

**On the Exclusion of Madness from Reason:
Between History and Philosophy**

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Introduction

“At the centre of this attempt to re-establish the value of the classical experience of madness. . . there is . . . a motionless figure . . . : the simple division into daylight and obscurity, shadow and light, dream and waking, the truth of the sun and the power of midnight. An elementary figure, which only accepts time as the indefinite return of a limit.” (Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, 1961 Preface, xxxiv)

“[T]he self-relation of a limit at once erases and multiplies the limit; it cannot but divide it in inventing it. The limit only comes to be effaced—it only comes to efface itself—as soon as it is inscribed.” (Jacques Derrida, “To Do Justice to Freud”: the History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis” 260)

The “borderline” is here first of all a twentieth-century clinical term—psychiatric, psychological, and psychoanalytic—for a certain syndrome, state, disorder, or type somewhere between neurosis and psychosis. In less narrowly clinical and twentieth-century terms: the “borderline” is situated between a fundamentally rational—perhaps all too rational—and an essentially irrational—perhaps irremediably irrational—mode of human being: between *reason* and *unreason*, where the latter is understood as *madness*. The attempt to determine the status, sense, and value of the “borderline” category today necessarily engages us, therefore, beyond the confines of clinical discourse, in a more general historical and philosophical reflection on the border between madness and reason.¹ The most important historical point of departure for such a reflection offered by recent humanities work is, to my mind, clearly still Michel Foucault’s *The History of Madness*. (It was originally published in French in 1961, and has been available in a complete English translation only since 2006). But in order to engage rigorously with the implications of this work for the limits of madness and reason, one needs to read it in conjunction with the methodological-philosophical critique by Jacques Derrida in his two essays, “Cogito and the History of Madness” and “To Do Justice to

Freud': the History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis."² In addition, one does well to consider Foucault's (wounded and angry but nonetheless interesting) responses to Derrida. While this point of departure, the polemical exchange between (Foucault's) historical discourse-analysis and (Derrida's) philosophical deconstruction, is of formidable complexity, it will be useful to say a few words about it here. For the exchange provides philosophical and historical concepts that are crucial, I believe, to any productively innovative discussion of "borderline" disorders today, in the clinical and nonclinical senses of the term. Concerning the nonclinical sense, reconsideration of the Foucault-Derrida exchange is important for all current humanities border theory, because their exchange condenses the methodological stakes of the historical passage from the deconstructionist moment of the 1970s-80s to the cultural studies heyday from the later 1980s through today.

Let me begin by providing a very sketchy overview of the claims and scope of Foucault's fascinating, provocative, and informative work. The central historical claim of Foucault's *History of Madness*—whose original French title translates as *Madness and Unreason: History of Madness in the Classical Age*—is that in early modernity, the discourse of "reason" constitutes itself by disavowing and externalizing its essential affinities with "unreason," a disavowal realized not just in theory, of course, but in the practice of the modern treatments and mistreatment of the insane. The modern mistreatments begin with massive isolation, according to Foucault, i.e. with the exclusion of the "mad" from society at large, in what Foucault calls "the great confinement" of the seventeenth century, the (French neo-) "classical age."³

While the bulk of his book focuses on the practices and theories of this period, Foucault provides a somewhat broader contextualization. He begins with the closing of the leprosariums at the end of the Middle Ages and suggests that these were partially transformed into "general hospitals" in the classical age. The mad thus become a new sort of "leper" in the early modern period, endangering the body of sovereign reason in the Renaissance and the subsequent age of absolutism. But the relevant danger shifts in this period, according to Foucault, from death to madness: "From the knowledge of that fatal necessity that reduces man to dust we pass to a contemptuous contemplation of

the nothingness that is life itself” (14). The Renaissance explores in image and deed, fact and fiction, the motif of the “ship of fools,” signifying for Foucault that just prior to their “confinement,” the tendency was to send the mad away to the outer limits of the city, or to an indefinite elsewhere—a very different strategy from the subsequent, neoclassical strategy of exclusionary enclosure (together with the impoverished, the criminal, the indebted), which implied a very different notion of unreason. Further, along with the physical marginalization and exportation of the insane, the Renaissance defends itself against the new threat of madness by splitting madness into two forms, a “tragic” and a “critical” form, the first primarily represented in images such as those of Bosch and Breughel, the second mainly in texts such as those by Erasmus and Brant. It is the former “tragic” modality of madness that will be subjected to exclusionary “confinement” in the “classical age.” If the “tragic” face of madness is inassimilable to social mores, its “critical” face (madness as lack of wisdom, as corrigible or at least tolerable folly) is mobilized by Renaissance literature and philosophy to smooth the articulation of the modernizing individual with the absolutist state.

