and a genealogical investigation of the textual, programmatic and discursive forms of those practices. Nietzsche, in short, is modern subjectivity as critique. He occupies this position by subsisting between the social discourse that constitutes subjectivity and an investigative, genealogical study of that same social discourse (Cf. Hf 383; HM 363).

58 “the experience of contradiction” (MI 40).

59 “contradictory experience” (MI 40).

60 “In a sense, it might be said, then, that it is through anxiety that psychological evolution is transformed into individual history” (MI 40).

61 “With anxiety we are at the heart of pathological significations” (MI 40).

62 “[b]eneath all the protective mechanisms that particularize the illness” (MI 40).


64 “brings neurotic protection into play” (MI 41).

65 “Does the patient defend himself with his present against his past, or does he protect himself from his present with the help of a history that now belongs to the past?” (MI 41).

66 “We must say, without doubt, that it is in this circle that the essence of pathological behaviour is to be found” (MI 41).

67 “the pathological history is marked by this circular monotony” (MI 41).

68 “The signal announces: ‘I am expecting a situation of helplessness to set in,’ or ‘The present situation reminds me of one of the traumatic experiences I have had before. Therefore I will anticipate the trauma and behave as though it has already come, while there is yet time to turn it aside’” (SE 20: 166).

69 “Anxiety is therefore on the one hand an expectation of a trauma, and on the other a repetition of it in a mitigated form” (SE 20:166).
“[Anxiety] has a quality of indefiniteness and lack of object. In precise speech we use the word ‘fear [Furcht]’ rather than ‘anxiety [Angst]’ if it has found an object” (SE 20:165).

The late essay is significant, too, for reversing much of what Freud had earlier believed about anxiety. Across all of its various, early appearances in Freud’s thought, Angst was construed, regularly, as an indirect expression of repressed libido. As Freud puts the point succinctly in his 1905 essays on Sexualität, “Angst aus der Libido entsteht” (GW V:125). This view of the relationship between libido and anxiety dates to the earliest stages of Freud’s thought. In writing to Fliess in the mid-1890s, Freud explains, “[Anxiety] is a question of a physical accumulation of excitation—that is, an accumulation of physical sexual tension. The accumulation is the consequence of discharge being prevented” (SE 1:191). In the 1926 essay, by contrast, Freud identifies anxiety as an affect and as such locates it within the ego rather than the id. This topographical change requires, in turn, a revision of the long-held link between anxiety and repressed libido. Yet, certain as he now is that Angst is an egoic, affective phenomenon and not merely libidinal, Freud effectively unmoors himself by making this claim. Without a foundation in instinctual, libidinal impulse, and without a clear distinction between Realangst and Angstsignal, it is impossible to make much theoretical headway in explaining anxiety.

At the end of the essay, for example, Freud briefly entertains Otto Rank’s theory of “Geburtstrauma” as a kind of founding principle of anxiety. However, like the hope of a purely neurological or physiological account of mental disorder and a treatment of the same in kind, Freud dismisses Rank’s definitive answer to the problem of neurosis with the conclusion, “Die Psychoanalyse führt zu weniger einfachen, minder befriedigenden Auskünften [Psychoanalysis leads to less simple and satisfactory conclusions]” (GW XIV 183; SE 20:153). Freud then dedicates the last few pages of the article to expositing what is knowable about the repression of instinctual-impulses and the possible relation of such repression to neurotic anxiety, and ends the main body of the text on an equivocal note, “Weiter muß ich glauben, ist unsere Einsicht in das Wesen und die Verursachung der Neurosen vorläufig nicht gekommen [Further than this, I believe, our knowledge of the nature and causes of neurosis has not as yet been able to go]” (GW XIV 187; SE 20:156).


Works Cited


