

REVIEW

Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), ISBN: 978-0231149198

Lynne Huffer's *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* is a complicated book that critiques queer theory's central placement of Foucault's book *The History of Sexuality* as its foundational text, and suggests that Foucault's recently translated (in the United States) and earlier written *The History of Madness* has much more to offer in terms of an ethics of eros than the latter text. For Huffer, queer theory is too focused on matters of identity and not enough on transformational power. Huffer wants to resituate *The History of Madness*, for that book details the constant turning (transforming) that provides an ethic of living, a major concern of Foucault's. Huffer's main objective is to queer *The History of Madness* (something many critiques of that book have ignored) in what she calls, amusingly, a "queer intervention" and to show it as part of Foucault's project to "rethink sexuality as a category of moral and political exclusions." (24-25)

In Chapter One, "How We Became Queer," Huffer examines the intertwining categories of sex, sexuality, and gender and shows how those definitions have become set in the work of many queer theorists. In *The History of Madness* Foucault traces the way people have become labelled: normal/deviant, reasonable/irrational, straight/queer. The oppression of the latter subjectivities comes about for two reasons: the rise of confinement in the seventeenth century and the "despotism" of Cartesianism. In the seventeenth century, Huffer points out, those who were mad were lumped together with prostitutes, the poor, the infirm, the queer; while these groups were lumped under one umbrella term, "mad" the norms of family morality continued to grow. The queer is what Foucault would call the "negative of the city of morals." In *The History of Madness*, Foucault wants to chart the *experience* of madness, and for Huffer that means the *experience* of sexuality. As heteronormativity in all its forms becomes stronger, the sexual deviant is further circumscribed, ready to be pinned down and studied in a later age. Huffer ends Chapter One repudiating the idea that Foucault was a historian who places sexual acts and identities teleologically. Rather, using *The History of Madness*, Huffer wants to highlight Foucault's concern with ethics to examine sexual acts in terms of the ethical worlds they inhabit. Rather than be stuck in rigid categorical positions, the queer is "reason's prodigal child," (82) not in terms of the Biblical leaving and returning, but in terms of excess, the subject of exclusion.

Chapter Two, "Queer Moralities," examines the morality of the queer and the ways in which Foucault uses Nietzsche in to critique sexual morality. Foucault interrogates the ways

that moralism is joined with rationalism and how this joining has produced a subject that is sexually normal or deviant. Sexuality has become a moral experience (a point that Huffer returns to many times) because eros (in the form of historical madness) has been confined and that confinement has involved its “reduction” to a “form of psychic interiority.” (121) In Chapter One, Huffer points to Foucault’s use of the Ship of Fools in order to highlight the back-and-forth movement of madness that preceded the stasis of confinement in the seventeenth century. The Ship of Fools allowed for transformation and open-endedness that confinement precluded. Confinement of madness parallels the production of moral norms in the private sphere; *bourgeois* in *The History of Madness* means “family;” bad conscience leads to the *bourgeois* order. For Nietzsche, this is where “that change which occurred when [man] found himself enclosed within the walls of society” occurs. (Huffer, 106) This enclosure, this confinement leads to normalization.

In Chapter Three, “Unraveling the Queer Psyche,” Huffer successfully critiques queer theories’ reliance on psychoanalysis and the damage psychoanalysis causes with its heteronormative categorization of the queer. Huffer writes that the psychoanalytic approach to queerness is at odds with a Foucauldian archival, historical project to rethink the psyche. Foucault highlights the way that psychoanalysis is the culmination of positivist science and that the internalization of the moral soul, as seen with Nietzsche, results in a psychoanalytic drawing out of that soul to indicate differentiate normality from deviance. Huffer highlights Foucault’s feminism in his critique of psychoanalysis, for it reproduces patriarchal structures in the doctor-patient relationship that contribute to the subjectivation (and othering) of the patient. Huffer writes that “the divine and satanical doctor imposes his institutional authority onto the patient in a classic display of repressive domination; at the same time, the transformation of human subject into object occurs productively through the “complicity of the patient herself” who, internalizing the powers she projects onto the doctor, polices herself as a psychic object.” (158) Because an engagement with experience is fundamental to an ethics of erotic freedom, psychoanalysis cannot free the patient because the patient can only speak of sex in terms of the patriarchal scientific gaze that psychoanalysis employs.