Moving beyond the “classical age,” in turn, Foucault traces the displacements of the exclusionary confinement of the insane into the eighteenth century. During the Enlightenment, the insane are gradually separated out from the other categories of “unreason” (poverty, criminality, immorality). This separation is followed by the “liberation” of the insane through the work of reformers such as Samuel Tuke and Philippe Pinel in the early nineteenth century, whose supposedly emancipatory practices and intentions Foucault regards with a persuasively skeptical eye. The book concludes with a condensed sketch of the development of psychology and medical psychiatry across the nineteenth century, in connection with the establishment of the “asylums” for the insane. Looking forward to a future in which reason and madness would be synthesized into a higher unity, Foucault juxtaposes with these clinical discourses the lyricism of madness in isolated figures such as Hölderlin, Novalis, and Nietzsche. With more than a hint of romantic messianism, Foucault characterizes these “mad poets” as re-establishing a tie with “tragic” unreason beyond the pathologizing limits of the modern psychological transformation of the mad into mere objects of observation.⁴

To recall even thus very hastily the main traits of Foucault's monumental history of the silencing of the irrational is valuable in our context. His work reminds us here, despite and because of its romantic dimension, how even medically scientific and morally humane attempts to delimit and control madness are ineluctably entangled with ideology and a continuing history of power-dynamics. Such entanglement extends, indeed, from the pre-modern period down to our own day, despite practitioners' most generous exertions. More narrowly with respect to our theme, Foucault helps us begin to grasp the particular *anxiety* that will necessarily be felt by those identified with "reason" or "social order"—in right, left, or center political variants (i.e. quasi all of "us")—wherever the "borderline" between reason and madness (and so, in twentieth-century mental health discourses, the frontier between neurosis and psychosis) is in question. To be sure, helping people in trouble is not always intentionally disingenuous, but it is, with equal certainty, never entirely separable from the helpers' investment in keeping their distance from the trouble involved. Indeed, this is one of the good reasons why psychoanalytic training requires a personal analysis. It is also a good reason why psychoanalytic discourse often discourages its practitioners from imagining that they are "helping" their analysands—or getting rid of their symptoms. Nonetheless, because Foucault's important perspective on the history of madness is marked by certain "limitations" of its own, which Derrida usefully brings out, we need to reconstruct Foucault's debate with Derrida before proceeding to the essays in this section.

Derrida was by no means apolitical or indifferent to history. But as a professional philosopher and a critical, detailed reader of the phenomenological and structuralist traditions (as well as the history of philosophy more generally), he was obviously above all concerned in his writings with what he termed "logophonocentric metaphysics" in the Western philosophical tradition, rather than with the concrete particulars of social and institutional historiography. This more abstract focus is precisely what enabled him to have an exacerbated awareness of methodological and philosophico-historical problems in Foucault's discourse, even if it may have limited Derrida's capacity to appreciate some of the descriptive details of Foucault's historical writings. In accordance with Derrida's interest in the dismantling of binary philosophical

conceptualities, the general thrust of his response to Foucault is to complicate and disturb the *linear temporality* of Foucault's historiography, while Derrida nonetheless shares Foucault's intense interest in grasping and allowing for what reason always leaves out or effaces.

In his first article on Foucault, "Cogito and the History of Madness," Derrida unsettles this linear temporality by questioning whether the "classical age" differentiates itself as radically or significantly as Foucault claims from those that precede it and proceed upon it. For example, Derrida reminds his reader not only that a discourse of reason was already being constituted in ancient Greece (raising questions about Foucault's hasty mention of Greek *hybris*, Socrates' stance, etc.), but that the circulation of madness in the Middle Ages was not as free as Foucault makes it seem, that the marginalization of the mad in the Renaissance was not without its own forms of containment, and so on ("Cogito" 39ff). That is, Derrida does not contest the descriptive specifics of Foucault's discussion so much as Foucault's exaggerated claims for the significance of the difference between the "classical age" and the others—ancient, medieval, and Renaissance—that precede it and haunt it, as well as those it subsequently haunts in its turn.

