



1. Introductory: A Genealogy of Postmodernism

To trail the genealogies of these high mortal miseries, carries us at last among the sourceless primogenitures of the gods; so that, in the face of all the glad, haymaking suns, and soft-cymballing round harvest-moons, we must needs give in to this: that the gods themselves are not for ever glad. The ineffaceable, sad birthmark in the brow of man, is but the stamp of sorrow in the signers.

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick**

1.1. Politically Correct(ed)

At first one thought that Political Correctness (PC) was but a surreal, and hopefully ephemeral, travesty: a collection of kitsch euphemisms patched together in order to

* Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York: The New American Library, 1961 [1851]), p. 440.

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cover, in the manner of fig leaves, the obscenities of contemporary America: her barbarism and deep-seated culture of contempt (i.e., “racism”).

We know the story: Mrs. and Miss demurely merged into Ms., gal became lady, colored people minorities, guy gentleman, blacks African-Americans, skinny slim or slender, FAT was initially replaced by “heavy-set” which lately succumbed to the more upbeat “robust,” Spics were elevated to Latinos (or Hispanic-Americans, who’ve been recently offered also a special niche for the gender-fluid in their midst: “LatinX”), Dagos & Wops were promptly flushed down the non-descript swamp of Italian-Americans; ever more stricken by ever more squalid misery, Third World countries were eagerly promoted to developing countries, Orientals were quietly subsumed by Asians, short by petite, et cetera. This was yet the folkish aspect of the bowdlerization.

Initially—in the early Eighties— all this sounded ludicrous, but one might have granted the benefit of the doubt to the whole effort and inferred therefrom that PC was but the expression of a movement that sought, in spite of all, to correct the errors and hatreds of the past by starting with the words themselves, with *speech*. Soon it became clear that the shift was never meant to go further. It was Orwellian Newspeak, cosmetic wordplay, rhetoric all right, (saying one thing, meaning the opposite, and, by any means, leave things as they are and should be); some kind of manneristic foreplay to the habitual doublespeak of the “Liberal democracies,” which, in their war-gaming ploys and social imbalances, always come to justify imperial intrigue in the name of “freedom” and “human

rights” on the one hand, and to blame economic inequality on “culture,” on the other.

So, PC appears to have started out as some kind of peculiar argot developed by the middle class to glamorize its hypocrisy and mask its failure —the failure to “sweeten” the country, the failure to overcome its ingrained loathing of all those ethnic groups that have shown themselves “unfit” in point of technological, martial, and business proficiency.

But, as it turned out, when it comes to the *raison d’État*, when it comes to politics, —for behind the petulantly jocose façade of PC there lay a serious powerplay— the middle class was actually not on display for the serendipity of its cultural playfulness, but, as intelligentsia —i.e., as mid-stratum flunkys to the upper class,— the middle-class was rather finding itself, hard at work, at the inception of a massive program of social reconditioning: language/discourse being the vehicle upon which to act by way of suggestion, and the goal: proclaim the advent of a new-fangled cult of “diversity” and radicalize in every citizen through a process of fanaticized *identification* with one’s ethnic make-up and sexual bent so as to turn (American) society into a battlefield, into the ideal *bellum omnium contra omnes*, a war of all against all.

In time, things progressed. Not only had ordinary language become falsified, and the intellectual possibility of *dissent* enfeebled as a consequence, but one came to find that this semi-improvised linguistic patchwork had gradually assumed the proportions of a *system*. In schools it became fashionable to hear that “truth” was an elusive concept, and therefore that the notion of “immutable values,” by which one might rank

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human achievements (and crimes), was not only wrong but heinous to boot, given its implicit injunction to discriminate, subjugate, and eventually destroy all that had been classified as “inferior.”

According to this sprouting creed, the culprit of all that was abominable was the white male of European descent: admittedly the greatest classifier and butcher in the history of mankind. This was hardly a new or controversial conclusion; what was different, however, was the peculiar logic leading to it.

