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REVIEW

Philippe Artières, Jean-François Bert, *Un succès philosophique: L'Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique de Michel Foucault* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, IMEC, 2011), ISBN: 978-2-84133-391-2.

***Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique de Michel Foucault. Regards critiques 1961-2011*, Textes choisis et présentés par Philippe Artières, Jean-François Bert, Philippe Chevallier, Frédéric Gros, Luca Paltrinieri, Judith Revel, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville et Martin Saar, Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, IMEC, 2011), ISBN: 978-2-84133-390-5.**

The publication of these two complementary works on Foucault's *History of Madness* by some members of the research team of the IMEC (Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine) is topical for two reasons. First, it celebrates the 50th anniversary of the publication of Foucault's *Folie et déraison.*[1] Secondly, it exploits Foucault's archives at a time when the French government has decided to class them as "national treasure" and banned their export abroad.

The first of the two volumes, in particular, reconstructs the history of Foucault's doctoral dissertation on *Madness and Unreason* (1961) from unpublished documents (pictures, photos, letters, preparatory papers, academic reports etc.) related to the different stages of publication and circulation. These stages are marked chronologically and coincide with the four chapters of this study on *History of Madness*'s "philosophical success." 1950-1960: research and writing; 1960-1961: defense of the dissertation and publication; 1961-1971: from dissertation to book, adaptation, circulation, and defense; 1972-1984: reissues, updates, and political implications. In other words, the archival research conducted by Philippe Artières and Jean-François Bert deals with the genesis, first outcomes, early reactions, as well as the fortunes of Foucault's book. It is a historical reconstruction which is not confined to tracing *History of Madness* within Foucault's own history, but rather outlines "the biography of an intellectual project" (247). Furthermore, this project is analyzed not only within the wider context of a political and social history, but also from the perspective of a "material history," that is, in particular, the history of publishing in France in the second half of the 20th century. This approach is probably the most original of the essay, in so far as it provides information and data about some aspects of this book that have been neglected until now.

[1] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

Thus, we learn for instance that Foucault's publication profited from the increasing circulation in France of paperback editions in the field of social sciences—especially philosophy—in the beginning of the 1960s. We also get information about the background of the publishing history of Foucault's dissertation, from its first edition in the series "Civilisations d'hier et d'aujourd'hui" by Plon, to the contract signed with Gallimard in 1971 ("Bibliothèque des Histoires"). Furthermore, we learn details about the cuts required by the first publisher for the new edition of the book in 1962 and about the consequences that this new adaptation entailed in its reception in France and abroad, especially among the English-speaking public.

But there are other complementary perspectives from which the authors inquire into Foucault's book. The history of philosophy in France in the mid-20th century is one of them. *History of Madness* is indeed presented by the authors in close continuity with this context, that is, in particular, the criticism respectively against Hegelianism and phenomenology developed by philosophers like Bachelard and Canguilhem. It is a matter of a philosophical approach, which no longer focus primarily on the subject of knowledge, but rather explores the dimension of the "outside of philosophy" (12). From this point of view—as stated by Canguilhem's academic report on Foucault's dissertation—this work had the merit of "opening a fruitful dialogue between psychology and philosophy" (93). That means that philosophical problems could be grasped not only within philosophy as a specific discipline, but also from any other field of knowledge and practice.

Now, between the 1950s and the 1960s the field from which Foucault drew his philosophical positions was psychiatry, and in Artières and Bert's inquiry we can find some new information on this subject.[2] Besides the already known activities of Foucault, Georges and Jacqueline Verdeaux at St. Anne hospital, we learn, for instance, of the important role that the writings on Nietzsche and the courses given by the French psychiatrist Jean Delay (1907-1987) at the "Institut de psychologie" in Paris played for Foucault's education in the 1950s (24-25). We also learn that the publication of a "history of madness" was an idea of Colette Duhamel, a philosopher and publisher[3] that in 1952 also commissioned to the young philosopher a work on the "history of death" (40-41). Furthermore, the authors put *History of Madness* into relation with the movement of criticism against psychiatry, which began to develop in France from the 1940s onwards.[4]