The debate does not concern, therefore, the general question about whether or not history is important, despite the fact that in his response Foucault accuses Derrida of maintaining the traditional philosopher's sublime indifference to history, an accusation that New Historicist Cultural Studies will subsequently tend to repeat *ad nauseam* with respect to post-structuralism in general ("My Body, this Paper, this Fire," in *Madness* 562-74). Nor does the debate concern, on the other hand, principally a particular point about neoclassicism or Descartes within the history of madness, as it might seem to do because Derrida focuses in part on a critique of Foucault's reading of Descartes. Rather, Derrida's focus is on a question about how to understand the temporality of history; his concern is the madness *and* methods of historiography as the writing of events and the event of writing.

The difference between Foucault and Derrida on this point, however, turns out to hinge on a difference between their views on limits and borders in general. Thus,

where Foucault writes a history of radical discontinuities or differences, Derrida insists here and in his subsequent article on Foucault (to which we return in a moment) that some continuities or samenesses are being neglected. Where Foucault sees limits or borders that are impenetrable, Derrida sees (in Foucault's historical-epochal determinations) more porous surfaces, the mutual interference of periods. The discourse-analyst emphasizes the *real, historical* violence of the borders imposed; the deconstructionist emphasizes the vanity of this violence as evidenced, through *philosophical* interpretation, in the immediately *virtual* and ultimately effectual collapse of the borders. There is thus between Foucault and Derrida a difference in *emphasis* in the interpretation of borders, which does not prevent a significant sharing of concerns and perspectives.

As a consequence of this different general emphasis, Derrida argues against Foucault that the exclusion of madness by reason in the "classical age" is not only *not* the "exclusive" privilege of that age, so to speak, but also excludes itself from itself. Reason confines and unconfines itself, as well as madness. How does Derrida argue this? Derrida's synecdochic demonstration of the role of unreason within reason itself focuses critically in "Cogito and the History of Madness" on Foucault's mobilization of Descartes as an exemplary instance of the exclusion of madness from reason in the "classical age." While the details of this struggle over Descartes' legacy—which persists in Lacan as we will see below—need not detain us, I will retain here three general traits.

First, Derrida argues against Foucault that, specifically through the role of the "evil genius," Descartes does not simply exclude madness from consideration, but allows it to play a larger and more essential role in his philosophical discourse than Foucault acknowledges ("Cogito" 52). Secondly, and on the other hand, Derrida grants that the Cartesian subject ultimately does push aside the possibility of its own madness, but indicates that reason assures itself more through an appeal to faith than through its own operations (58). Third, however, this gesture is for Derrida not specific to the "classical age" but endemic to all discourse as such, even ostensibly nontheologically grounded discourse. All operations of making sense whatsoever distance themselves from senselessness ("Cogito" 59-60 *passim*). And such operations of course include

Foucault's own attempt to make sense of the silencing of unreason in his work on the *History of Madness*, precisely a work from which madness, as what he calls the "absence of the work" (in a phrase that Derrida repeatedly and without irony calls *profound*), is necessarily and in principle excluded ("Cogito" 53-4, *et passim*). In short, Derrida shares with Foucault an abiding concern with the violent exclusion of madness, of the irrational, of the senseless—of what both Foucault and he call "negativity" ("Cogito" 41 and 308n4; *Madness* 251)—but he questions Foucault's periodizing zeal because it makes, as it were, too *much* sense out of the effacement of the senseless. Instead, Derrida argues for a more complex temporality of history, whereby different epochs are understood to anticipate and retroactively affect each other *constitutively*: a linear narrative, even one like Foucault's, marked by sharp cuts and discontinuities, is no longer cleanly possible.