So-called truths, one heard, formed just a jangle of *discourses*—discourses ever changing, the one hardly “truer” than the other, all of them manifestations of evolving *power* relations. This sounded like some trivial relativistic argumentation, but it wasn’t, for, listening on, one discovered that the human expression of reality as a whole was but a fabric of discourses, some (the dominant ones) more preponderant, others (the marginalized ones) less so. The novelty was that whole new categories of “displaced subjects”—the oppressed ones—were now launched onto the field of analysis and endowed with discourses of their own, which, as it was vehemently conveyed, happened to be no less (if not a great deal more) noble, legitimate, and truthful than the discourse of the Eurocentric whites.

At first sight, this appeared to be an equanimous move to give a voice to all the formerly silent victims of abuse—the “soft targets” of Western oppression: colonized peoples, the poor, the weak, women, children, and homosexuals.

Yet again, looking more closely, it was nothing of the sort.

This new philosophical “system” implied no resolution, no promise of a struggle in the name of unity —aspects that, for instance, Christianity and Communism did share to a certain extent. Because it didn’t really promise a way out of the morass, the new “discourse” seemed to abandon the world to its own confused devices and insolvency. The best one could do, so went the advice, was to resist stubbornly the established powers of oppression and attempt to “subvert” them always by joining nuclei of guerrilla warfare, which maneuvered from the *margins* of society.

In brief, what was being offered was a shorthand gospel of postural disobedience in the name of a sentimental connivance with the downtrodden of the world. In fact, as we shall see, the true nature of this new intellectual fad was more complex than what might have been gathered from this collection of impressions, but all in all, a sneering relativism and the profession of parlor radicalism were the immediate traits that transpired from a first casual encounter with it.

American academia in the Eighties was at the forefront of this transformation.

Notwithstanding its poses and sentimental outbursts, seldom, if ever, is the academic corps a disobedient lot. Among American educators, as the issue was one of “resistance,” what this new trend thus translated into, practically, was an obnoxious pantomime of antagonisms. In other words, the “new dissenters” —who, exactly as their predecessors (the Marxists of yesteryear), never acted outside or against the system but always (& comfortably) *within* it— resolved to play a game in which each entrenched himself or herself in the

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nominal dugout of “diversity/inclusiveness.” From that position, they proceeded to analyze all “cultural artifacts” (the “great books,” films, scholarly and media articles, etc.) and tear them apart — “deconstructing” was the proper expression— with a (more or less overt) view to lashing out at a number of choice targets, which were always the same for all (we will come to these shortly).

The beauty of it all was that, through this game, one got to disintegrate much and construct nothing; and no systematic alliances across the dugout were possible for these would have meant one step toward *unity*, which, as a “totalizing discourse”—as a “universal”— was, for the “new dissenters,” the ultimate taboo. In truth, the “de-constructivists” came to form an alliance of sorts: a loose but nevertheless strong and resilient alliance against anyone seeking unity across the political spectrum in the name of dissidence. Phrased differently, the “new culture of resistance” stood for an alliance against alliances.

The new trend took on the name of “postmodernism,” and its prophet was a white, thoroughly European male: Michel Foucault (1926–1984), a darling of Western propaganda, whose decisive endorsement by the Parisian intelligentsia in 1966 and by its New York counterpart in 1975 transformed him instantly into an intellectual icon of the West. Foucault agreeably assumed the proffered role of guru, and in time came to be the leader of a veritable French invasion of America’s academia and educational institutions. An invasion which has consolidated itself twenty-five years later—at a time when, in Europe, the Foucauldian influence has been long dead— into

a strong bastion of thought, wielding ever more money, converts, governmental leeway, publications, and power, power of the purest sort: intolerant and corrupt.

For lack of a better creed, and presumably disappointed by the utter failure of their country's short-lived and scattered Socialist and hippie experiments in the recent past, waves of American intellectuals, educators, and publicists presently seem to have found sanctuary in the "rebel" construction of this late French, postmodernist school.

From philosophy to literary criticism, via sociology and governmentality, the contagion eventually reached even the unwelcoming stretches of economics. The picture that emerged from this scramble was an odd one: among the lettered multitudes, we no longer saw the "Left": no semi-coherent movement of dissent existed anymore —it was literally finished.