It is worth remarking that all this information is not an end in itself, but is instead aimed at showing the emergence of a new kind of philosopher. Through the genesis, the publication and the circulation of Foucault's masterpiece on madness, one sees indeed philosophy leaving the university and acquiring a wider social visibility. Thus, according to the authors, *History of Madness* presents itself as the mirror of the personal path of Foucault as an intellectual. In fact, after his studies in philosophy and psychology, Foucault did not begin his career as a university professor. He left France during the second half of the 1950s and he was employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a promoter of cultural activities in the "Maison de

[2] cf. Artières and Bert, chap. 1: "Chercher et écrire. 1950-1960"

[3] Duhamel, "La table ronde"

[4] cf. the special issue of the French journal *Esprit* in 1952: Jean-Marie Domenach (ed.), Albert Béguin (dir.), *Misère de la psychiatrie*, *Esprit 12* (Special Issue, December, 1952), 26.

France" in Sweden, then in Poland, and Germany. The comparison with different political and health systems had a crucial role in his approach to the history of psychiatry. This is one of the reasons why, once the time came for him to publish his dissertation, Foucault refused the customary academic publishers in order to reach a wider public (87-88).

Thus, Artières and Bert emphasize that the place of Foucault's philosophy are books more than university classrooms: "The book as an object has a new role […] it should spur into thought and action, or better, it should provoke an experience" (251). In other words, "a book, for Foucault, is not just an entity having a beginning and an end" (ibid.), inasmuch as it interacts with the readers' present. In the same way, history as a discipline, according to Foucault, should not be considered as an objective in itself, as historical questions are always put from specific present situations and problems. This is the reason why "Foucault constantly changes the challenges of his *History of Madness*" by adding new problems and new questions (105). In fact, this work evolves together with the urgency of different political issues, as well as with Foucault's own intellectual interests and fights. From the philosophical topic of the limits of reason at the beginning of the 1960s to the history of power during the 1970 and the problem of the constitution of subjectivity in the 1980s, "*History of Madness* presents itself as the backbone of Foucault's philosophical path," it is a book that "chooses progressively its targets, and Foucault acts as the gunner that adjusts fire over the years. Actually, it is a matter of a weapon-book" (249).

Artières and Bert dwell also on other specific matters arising from Foucault's book and in particular on the debates between Foucault and the philosophers of his time (Bachelard, Canguilhem, Althusser, Derrida: see the interesting unpublished documents included in the volume), as well as with the historians (especially with the historians of the *Annales*: Robert Mandrou, and Fernand Braudel). However, these perspectives are only mentioned, since they are at the core of the complementary volume of this study on *History of Madness*, whose aim is exactly to collect the "critical gazes" brought about by Foucault's book between the beginning of the 1960s until the present day.

Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique de Michel Foucault. Regards critiques 1961-2011

Regards critiques 1961-2011, like the two volumes on *Les mots et les choses* and *Surveiller et punir* that have preceded it, gathers and introduces sixteen reviews or articles on *History of Madness* authored by the philosophers, historians, and psychiatrists that debated with Foucault since the publication of his dissertation in 1961. What is especially interesting in this volume—compared to the previous ones—is that it includes not only the contributions of some of the most prominent figures of the French intellectual scene, but also some lesser-known articles, which are meant to represent the international reception of Foucault's inquiry into madness. Thus, besides the well-known studies, for instance, of Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Derrida, and Georges Canguilhem, one can read also the French translation of two

Italian reviews of the early 1960s,[5] as well as an abstract of the article published in 1970 by the German historian of psychiatry Dirk Blasius.[6]

Furthermore, this volume takes into account also the wide debate roused by the first English translation of the uncut version of *History of Madness* (1972) in 2006. This debate is represented by the letter by which the English philosopher Colin Gordon, in 2007, responded to the bitter criticisms addressed to Foucault's historical methodology by the sociologist and historian of psychiatry Andrew Scull.[7] The choice of Gordon's article is strategic in this volume for several reasons. First, this article is one of the most recent contribution to the debate about Foucault's "history of psychiatry," a debate that had already reached its apex during the 1990s with an article published by Andrew Scull in 1990 in the journal *History of Human Sciences*.[8] In this paper the English sociologist attacked Gordon's idea according to which the critical readings of Foucault's *History of Madness* by the Anglophone historians[9] was due to the fact that these readings based themselves on the translation of the French cut version of the book.[10] This exchange gave rise to a series of reactions from some of the most prominent philosophers and historians of psychiatry in Europe and the USA (e.g. Robert Castel, Jan Goldstein, Roy Porter etc.), which merged some years later with a collective volume entitled *Rewriting the History of Madness: Studies in Foucault's "Histoire de la folie."*[11] This volume focused mostly on the different readings of Foucault's book over thirty years and collected both critical and apologetic positions on Foucault's historiographic methodology, as well as on some of its historical arguments. It is exactly these topics that are taken up again by Colin Gordon in 2007.