In Chapter Three, “A Queer Nephew,” Huffer unpacks Foucault’s use of the archive. In the late-eighteenth century there is a historical moment where lives become “open to transformation through the fiction-making practice of *histoire*”; (194) in this moment these opportunities are revealed and foreclosed. The literary figure that Foucault uses to illustrate this is in Denis Diderot’s *The Nephew*. His literary figure both highlights subjective instability representative of unreason and its disappearance into post-Enlightenment mental illness called madness. Huffer writes that she and Foucault need the Nephew because he allows Huffer to link the first three chapters with the last. For rather than going along with traditional Foucauldian thought that sees him re-embracing the Enlightenment subject, Huffer writes that the Nephew indicates the letting go altogether of the subject and tracing the undoing of the subject and articulating a philosophy of the limit. The Nephew illustrates the breakdown of Hegelian dialectic that Huffer writes maintains a line of reasoning that precludes what Foucault articulated as the opportunity to “remain in the difference that is unreason.” By resisting the dialectic reason/unreason, the Nephew represents a gap and highlights the problem of Western subjectivity: the silencing of the historical other. Huffer

writes that this line of thought will lead to a Foucauldian erotic ethics of alterity that she will deal with in her final chapter.

In Chapter Four, "A Political Ethic of Eros," Huffer grapples with the tough task of resisting being pinned down, of having an identity predetermined and to celebrate and practice what she calls becoming other. Huffer explains that "becoming other is thus a process of stripping away the structures of thought that produce reason and madness: an unlearning or releasing of the rationalist subject." (243) This Foucauldian ethic is itself difficult to pin down in that its hallmarks are change, mutability. Huffer writes that Foucault's ethic is the opening of a question, "something to be articulated on the way to something else." (244) In this way, the subject is an interruption of the self by an other (in a Levinasian sense) and concretized by geography and time in the lived world. This highlights Foucault's archival project, the attention to the lived specifics. Huffer writes that "the possibility of these strange self-transformative survivals of the present" is Foucault's political ethic of eros. (253)

While interrogating queer theories' reliance on psychoanalysis and short-circuiting the Hegelian dialectic, Huffer provides interludes between each chapter that serve various functions. Huffer, like Foucault, is trying to recapture the ludic in queer theory, as opposed to the oppressed, the silent. Huffer gives voice to the song of transformation; many of these interludes outline how researching and reading for this book have changed her mind on some point (too vague), on Foucault, on herself. Sometimes the interludes, for example, the Second Interlude, allow for reflection on difficult terms. In this interlude, Huffer admits that the *how* of the concept of "becoming-other" is a mystery to her. Other interludes become like secrets, as Huffer read things in the archives we cannot (e.g., the correspondence between Foucault and his first love, the composer Barraqué). These interludes illustrate Huffer's struggle with the Cartesian split: the chapters represent the mind, the interludes the body, and within the process of writing and producing the book, Huffer attempts to break the barrier between the two.

In this provocative and thoughtful book, Huffer highlights the transformative power of eros. As Huffer writes, eros is a practice that reveals the relationship between subjectivity and truth and allows for its undoing. In the undoing, "the subject becomes erotic." (269) Eros is biopower's reverse. Eros is at the heart of queer theories' goal of transformation, getting us outside of normative oppression. By situating Foucault's emphasis on ethics in relation to this early text, *The History of Madness*, Huffer distinctly reveals the way that Foucault's concerns with ethics and eros became a lifelong project.

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