Instead, the spectacle, as it has been unfolding ever since, is one of affluent middle-class intellectuals, nearly all white males of European descent, that are divided into two factions: the Liberals (modernists) on one side, and the mischievously antagonizing postmodernists on the other. Under the cover of a politically correct truce signed in the name of propriety, the one faction (barely) tolerates the whims of the other, and while the modernists carry on business as usual, telling their pupils that life is a game of chance in which "the market" and allegiance to the Flag alone can take them to the top, the postmodernists reach conclusions not altogether dissimilar.*

* See Chapter 6, pp.235-42, the segment on the phenomenal convergence of views between the Foucauldians and the ultra-orthodox, ultra-capitalist

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Put another way, postmodernist professors invite their classes to apply relativistic exercises and “de-constructivist” techniques, whereby the students are made to take apart a story, a “narrative,” and identify the social prejudices informing the text; but after the deconstruction has crushed all the idols, the class has in fact no option but to fall back upon whatever is the current system of belief, that is, the creed of self-interest, patriotism, and faith in the “free-market” with which every Anglo-Saxon is raised.

Ten times out of ten the pupils are trained to take aim and fire at the privileged pet-peeves of postmodernism. These are: patriarchy, phallocracy, paternalism, racism, sexism, machismo, racist industrial pollution (that is, only that pollution that is putatively caused by the white elites and discharged on “minorities”), Europe, Eurocentrism, the white European male, the male in general, Columbus and the Catholics, very much the Catholics, religion, God, transcendence, metaphysics, the spirit, colonization and early imperialism (not so much that of the Brits as that of the Spaniards’), and sometimes, *ever more infrequently*, “capitalism,” preferably singled out as a vague synonym for economic oppression. In sum, barely scratching the surface, we find ourselves, lo and behold, staring at the austere buffet of the White Anglo Saxons Protestants’ traditional dislikes. Hardly a surprise.

Never, though, are the students made to visit the polemic upon the concrete working of the hierarchies of *real power*: say, to investigate the effective composition, functioning, and

history of the political and financial establishments of the West—and, therefore, to expose, and ruminate on the filth that organically accretes everywhere from the workings of power itself.

Postmodernism has three principal negative effects: a waste of time in the human sciences, a cultural confusion that favors obscurantism, and a weakening of the political left [...]. Students learn to repeat and to embellish discourses that they only barely understand. They can even, if they are lucky, make an academic career out of it by becoming expert in the manipulation of an erudite jargon.*

1.2. Two Sides of the Same Dollar Coin

In the end, even though in the classroom “God” and patriarchy have come to be arraigned, tried, and sentenced a million times, our System, as a whole, is never questioned. Moreover, it is widely remarked that the postmodern attitude, in its craving for differentiation, erasure of boundaries, and permissiveness, is indeed highly compatible with the defining traits of our corporate, market-oriented age.

This basic realization reveals that the apparent antagonism between modernists and postmodernists is somewhat feigned, if not wholly spurious.

So far, all this sounds like a sorry joke. But the fact remains that, since the advent of postmodernism, whatever was left of a dissenting mood has beaten a hasty retreat. And the impact of Political Correctness on the system of the middle-class

* Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense, Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1998).

education has something to do with this. Forty-plus years of disintegrative labor in the schools have eventually managed to discipline American pupils, conditioning them to snarl, snap and bite whenever they sniff anything redolent of “sexism,” “absolutism,” “Eurocentrism,” or “white male chauvinism.”

They have been disciplined by means of a politically correct lack of any spiritual certainty, other than a patriotic feeling of righteousness, a feeling shared and reinforced on the other hand by the pupils’ “economistic” (“Liberal”) education —the other pedagogical half of America. Joining the postmodern half to the Liberal half, and taking the limit of our argumentation, thus assuming that in time all cooperativeness will be excised from the minds of young Americans, we obtain this hypothetical, neo-type of “American citizen”: a bigoted hybrid who, as a creature of “economism,” breaks down life in costs and benefits, considers cooperation an (expensive and nugatory) option, and is convinced of his/her intellectual, moral, and cultural superiority vis-à-vis all those peoples incapable of mastering the technological arts (of war) or the savvy ways of commerce.

As a creature of postmodernism, however, the “new western type” will never dare to confess openly the conviction of being culturally superior. He or she is ever the hypocrite.

The Right-wing variant of this type —the so-called “Neo-conservative” — presents a fascinating synthesis: what the new Republican Right has studiously attempted since the mid-Nineties is precisely this fusion of civic, devout ardor —Christ wrapped in the flag, or the flag *tout court*— with the “free-marketeering” faith: supply-side economics plus technology.