The second reason why this article is strategic within the French collection of "*regards critiques*," is that it was originally published not in a traditional academic journal, but "posted" in a blog.[12] In this way one can experience directly what stated by the introductory volume of Artières and Bert, namely, that *History of Madness* is a book that, since the 1960s—by means of

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[5] By, respectively, the journalist Nicola Chiaromonte, "La nef de fous", *Tempo presente*, vol. 8, no. 12 (1963), 313-321; and the historian Alberto Tenenti, "Compte rendu de Michel Foucault", *Storia della follia*, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, vol. 77, no. 4 (1965), 323-332.

[6] Dirk Blasius, "Extrait de 'La pathologie sociale comme problem historique'", *Neue politische Literatur*, vol. 15, no. 4 (1970), 335-356.

[7] Colin Gordon, "Extreme Prejudice: notes on Andrew's Scull's TLS review of Foucault's History of Madness" (cf. http://foucaultblog.wordpress.com/2007/05/20/extreme-prejudice/). Gordon addressed his letter to the TLS in 2007, but they have declined to publish it.

[8] Andrew Scull, "Michel Foucault's History and Madness", *History of Human Sciences,* vol. 3 (1990), 57-67.

[9] See here the abstracts of the two articles of Lawrence Stone, "Folie", and "Un échange avec Michel Foucault. Lawrence Stone répond", *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 29, no. 20 (1982) and *The New York Review of Books,* vol. 30, no. 5 (1983), 357-382.

[10] cf. the lecture given by Gordon at Durham University in 1988: "*Histoire de la folie:* an unknown book by Michel Foucault" in Arthur Still, and Irving Velody (eds.), *Rewriting the History of Madness: Studies in Foucault's "Histoire de la folie"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 19-44.

[11] Arthur Still, and Irving Velody (eds.), *Rewriting the History of Madness*, op. cit.

[12] Colin Gordon, "Extreme Prejudice: notes on Andrew's Scull's TLS review of Foucault's History of Madness", *foucaultblog.wordpress.com* (May 20, 2007). Web: http://foucaultblog.wordpress.com/2007/05/20/extreme-prejudice/

radio, television, magazines or dailies—has largely circulated not only in a strictly academic way. But one should remark also that Gordon's article, by emphasizing the problem of the different versions and translations of Foucault's book, focuses on another topic brought out by Artières and Bert, that is the "material" history of this book as one the reasons of its "recurring success."

Furthermore and lastly, one should point out that this "material argument" raised by Gordon in defense of Foucault's study of madness has opened another kind of debate. In an article published in 2007 in the electronic journal *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* Gordon emphasized indeed the expediency of reading some of the fundamental arguments of *History of Madness* in the light of Foucault's lectures at Collège de France. Thus, for instance, the phenomenon of "the Great Internment"—one of the most debated topics of *History of Madness*—should be read, according to Gordon, "in the light of Foucault's later analysis of 'police' as a governmental rationality for the regulation of conduct."[13] It is a reading that is again in line with the positions expressed by the introductory volume of Artières and Bert, according to which *History of Madness* is a new kind of book, one which is never closed.

One could object that this reading is not viable from both a historical and a philological point of view. In other words: is it possible to read and interpret a book in the light of the later development of its author's thought? In this regard, we could recall for instance what was stated by Ian Hacking in the Foreword that he wrote in 2006 for the full translation in English of Foucault's book.[14] He pointed out indeed that between the first edition of 1961 and the edition of 1972—that is the new full version of the text published by Foucault himself and translated into English in 2006—there is the same difference that can be found between "the two *Don Quixote* invented by Borges, the one written by Cervantes, the other, identical in words, written much later by an imagined Pierre Menard. Despite the words being the same, so much has happened that the meaning is different", first of all the meaning of "archaeology" (XI-XII). It is a very interesting remark, to which Foucault would have probably reacted like Gordon and also like Artières and Bert did, by saying that his book is not just one or even two books, but actually a "weapon-book," "a event-book," like Canguilhem maintained in 1986.[15] To borrow again the words of Canguilhem, one could say that, for Foucault, to conclude a book once and for all would have meant to sign a "declaration of tyranny" toward the readers (271).

