

The Interplay of Power and Deconstruction: Exploring the Intellectual Relationship between Foucault and Derrida

A 'petty pedagogy', the infamous indictment bestowed by one 'French Theorist', a term coined by Cusset, upon another. (Cusset, 2008) Though Foucault critiqued his friend and student Derrida, the critical engagement was mutual – jeopardising cordiality, yet friendship rekindling in 1981.

It is important to first highlight how Derrida was a student of Foucault. In the introduction to the lecture that would become the *Cogito*, at which Foucault himself was present, Derrida talks of an "interiorised master", to whom he feels "indefinitely challenged... rejected... accused; as a disciple". (Penfield, 2016) This interior relationship of Derrida to his teacher Foucault, highlights the problem of trying to break from the tutor's opinion in order to speak one's own mind. This tension would embed itself for the next ten years. Even if "the master, like real life, may always be absent", what Derrida raises is the matter of (Foucault's) conditioning – a structure out of which it is difficult for a historically contingent subject to ever break out of truly. (Penfield, 2016) A decade of discourse framed the relationship of Derrida and Foucault. This can be seen through the publication of Foucault's first work *History and Madness* in 1961, "Derrida's challenge in 1963 and Foucault's response in 1972." (Custer, et al., 2016)

The two were politically intertwined as political thinkers of the postmodernist era, in 1977 they petitioned together against French age of consent laws (alongside their Marxist tutor and thinker Althusser); and by 1982 after the rekindling of the relationship, it was Foucault who managed to extradite Derrida from a Czechoslovakian prison after being arrested at an

illegal conference. (Derrida, 1998) This shows the intrinsic formative nature of the thinkers on one another, but also the creation of a post-structural zeitgeist that sought to upturn the accepted norms. This rejection of the status quo can be seen in the broad variety of disciplines over which both thinkers simultaneously worked, especially through “their late work that has fuelled recent discussions, notably around questions of sovereignty, governmentality, biopolitics, animality, the death penalty, and neoliberalism.” (Custer, et al., 2016) With the shared moments and thought clarified, we must then turn to the differences that separated the thinkers intellectually in “irresolvable disaccord”. (Penfield, 2016)

The two writers focussed respectively on the ‘othering’ created by madness. Foucault believed in reason being secured by the “exclusion and containment of madness”. (Custer, et al., 2016) This is the belief that the rational mind is created by pushing out madness to a metaphysical exterior. Foucault believes that this happened (in reference to Descartes) “in 1657, the founding of the Hôpital Général, and the Great Confinement”, in which the poor, the criminals and the mad (all *deviant* in their respective ways of embracing “tragic experience”) were pushed out of the rational world and interned. (Penfield, 2016) This type of inverted linearity to history is the archaeology of knowledge that Foucault would use in his works on prison and disciplinarianism in *Discipline and Punish* and the institutionalisation of knowledge and medicalization in *The Birth of the Clinic*. The aim then of the *History of Madness*, is to utilise this archaeology of ‘unreason’, that is excluded from the world, “in its difference and contesting western culture in its arbitrary constraint.” (Penfield, 2016) Here we see Foucault’s attempt to “unsettle reason’s apparatus”. (Custer, et al., 2016)

Here, we turn to Derrida's critique in *Cogito and the History of Madness*, in which he criticises Foucault's assumption that Descartes dismissal of madness creates a self-assured rationality, that is to say Derrida believes that the divide between mad and reason is internal. This could be referred to as a "rejection-assimilation of madness detected by Derrida", in the sense that both thinkers respectively have acknowledged that reason establishes itself by othering the mad, however Foucault's historical mode of doing this is far different from Derrida's internalised notion. (Custer, et al., 2016) To support this, we can see the two post-structuralists divergence in thought between the Nietzschean notion of 'tragic experience' in Foucault and Hegelian conception of the dialectical 'revolution within' in which reason can be spoken out against by madness. (Penfield, 2016) This then has broken down the inner-outer relationship of 'confined madness' constructed in Foucault's *History and Madness*. In its place, there stands Derrida's notion of reason's inhabitation of madness on the other. (Custer, et al., 2016)

Two replies from Foucault would entrench the divide on the matter of the othering process. In the *Reply to Derrida*, Foucault accused Derrida of being stuck within the "interiority of philosophy. (Penfield, 2016) He is here arguing that without any positive regard for the exterior, any thought form that could open up on the outside, then Derrida is posing a redundant antithesis to Foucault's thesis. With the decade having nearly passed, in 1972 Foucault also published his other reply *My Body, This Paper, This Fire*, in which he asked (to Derrida) whether there might be "something anterior or exterior to philosophical discourse?", damning him to the likes of 'religious people' and their conviction to their 'religion'. (Penfield, 2016) The difference between Foucault and Derrida here is focussed on

the interpretation of Descartes' Meditations; Derrida believes one can't bridge the dualist gap between the interior and exterior world, reducing madness to a component of the mental, whilst Foucault believes that it is on the physical side of dualism that madness has been excluded. However, at the same time Foucault in his changing thought over the preceding decade, does concede somewhat on the metaphysical potential to Derrida. He suggests that modern literature had lost its position of exteriority in relation to capitalist society. (Penfield, 2016) However, even in the face of the disaccord over internal/external othering of madness, both thinkers develop original philosophies of difference that challenge the dominant discourse or logocentrism of western reason." (Penfield, 2016)

Word Count: 916

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