This project for the new citizen, conceived and orchestrated with patience and method by these intriguing “postmodernists of the Right” (e.g., Leo Strauss, Irving Kristol, Francis Fukuyama, and others), though much derided at its inception by rival Democrats, appeared to have worked better than anything they had thought of in the era of post–Cold War, “global,” “multipolar” competition, thanks in no small measure to the anointment it was accorded by the national martyrdom of 9/11.

However, since the Neo-conservative administration of Bush Jr. passed the baton to the “progressive” faction of the Democratic executive in 2008 (under Barack Obama, and then, under his deputy, Joe Biden), the posturing fanatics of the postmodern Left have been awarded mandates and mounds of cash wherewith to raise within all agencies and divisions of the US Techno-Structure, in business, school & academia, and the entertainment industry, an inquisitorial armada of cultural influence of such power and magnitude as to have completely obliterated in deed and memory whatever amount of clout the once-almighty Neocons had been able to garner in the first decade of the new millennium.

Experience has thus been showing that the new Leftists can easily go it alone: with their worldwide mass-crusading in the trinitarian name of anti-whiteness, homosexual exaltation & pro-disability compassionateness, the America’s Foucauldian epigones have shown themselves fit to evangelize the world with a straighter face than the hawks; on the other hand, no less imperially belligerent than their Republican brethren, the new leftists could take equal, if not better, care of the war

business—as they did by carrying on the Afghan war, 2008–2021, and freshly thereafter, by supporting the Ukrainian proxy vs. Russia, 2022–present).

Long before the 9/11 swerve, scholarly analyses of Neo-conservatism had already revealed the existence of an undeniable philosophical affinity between these postmodernists of the Right and their counterparts on the Left; this connection will be examined in chapter 8.

Both parties believe that ours is a world ultimately driven by chance, which only power (i.e., violence) can subdue. Yet the conservative elitists keep this “truth” hidden and recommend, for the sake of social stability, the espousal of “traditional values” and economic oligarchism, whereas the Foucauldian postmodernists of the Left personify, more or less aggressively, the other half of the game, namely, the unstable and chaotic storm of transgressive defiance whose containment is, nominally, the partisan duty of the conservatives. By retreating “to the margins of cultural difference” and posing behind a stance of merely verbal harassment aimed at, say, phallocracy or televangelism, the Foucauldians do in fact renounce to antagonize, in a united front, the powers that be.

Superficially, what seems most contradictory of these Foucauldians is their use of reason to humiliate reason itself, and of rational language (what they refer to as “discourse”) to celebrate chaos: more than a contradiction, this is “cheating” (*une tricherie*), as Georges Bataille himself admitted. “The realm of thought,” he said, “is horror. Yes, it is horror itself [...]. It is like slipping in the night, on the pitch of a roof, with no

parapet and in a wind that nothing appeases. The more thought is rigorous, the more the menace intensifies.”

So, what has been truly at work in this strange debate? What have been the stakes?

Several issues are at stake here: the state of education in America, the paralysis of the critical faculty of students, the death of dissent, and the political orientation of the American intelligentsia. These are all related themes, and one of the linking threads is indeed this exceptional adaptation of a weird sort of French story-telling within America’s network of knowledge.

What is sketched here is an investigation of the origins and nature of this peculiar philosophical import from France. Borrowing Foucault’s phraseology, we propose to conduct an archeology of Foucault himself and map out a genealogy of his spiritual provenance.

1.3. French, Faux *Gourou*

Who is Foucault and where does he come from?

Foucault owed his American success to having developed a product that happened to satisfy a critical exigency of the U.S. elites in managing country and propaganda: namely, that of preventing the formation of a compact movement of political dissent united by a coherent and diffuse sense of justice. Academics, too, had reasons for jumping on the bandwagon and taking up the vogue from France: (1) it offered the upper-

* Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes* (OC) (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), vol. 12, p. 223.