Hacking's remark, however—by emphasizing the differences between the two editions of *History of Madness*—helps us to understand the different theoretical targets of the various critical readings over the years. The collection of articles we are presenting is very helpful too, in this respect. It allows us to realize, for instance, that the first reviews of the book, compared to the more recent ones, did not concern the problem of the sources of Foucault's history of psychiatry, or the way the philosopher used them, but rather both the philosophical premises

[13] Colin Gordon, "Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (NY and London: Routledge, 2006) Book Review", *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (Feburary, 23rd, 2007). Web: http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/25226/?id=8904

[14] Ian Hacking, "Foreward" in Jean Khalfa (ed.), Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (Trans), *History of Madness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[15] Georges Canguilhem, "Sur l'*Histoire de la folie* en tant qu'événement", *Le Débat*, Vol. 41 (1986), 263-271.

and consequences of Foucault's "archaeology of a silence." The article that Roland Barthes wrote in 1961 for the journal *Critique* is very interesting in this regard.[16] Barth pointed out indeed the intrinsic difficulty of thinking the antinomy between reason and unreason starting from one of the two terms, since "the distance" between them—he stated—"is nothing but the ultimate ruse of reason" (45). A similar remark was made in the same year by Maurice Blanchot,[17] according to which philosophy, unlike literature and art, is not able to give voice to madness (55). This voice is indeed the expression of a particular kind of language, that is, a "non-dialectic experience of language" (62).

The problematic distance between reason and unreason is emphasized also by Jacques Derrida in his well known lecture, then article, of 1963 on "Cogito and History of Madness".[18] Starting from Foucault's analysis of the passage of Descartes' "First Meditation" on the skeptical doubt,[19] Derrida employed in turn Hegel's idea of "the ruse of reason" by means of an incisive metaphor: "There is no Trojan horse unconquerable by Reason (in general)" (120). Unlike the contemporaneous article of Michel Serres, according to which Foucault's book sparked off the "Copernican revolution of unreason,"[20] Derrida maintained that the philosophical project of writing a history of "madness in itself" is impossible, since "if discourse and philosophical communication (that is, language itself) are to have an intelligible meaning, that is to say, if they are to conform to their essence and vocation as discourse, they must simultaneously in fact and in principle escape madness" (150).

It is in these articles that the philosophical debate raised by Foucault's book reaches the highest level. It is a debate that—like the French sociologist and historian Robert Castel has rightly pointed out in 1986[21]—preceded the events of May 1968 in France. The new political activism and social concerns "transformed [indeed] the meaning of [Foucault's] work by opening it to a new audience, which did not share the same need of rigor expressed by the intellectual community that had received it at the beginning" (282). The introductory volume of Artières and Bert is very interesting in this regard, since it goes over the diverse forms of political engagement which took *History of Madness* as a point of reference, or to which the book gave rise from the end of the 1960s in Europe.[22]

We can certainly see here one of the reasons why in 1969, in the heyday of the anti-psychiatry movements, the French psychiatrist Henry Ey—on the occasion of a workshop devoted to Foucault's *History of Madness*—accused this latter of adopting an "ideological" stance

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[16] Roland Barthes, "De part et d'autre", *Critique,* Vol. 17 (1961), 35-47.

[17] Maurice Blanchot,"L'oubli, la déraison", *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, vol. 9, no. 106 (1961), 49-63.

[18] Jacques Derrida, "Cogito et histoire de la folie", *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 3, (1963), 109-165.

[19] In this regard, see also the article of Jean-Marie Beyssade, "'Mais quoi ce sont des fous'. Sur un passage controversé de la *Première Méditation*", *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 3 (1973), 191-227.

[20] Michel Serres, "Géométrie de la folie (*fin*)", *Mercure de France*, no. 1189 (1962), 87-108, 100.

[21] Robert Castel, "Les aventures de la pratique", *Le Débat*, vol. 41 (1986), 273-294.