But what are the implications for *psychoanalysis* of this debate between the linear historiography and the deconstruction of the polarity opposing madness to reason? Since psychoanalysis questions linear history in its own domain through the notions of repetition and retroactive meaningfulness, while it also sometimes allies itself with repressive, ideological discourses of rationality and conformist talk of reality-values, this is a complex question. It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that when Foucault considers the twentieth century at the far end of his trajectory in the *History of Madness* he mentions Freud intermittently in terms that vacillate wildly between two extremes. At one moment, he credits Freud for having reestablished a dialogue between reason and unreason after the end of the classical "confinement" of the insane (and against the nineteenth-century perpetuation of this "confinement" in the name of emancipatory reform). At the next moment, he discredits Freud for having perfected, through the invention of the "analytic situation," a more subtle form of confinement within an asylum, subjugating the patient (qua passive object) to the quasi-thaumaturgical authority of the now medicalized magician. But how exactly is one to account for Foucault's striking ambivalence or uncertainty with respect to Freud's contribution and the status of psychoanalysis in general?

Derrida traces and interprets these vacillations in detail in "To Do Justice To Freud: the History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis," written some years after

Foucault's early death. Derrida explains this unresolved problem in Foucault by attributing it to Foucault's inadequate grasp of the undecidability of limits and borders, both in general and in the specific Freudian manifestation and theorization of this undecidability. Not only are the borders of periods, discourses, and authors' *œuvres* rough-edged, and not only is the subjective or objective status of knowledge uncertain, at least in the interpretive fields (such that one cannot simply *decide* the question of whether Foucault is just ambivalent or Freud is himself ambiguous). In addition, according to Derrida, Freud articulates explicitly a theoretical motif that inscribes irrationality in reason (and vice versa), a theoretical figure of undecidability: nothing less than the dual principle of libido, eros-thanatos. As the mutual entanglement but continuing opposition of productive and destructive behavior, or more abstractly the principles of unity (or identity) and multiplicity (or difference), eros and thanatos—like language itself—divide the subject at all points against itself. They thus impose upon it a regime of what Derrida elsewhere calls “life-death” or “survance”: one lives by constantly outliving oneself.⁵ Under such a regime, the unification of reason with itself, its differentiation from its other, will always be shadowed—doubled in a displaced manner—by the disunification of reason, the inscription of its other within itself. Yet as Derrida points out, Foucault essentially ignores the text in which Freud develops this complex thought of the death-drive, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which is an extremely important aspect of the psychoanalytic contribution to the understanding of the borders or limits between reason and unreason (or ego and unconscious). Further, Derrida argues that, while ignoring this aspect of Freud (or at least trying to), Foucault not only plays an extended *fort-da* game with Freud himself (casting Freud alternately inside and outside the limits of the group of modernists who risk an encounter with unreason), but ends up, in his later writings on the *History of Sexuality*, articulating a position on the relationship between power and sexuality that is (unwittingly) reminiscent of precisely Freud's articulation of this eros-thanatos relationship.⁶ For Derrida, psychoanalysis—although and because it is a radically heterogeneous phenomenon—questions both linear historiography and the rigid opposition between reason and madness that Foucault retraces and bemoans.

So where does the Foucault-Derrida debate leave psychoanalysis with respect to other discourses, in its relationship to the madness/reason dividing line? As we have seen, the debate between Foucault and Derrida on the relations between madness and reason concerns the question of how to understand limits in general and the specific temporality of history (the limits of presence). The differences between Foucault and Derrida on these questions, however, ultimately give rise to a (false) polemic that concerns the question of whether *history* or *philosophy* is the more appropriate discipline through which to study what reason in its broadest sense tends to suppress and avoid. Indeed, when Foucault responds to Derrida's first essay (the only one of the two that was written or published during Foucault's lifetime) in "My Body, this Paper, this Fire," he does not just contest Derrida's critique of his reading of Descartes in the *History of Madness*. On the basis of this contestation, he accuses Derrida of being complicitous in the culpable subjugation of madness by continuing to adhere to a traditional model of philosophy. In turn, Derrida had indeed argued that a certain kind of linear historiography itself belonged to such a traditional model, a point Foucault wants to deny. Thus, while it is not precisely the case (if we take Derrida somewhat seriously, as I think we should) that the debate ends up with the alternative between philosophy and history as the potential liberator of madness (and of everything "confined" as "unreason" in the classical age), the *appearance* of this alternative is one de facto ideological or caricatural result of the debate, and a result that has colored much humanities work ever since. Is *philosophy* (perhaps as "theory") the discourse that is privileged to grasp the irrational underside of its own figures of thought, or does *history* have priority, in that it graphs subjection in its arbitrary violence, power-dynamics, and so on? Is (deconstructive) philosophy situated on the borderline of reason, either in the "good" sense (that it maintains contact with—especially its own—unreason) or in the "bad sense" (that it polices the border of rationality to keep error out)? Or is history on this border, again either in the "good" sense (that it reaches to the edge of unreason by describing its exclusion and by renouncing the formal self-reflexivity of philosophy that tends toward the policing of thought) or in the "bad" sense (that it precisely "makes sense" of that which exceeds "sense" in the sense of supersensuous meaning)?