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class intellectual leftist a liberating break from the Marxist pretense that he breathed and fought for the proletariat: with Foucault, “revolt” was stripped of its class connotations: nominally, it had become a matter of pure transgression, which shift nicely dovetailed with a variety of (behavioral) morbidities that were more often than not the affair of the more affluent castes; and (2) Foucault wrote at length, often passionately, in defense of the oppressed who suffered disfiguring abuse in asylums, prisons, and hospitals; he spoke in defense of a primordial vitality, systematically crushed by disciplinary powers, whose mystique he originally depicted; and he pleaded without affecting the sanctimonious style of all those optimistic bores who could never conclude a treatise on human struggle and iniquity without appealing to the powers of divine or “evolutionary” providence.

In a word Foucault was “it”: sophisticated, talented, insightful, feisty, creative, politically engaged, seemingly compassionate, but sporting enough iconoclasm and irreverence to keep the whole deal “cool.”

And so, he became a new star of the (already bankrupt) American Left. During the 1980s, a number of Americans working in a university setting enshrined Foucault as a kind of patron saint, a canonic figure whose authority they routinely invoked in order to legitimate, in properly academics terms, their own brand of “progressive” politics.

But there appeared to be a serious misunderstanding behind it all.

Unfortunately, Foucault’s lifework is far more unconventional—and discomfiting—than some of his “progressive” admirers

[with roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition were] ready to admit [...]. Foucault issued a basic challenge to nearly everything that passes for “right” in Western culture — including everything that passes for “right” among a great many of America’s left-wing academics.’

These lines, penned by a Foucauldian academic, go to the heart of the matter. “Unfortunately,” he wrote: as if he were regretfully informing his “high-minded, Democrat” colleagues that they have all been the victims of a frightening misjudgment, if not a dupery. Still driven by the precepts of their “Judeo-Christian” formation, but pressured by the mechanical pace, peer pressure & job perks, and the disillusion of the times, the “progressives” appear to have satisfactorily bartered their traditional, leftist slogans for the newer lingo of Foucault.

They merely thought that they had “upgraded”: still compassionate after all these years, yet “hip.” However, the trouble was that Foucauldian discourse, as the passage above correctly warned, has nothing to do with “progressivism.”

Foucault never cared for the conservation of life, but rather the opposite: if anything, he enjoined to cultivate *suicide* throughout one’s life. His (cerebral) sympathy for the troubled lunatics and convicts of the carceral institutes was a form of corrupt complicity with all those creatures of uninhibited, violent yearning; a camaraderie felt toward all manifestations of bestial insubordination before any form of authority, religious and secular alike. The proximate enemy of

* James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 384, emphasis added.

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postmodernism appears to be technocratic oppression and surveillance —symbolized by the clean-shaven, spectacled, monitoring engineer in a white robe— but the ultimate target is unmistakably the belief in “the good,” whatever that is and wherever it may issue from. Foucault’s is a testimony to an egomaniacal fixation on life’s (ugly) abnormalities, a fixation which strives to oppose a certain ideal of beauty and which takes no pains to (attempt to) reform the world’s iniquities for the sake of peace.

As said, the Foucauldians have no political agenda, no program, and no plans for reform. Foucault’s idea of resistance was merely to join the forces of resentment that simmer in the lower depths of society (“at the margins,” as he put it), and engage, in choreographed fashion, in an endless tug-of-war with the constituted authorities. The invitation to *transgress* appeared to have been an end in itself: it managed to keep social tension always at boiling temperature. And, needless to add, the faction profiting the most from such a stylized state of perennial strife is “disciplinarian power” itself —the enemy.

Professionally, Foucault wasn’t not doing anything essentially new; he seemed to be drawing (theatrical) inspiration from those preachers and mystosophists of two thousand years ago who were known for putting the Prince of Darkness on a par with the God of Light —each being the representative of a willing force, ill for the one, and good, for the other— to account in some rational fashion for the mysterious presence of evil in the cosmos, i.e., in what appears to be the otherwise masterfully engineered creation of a benevolent Maker. This sort of preoccupation lies at the heart

of the mother of all (socio-existential) questions and it bears the name of Theodicy (i.e., the vexatious topic of “divine justice”).