[22] Ph. Artières, J.-F. Bert, *Un succès philosophique*, op. cit., chapter 4: "Rééditer, actualiser et donner une suite politique 1972-1984", 230ff.

targeted "to murder psychiatry."[23] It is a view that is still topical today within the debate on Foucault's book, as testified by the foreword by which the French historian Marcel Gauchet presented in 2007 the new edition of his famous essay on *Madness and Democracy*, originally published with Gladys Swain in 1980.[24] According to Gauchet, in fact, Foucault's criticism against psychiatry is just a "broken promise," namely, a criticism that could never be constructive, since the alternative it offers to clinical psychiatry is the "myth of the truth of madness." In other words—maintains Gauchet—psychiatry and its clinical knowledge "can be reformed, but it is not possible to escape from them."[25]

The criticism of sustaining a "mythical argument" had been already addressed to *History of Madness* by the French philosopher Henri Gouhier at the time of Foucault's dissertation's defense.[26] It is actually a recurrent criticism that has also been strongly argued by Pierre Macherey in a very interesting article of 1986.[27] Macherey indeed analyzed Foucault's book in the light of his previous works of the 1950s—*Maladie mentale et personnalité* and the Introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's *Dream and Existence* (both published in 1954)—and maintained that, despite its new argument of the "historical constitution" of madness, it has not actually been able "to free from the weight of its origins", that is, the mythical idea of an "essential madness", which had now taken the place of the "disalienated human essence" claimed in the works of the 1950s (255).

The criticism about Foucault "romantic" view of madness is still topical today. It is worth mentioning, in this regard, Ian Hacking's idea according to which the very originality of Foucault's archaeological method can be grasped only in the light of his later texts, namely, *The Order of Things* (1966) and the *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). These books show indeed that knowledge (*savoir*) cannot be reduced to its contents, but to the "set of rules that determine what kind of sentences are going to count as true or false in some domain."[28] It is exactly starting from this intuition that Hacking could develop his own "historical ontology" of objectivity.

The epistemological value of Foucault's "archaeological" methodology, however, has been one of the most debated topics since the publication of *History of Madness*, as witnessed by the collection of papers presented here. In 1961, for instance, Barthes pointed out that the "structural history" outlined by Foucault was close to cultural anthropology in so far that it did not look for "positive facts", but for a "functional totality"—the cleavage between reason

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[23] Henri Ey, "Commentaires critiques sur l'*Histoire de la folie* de Michel Foucault", *L'Évolution psychiatrique*, vol. 36 (1971), 167-189, 188.

[24] Marcel Gauchet, and Gladys Swain, *La pratique de l'esprit humain: l'institution asilaire et la révolution démocratique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

[25] Marcel Gauchet, "La folie à l'âge démocratique" in Marcel Gauchet, and Gladys Swain, *La pratique de l'esprit humain*, Paris: Gallimard, 2007, II-XXVIII; see the abstract here 295-311, 309.

[26] See Artières and Bert, *Un succès philosophique*, op. cit., 89ff.

[27] Pierre Macherey, "Aux sources de l'*Histoire de la folie*: une rectification et ses limites", *Critique*, Nos. 471-472 (1986), 229-261.

[28] Michel Foucault, "The Archaeology of Knowledge", in David Couzens Hoy (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford-New York: Blackwell, 1986), 30.

and unreason—including both forms and contents (42). Also Michel Serres in 1962 defined Foucault's archaeology as "a genetic and structural method" and he compared this "generalized psychoanalysis" of psychiatry to Bachelard's psychoanalysis of scientific knowledge (99). The French historian Robert Mandrou too, in the same year, in the famous journal *Annales*, considered Foucault's historiography as a kind of "psychology,"[29] in so far that it involved a view about men and the world. But Canguilhem more than anyone else—see the lecture he delivered in 1956 on "What is Psychology?"[30]—could appreciate Foucault's "questioning of the limits and scientificity of psychology,"[31] that is, the history of the advent of psychology and psychopathology as "weak sciences" (269). The question about the meaning of "science", "scientificity," and "rationality" in the field of psychiatry is actually one of the most topical arguments of Foucault's "history" within a certain part of the present-day "philosophy of psychiatry." It is a debate that—even though it does not share Foucault's own arguments—still owes a lot to the French philosopher's "impure" history and philosophy.

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[29] Robert Mandrou, "Trois clef pour comprendre la folie à l'époque classique", *Annales. Économies. Sociétés. Civilisations*, vol. 4 (1962), 65-85

[30] Georges Canguilhem, "What is Psychology?", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 1 (1958).

[31] Canguilhem, "Sur l'*Histoire de la folie* en tant qu'événement", 270.