

# Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory (Gender and Culture)

By Lynne Huffer

Michel Foucault was the first to embed the roots of human sexuality in discipline and biopolitics, therefore revolutionizing our conception of sex and its relationship to society, economics, and culture. Yet over the past two decades, scholars have limited themselves to the study of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, volume 1 paying lesser attention to his equally explosive *History of Madness*. In this earlier volume, Foucault recasts Western rationalism as a project that both produces and represses sexual deviants, calling out the complicity of modern science and the exclusionary nature of family morality. By reclaiming these deft moves, Lynne Huffer teases out exciting new strands of Foucauldian thought. She then revisits the theorist's ethical work in light of these discoveries, divining an ethics of eros that sees sexuality as a lived experience we are repeatedly called on to remember. Throughout her study, Huffer weaves her own experiences together with Foucault's, sampling from unpublished interviews and other archived materials in order to intimately rework the problem of sexuality as a product of reason.

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Review

[A] provocative and thoughtful book.

(Christopher Roman *Foucault Studies*)

Review

From the picture on its cover to the pages of her book, Lynne Huffer's study offers us a Foucault many will scarcely recognize. Arguing that virtually from the start of his career Foucault lays new grounds for queer theory, Huffer combines scrupulous scholarship, attentive close reading, and passionate argument with personal meditations to suggest why the early Foucault matters now.

(Jonathan Goldberg, author of *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations*)

What if, Huffer asks, the center of gravity of one of the most powerful strands of queer theory were relocated from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, volume 1, to his earlier, massive *History of Madness*? With great generosity of mind and spirit, Huffer, a leading theorist at some of the most productive intersections between queer and feminist theory, performs this needful Archimedean task.

(Michael Moon, author of *A Small Boy and Others* and *Darger's Resources*)

This book really highlights and clarifies what is at stake in the *History of Madness* and how those stakes articulate with Foucault's philosophical agenda from the 1960s forward. As a Foucault scholar, I am very grateful for that work. I love a provocative book, and this one kept me thinking well beyond its own text.

(Ladelle McWhorter, University of Richmond)

*Mad for Foucault* is one of the most exciting books I have read in a while. It represents an original, provocative, and ambitious effort to rethink the foundations of queer theory. Every chapter is replete with fascinating points and provocative assertions.

(Jana Sawicki, Williams College)

Lynne Huffer startles our complacent ownership of Foucault. Own him? We've hardly read him. Huffer has—lyrically, ironically, with unblinking passion. She shares the results: a political ethics (hardly a morality!) for erotic bodies subject to madness-or subjects after it. A dazzling dance of a book.

(Mark D. Jordan, Harvard Divinity School)

In exploring the gold mine that is *History of Madness*, Lynne Huffer does more than simply reveal the full importance of this first of Foucault's major works. She demonstrates that from the beginning to the end, Foucault's project was driven by a desire to offer a radical, intransigent critique of psychoanalysis and of any psychoanalytic theory of the subject. *Mad for Foucault* is sure to become a classic.

(Didier Eribon, author of *Michel Foucault and Insult and the Making of the Gay Self*)

#### About the Author

Lynne Huffer is Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Emory University and author of *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex; Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics, and the Question of Difference*; and *Another Colette: The Question of Gendered Writing*.

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