A classic expression of Gnosis, which the Fathers of the Catholic Church understandingly abhorred and restlessly persecuted as the most menacing of heresies, is the credence that the world we live in —imperfect, violent, and full of injustice as it is— is actually “Hell” and that our bodies are prisons of flesh in which the (penitent) soul —which yearns to be reunited with “God” in a faraway realm of light (its true ancestral home)— finds itself trapped. Gnosticism is the creedal stance according to which this world is the cocked-up hodge-podge as well as the social precinct under the exclusive jurisdiction of a bad Demiurge, i.e., of a lesser, moody, approximative, and malignant god —the very angel, whom devout people, all of them gulls hoodwinked by the priesthood, sacrilegiously invoke as the Almighty.

The Gnostic challenge is a serious one, because it is solidly axed on the apprehensions issuing from theodicean considerations. Gnosticism is a serious thing, Foucault is not. Foucault was a hack, yet one familiar enough with this sort of current as to borrow some mythologemes and images from Gnosticism with a view to giving his academic prose a different sort of sheen, of veneer. Theodicy did not interest him, stylizing violence did; and he cleverly cultivated this sort of aesthetic affectation in jockeying for academic fame as the (French) System was seeking (in the late Sixties) to replace the obsolete Marxist cohort with a new genre of Leftist vanguard.

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In this sense, I consider Foucault a notable exponent of (modernity's) pseudo-Gnosticism. A skilled, corrupt, and profoundly noxious phony. And as a Pseudo-Gnostic, Foucault's induction into America's academic Hall of Fame might be seen as something of a sensation; one of those bizarre twists in the history of ideas that do not occur infrequently, but that do not generally last more than a few seasons. At this time, however, Foucault is still going *fortissimo*, and his academic popularity in the United States shows no signs of abatement. And, for a fad, even if French, nearly half-a-century is a long time.

In truth, this phenomenon is the conspicuous symptom of a crisis. A crisis so profound that clever minds, such as American academics claim to have in abundance, have mistaken a curate of contrived mischief (Foucault) for a hyper-sensitive apostle of hyper-skepticism and taken in his whole retinue (other French *maîtres à penser* such as Lyotard or Baudrillard, whom we will discuss later), no questions asked. Those questions should have been asked, for the sake of clarity. Because, if they had been, they would have revealed that Foucault is not as original as the voice of U.S. academe purports him to be. By tracing the sources of his discourse, one discovers that Foucault had merely re-elaborated—not to say outright plagiarized—themes that had been developed by another thinker. Not some evanescent magus of Gnostic memory, but the true inspirer of the postmodern mood: Georges Bataille (1897-1962), the *poète maudit* of contemporary French thought. Foucault borrowed the near entirety of his neologisms, metaphors, allegories, and philosophical constructions from Bataille, *wholesale*.

1.4. The True *Maître*

And like all ambitious, and accordingly ungrateful, pupils, Foucault gave only sparse thanks to the master, quoting him duly and admiringly (whenever the master's shadow could not be avoided altogether), but as seldom and stenographically as possible.

Exponents of the Frankfurt School, who attended a series of seminars chaired by Bataille in Paris the late Thirties, were quick to point to the *obvious* nexus tying Foucault to the forgotten Bataille,* but, as it usually happens in the history of modern thought, the mold of a successful, *State-approved* creed of subversion is much too revealing and is thus better left in wraps, or mothballed altogether. And so it went: Bataille, like a Leninist grandee at the time of the Stalinist purges, was effaced from the official photographs; thenceforth his name made only brief appearances in the indices of postmodern texts, and his vast opus (very little of which exists in English) has been entrusted to the discreet care of a handful self-effacing purists. Custodians, whose chief duty, of course, has been to issue continual disclaimers highlighting how starkly different in point of style and goals the two men —Bataille and Foucault— truly were. Which is patently false.

Bataille had conceived his opus in the form of “a project” (*le projet*) whose crudity and extremism, however, prevented it

* See for instance Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille, A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 43–44.

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from gaining diffuse acceptance in the Liberal mainstream. The Bataillean enterprise was driven by the unhinged ambition to convert others to a placid acceptance of violence and dissipation by employing a mix of persuasive rational arguments on the impossibility of grasping the meaning of the Hereafter, and by teaching the rudiments of an idiom of his making, which was built upon imagery inspired by the cults of death and bloody sacrifice.