Is philosophy irrational, untrue, and/or dishonest, and hence mad in a negative sense when it claims to grasp or to participate in madness? Is history irrational when it makes the same claims?⁷ Is psychoanalysis more akin to a historiography of the subject or to a philosophical-ethical discourse?

Instead of pursuing these questions in our own terms, let us look now into the ways in which the contributions in this section position themselves (and psychoanalysis) with respect to these potential alternative views of the best approach to the borderline of reason and madness.

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The first essay in this Special Issue, like the last, approaches our topic from outside the edges of psychoanalysis, providing us with a glimpse into the history of narcissism a century before the invention of psychoanalysis. Outside any explicit engagement with either Foucault or Derrida, but closer to the former than the latter, Alexander Mathäs' "Keeping Narcissism at Bay: Kant and Schiller on the Sublime," provides a version of the historicist-materialist critique of idealist philosophical pretensions. Mathäs argues that the aesthetics of the sublime, which lays claim to a philosophical transcendence of the narcissistic, or imaginary-sensuous self, in fact falls prey to the narcissism that it claims to exceed. His argument aligns loosely with that of Foucault on madness, in that the object of Mathäs' critique is likewise a version of the neoclassical attempt to master the irrational, this time in the German Enlightenment and Neoclassical thought of Kant and Schiller, and more specifically in their neoclassical aesthetics. In the eighteenth century, alongside such terms as "enthusiasm" and "*Schwärmerei*," "narcissism" already functions as a figure for a morally culpable madness, as an irrational entrapment in the senses. By retracing this functioning in Kant and Schiller, Mathäs' piece provides a useful glance into the historical origins of the discourse on narcissism a century prior to its clinical (re)inscription by P. Näcke and Havelock Ellis. This discourse on narcissism is at the very center of the concerns in the current Special Issue, for it extends through Sigmund Freud up to figures like Heinz Kohut and

Otto Kernberg, in whose important works the difficult distinction between narcissistic and “borderline” personality disorders is still under contention, as well as into Lacan, who has little or no interest in the “borderline” personality category per se, as we will see in the third section of this Issue below.

In contrast to Mathäs (but not binary opposition), the essay by Samuel Weber in this first section, “Anxiety: the Uncanny Borderline of Psychoanalysis,” places itself in the (non)philosophical (non)tradition of deconstruction. Focusing on Freud’s various attempts to theorize anxiety—from the earliest essays up to “The Uncanny” and the period beyond *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—Weber situates (or rather unsituates) anxiety as the unmasterable border of both psychoanalysis and the psyche. In the process, he gives Freud credit for exposing the unmasterability of anxiety, while he nonetheless acknowledges that this exposition occurs, in part, against Freud’s own will or intentions. As the frayed (or afraid) edge of both psychoanalytic discourse and the individual psyche, anxiety is to *affective* categories what the “borderline” personality is to *nosological* ones: it is the involution of the exterior edge and the exfoliation of an interior folly, or foil, or fold. Anxiety is, for Weber here, the limit where the psychoanalytic ego and the ego of psychoanalysis (the coherent self of psychoanalytic discourse), break down and cease to be able to exclude the incoherence and otherness that Foucault called madness itself.

Juliet Flower MacCannell’s piece, “Drawing Lines: from Kernberg and Haraway to Lacan and Beyond,” takes up a position perhaps midway between these two, in the sense that she stresses the importance of a historical and sociological critique of psychiatric discourse but also proposes a positive interpretation of the contributions of (Freudian, then Lacanian) psychoanalysis in this regard, and ends up underlining the importance of a notion of the trait that seems marked by the Derridian reflection on writing. MacCannell begins with a critical analysis of Kernberg’s concept of the “borderline” (which I outline below in the Introduction to the third section of this Issue), a critical analysis that questions the ideological commitments entailed by Kernberg’s institutional-disciplinary position, as well as his presupposed metaphysics. Specifically, she invokes Erving Goffman’s sociological critique of both medical psychiatry

and cognitive-behavioral psychology against Kernberg's ego-psychological/object-relations approach, questioning the apolitical and ahistorical character of the latter's theory, and indicting in Lacanian (and implicitly also Foucauldian) terms the social conformism of its emphasis on the strong ego. Of course, MacCannell knows well that the acting-out and suffering of the "borderlines" (and others) among us is neither a mere fantasy of the heavy-handed psychiatrist qua extension of the police apparatus, nor a mere political strategy of disruption on the part of a sovereign rebellious or revolutionary subject. Hence, she argues in the remainder of her essay—via readings of Freud, Rousseau, Lacan, and Haraway—that, on the one hand, dividing lines are necessary, but that, on the other hand, there is a difference between drawing a line to mark the opening of a difference and drawing a line to establish a container and to control its contents. MacCannell closes urging us to focus on the former, the drawing of lines as a writing or sketching that opens up a displacement of differences.

¹ While contemporary clinical discourses will often downplay the origins of the “borderline” concept, declaring that “we now know that the borderline is its own specific phenomenon, and has nothing to do with a limit between neurosis and psychosis,” a minimal sense of history makes it obvious that this sort of dismissal or disavowal must be regarded with a skeptical eye.

² Of course, ultimately any thorough reception of Foucault has to deal also with his historian critics, by comparison with whom he appears perhaps more Cartesian, more of a traditional philosopher than he might intend. Cf. Midelfort 7-9, 229f ; and Scull 13-20 passim.

³ Psychiatric hospitalization of the “borderline” is evidently light years away from the seventeenth-century incarceration of “unreason,” although there remain, of course, social order concerns that link contemporary clinical and penal discourses with those of previous epochs. For the state of the art proposal of partial hospitalization of “borderlines,” see the studies by Bateman and Fonagy.

⁴ More specifically, this romanticism—which should prompt us (only) partially to skepticism—is closely akin to, and of course strongly influenced by, the late romanticism of the early Nietzsche, whose Wagnerian *Birth of Tragedy* still plays an important structuring role in Foucault’s early argument. The splitting of the understanding of madness into a “tragic” and a “critical” understanding—which Foucault situates in the Renaissance, and which precedes the externalization of the “tragic” form of madness through the “confinement” invented by the “classical age”—bears a close resemblance to the splitting of ancient Greek culture, on Nietzsche’s account in the *Birth of Tragedy*, into an increasingly buried Dionysian culture and a philosophical, Socratic, “critical” culture (broached in the theoreticist, watered-down tragedies of Euripides). As Nietzsche heralded the rebirth of tragedy in his mentor, Wagner, and later the overcoming of “man” in the *Übermensch*, so Foucault ends up, in the *History of Madness*, with the insane poets from Hölderlin to Artaud, who announce precisely a rebirth of the tragedy of madness and the end of (rational) “man,” in a schema that moreover still participates in Christian apocalyptic rhetoric, as Derrida points out in the essay “To Do Justice to Freud,” which I discuss below.

⁵ See “To Speculate—on Freud” (*The Post-Card* 257-410).

⁶ By “trying to,” I refer to Derrida’s discussion of the places where Foucault credits Freud with inventing an analytics of finitude, but never mentions *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* or the “death drive” as such (252-60).

⁷ Derrida in fact answered this last question affirmatively with respect to Foucault, and in this sense praised Foucault in the very movement of criticizing his claim to grasp madness in an unmediated manner (“Cogito” 34).

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