Should I speculate gravely about freedom, or about God? We know nothing of it, and if we do speak of it, it is by way of play (*c'est un jeu*). Everything that goes further than common truth is play.*

It seemed as though Bataille had wanted to infiltrate conventional language and thought (which he subsumed under the rubric of “discourse”) and, through these, reach the collective mind of bourgeois society with the purpose of bending, confusing, and re-directing it. Thus, he looked forward to dissolving within the thinking individual all expectation of divine justice after death, of karma.

More specifically, the “project” consisted of making “*violence*,” which is *silent* (i.e., whose experience is inexpressible), a spoken word, in the *hope* of subverting all preconceptions traditionally accepted as “sacred,” such as peace, compassion, gifting, and harmonious cooperativeness. The final objective being that of disabusing the potential convert by reconciling him or her to the spontaneous brutality of life and nature.

* Bataille, OC, vol. 12, p. 223.

Finally, Bataille's social dream was to see men, after they have undergone this kind of *initiation*, create communities that would celebrate the mystery of collective life much in the fashion of the ancient orgiastic cults, which fascinated him so deeply. The new sacred imperative was to violate every prohibition, to *transgress* every taboo and sacred commandment: especially the belief in the "benevolent, all-seeing God," which, in revenge, he turned on its head by transforming it into a worship of base matter. His new creed came to be symbolized by a headless monster: the Bataillean icon of a deified Nothingness; he christened it "*l'Acéphale*."

Bataille's starting point was the critique of modern bureaucratized society whose sabotage he wished to leverage for a clearing through customs, as it were, of ancient bloody cults, such as those of Kali or the Aztec divinities. He was the first contemporary thinker who systematically tackled the essentially religious challenge of resurrecting, within a modern, rationalist framework, old infernal forms of worship with the avowed intent of numbing within the individual the yearning (or auto-suggestion?) for transcendence —of annihilating in humans the wish that there be retribution after this life.

But "the project" never took off. In itself, the legacy of Bataille —an eclectic and unique collection of gritty pornography, surrealist poems, philosophical aestheticism, iconoclastic mysticism, bold theology, genial sociology, and dazzling political economy, all of which were composed in the key of death, tumescence, and bloody effusion— was far too pictorial, uneven, and cruelly earnest to have succeeded in

perverting the dormant larvae of Modernity's middle stratum as its author had wished.

What with the oneiric prose and, as we shall see, all that evocation of obscene monsters, dreary epiphanies, purulent vaginas, and not-so ambivalent tracts on the merits of Fascism, "the project" did not fit the profile of "required reading" for postwar curricula, the previous editions of which had long since been expunged of angels and demons. And this is the reason why Foucault was eventually afforded ample room for philosophizing maneuver: he purged the Bataillean project of the mystical and morbid fancies and gave it discursive respectability by shaping it into a compact system of thought, a pseudo-philosophy built upon a simple contraposition: the contraposition of a preexisting core of rebellious, primordial lifeblood (embodied by Foucault's now-famous lunatics of the asylum), prowled and hunted by the aseptic, rational rigor of the machine era (the technocratic managers of the clinics, penitentiaries, and madhouses).

This imaginative Bataillean metaphor of contemporary life struggle in the modern era Foucault would immortalize in his celebrated "theory" of Power/Knowledge.

Finally, the American Foucauldians adopted this myth to articulate the racial/gender divide along which blacks allegedly part from whites, and women from men, until each party rejoins its own isle of indigenous knowledge, pledging to resist "at the margins" and to let the mutual hostility fester with no chance of reconciliation. Thus, with uncommon disingenuousness, feminism, homosexuality, and nonwhite ethnicity have been granted by the white establishment peer

status in the grand arena of public discourse —through, for example, proclamations, exclusivist legislation such as Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, and ad hoc academic departments. And from this kind of promotion to describing, e.g., the post-9/11 rampage in Afghanistan as a “feminist war of liberation” there could only have been a short step.

So, ours is the story of a system of power, which, finding itself ever more under the grip of war-loving oligarchs that have brought intoxicating propaganda to new heights of virtuosity, resolved almost fifty years ago to promote openly the postmodern politics of diversity with the manifest intent of sapping any form of dissent and opposition. This platform of “diversity” is a political rendition of Foucault’s Power/Knowledge, which is itself, a scholarly whitewashing of a creed of sorts invented by Bataille in the prewar era.

We now turn to the anti-traditional roots of the Bataillean vision.