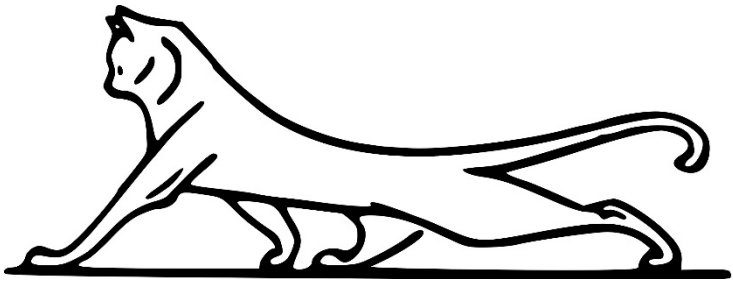

6. Foucault and the Social Science-Fiction of Neo-Gnosticism

> I have been considered by liberals a technocrat, an agent of the Gaullist government; I have been considered by people on the Right, Gaullist or otherwise, as a dangerous Left-wing anarchist; there was an American professor who asked why a crypto-Marxist like me, manifestly a KGB agent, was invited to America, and so on.
>
> Michel Foucault[1]

1. Yet Another Anointed Hack

Michel Foucault was not a mere imitator; he clearly tinkered with the Bataillean project —which is an original, dilettantish attempt at a discursive blueprint for chthonic religious awakening— with a view to fashioning it, politically speaking, into something sufficiently "commercial" —in other words, something "different" enough so as to carve for himself a respectable niche into academia. He was in luck, because the "prospectors of the intelligentsia," i.e.,

the men and women who "make" men (and women) "in the world," saw in his brew more than a novel gimmick by which academic storytellers make a career: his was a construct they could leverage, something they could use in a practical, applied direction. So practical that Foucault's re-elaboration of these infernal themes came in the late Sixties to be co-opted into the official rhetoric of France's Liberal regime.

After a decade of finessing, his brand of thinking, like a certified strain of red wine from the sunny Midi, was "turned into a major export industry"[2] and was from then on to be found in all aisles of all academic supermarkets in the United States —always a top-seller. Today, "many if not most of the studies of Foucault to be found in Parisian book shops are translations from the English."[3]

A remarkable achievement.

The "experts" list Bataille as *one* of Foucault's inspirations, though the acephalic guru is by no means given preeminence in the intellectual pedigree of the "great Foucault." Bataille figures as little more than an eccentric literatus whose nocturnal insights were tastefully blended by Foucault into the rich texture of his philosophical construction. Foucault himself was naturally responsible for misleading the historians on this count: he appealed with emphasis rather to the intellectual debt he owed, say, to Heidegger or, of course and above all, to Nietzsche. In this connection, Bataille himself was often labeled in reference sources as a Nietzschean. If one adds the visible structure of Hegelian influence both on Foucault and Bataille, which is undeniable, then the mix becomes thick and the door is open to say whatever one pleases on the subject.

But that would be unwarranted.

Leaving the German idealist veneer aside[*] —a preposterous blob of wordplay which serves mostly as a teleological[†] implement to fabulize about whatever one wishes,— and refraining for once to invoke the holy ghost of Saint Friedrich Nietzsche, that insufferable poetaster graced by good press — he will not be needed here anymore than in a million of other venues where his phenomenally overhyped screeds have been manipulated *ad libitum* for a variety of ends,[‡]— we will argue

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[*] We shall have something to say in this connection with the work of Kojève (see chapter 8).

[†] Western philosophy is an unbounded bedding of reeking manure, really; one of the *pièces portantes* of this excrementitious expanse is German Idealism, by which "genius-thinkers" in the early XIXth century came to speculate that, since the "great" Immanuel Kant had previously told them that "reality" is what it is, e.g., that the trees are where they are only because we, with our sense-apparatus, happen to be "there" to "see" them, it was therefore perfectly consequential to assert, in turn, that we, as the newfound springs as well as (privileged (?)) witnesses ¿ scribes of all reality, are but the orifices of the...of the Spirit (Fichte), as it were. Yes, the Spirit: this humongous swath of cotton-candy that oozed out of nowhere and then proceeded to rise, disperse, affirm, negate, re-affirm and re-penetrate itself, periodically and spasmodically shooting out of our nostrils, climaxing ¿ crashing again and again —and in so doing, originated and semi-obliviously (Schelling) fashioned Life, whose culmination is...the State (!) (Hegel). Yes, that is (a vivid instance of) how obnoxiously moronic curricular knowledge is in "Western culture" –"Crétinisation par la philosophie," "cretinization through philosophy," sentenced Cioran (*Cahiers, 1957-1972,* Paris: Gallimard, 1997, p. 497).

[‡] The juxtaposition of the Apollonian and the Dionysian featured in our previous schema is of Nietzschean provenance (form his overhyped *The Birth of the Tragedy,* 1872). Although, adopting this dichotomous conception, which is truly one of the standard themes of classical philology, does by no means imply that, at heart, the thought of

that Foucault took up where Bataille left off. The line of continuity uniting the two is the crucial link, the original tale that has made the Foucauldian model the philosophical export of the last century. If it is a fact that in America this model has been committed to memory as "Power/Knowledge," then we need to look no further than to Bataille's legacy to identify the seed, indeed, the core, of such a seductive approach. This chapter, therefore, is not devoted to exploring Foucault's production as a whole —there is a vast literature in English on the subject that will satisfy that desire— but only the nature and originality of the "greatest hits" that made him top the U.S. charts since the late Seventies.

Among Europeans, today, Foucault has been virtually forgotten; Power/Knowledge survives only in the United States. When Gallimard, the prestigious Parisian press, released in 1970 Bataille's complete works in twelve volumes, it was not by chance that Foucault, by then one of France's most conspicuous academics, was selected to introduce the collection. "Today we know it," Foucault wrote in the presentation of the first tome, "Bataille is one the most important writers of his century. *The Story of the Eye, Madame Edwarda,* have broken the thread of narration to recount what had never been told before. What is tied to profound sexuality, for example, blood, smothering, sudden terror, crime, everything that destroys indefinitely human beatitude and honesty."[4] So Foucault told the reader that he was an admirer

Nietzsche was intimately connected with Bataille's attempt to rehabilitate the "monstrous archons."

of Bataille's, as he paid a tribute to "one of" the greatest. That is revealing enough.

Yet the association goes much further than what this deferential, though by no means emphatic, encomium would lead one to assume.

> Despite his obvious interest in Bataille, Foucault had never made any attempt to meet him.[5]

"Unlike Bataille, who was by profession a librarian and not a university teacher […], *Foucault was in many ways a product of the system.*"[6] The shift in style between the two was, in fact, dramatic. In the Fifties, Foucault had undergone the excruciating discipline of France's most elitist school, the *École normale superieure.* Groomed and drilled at the highest level in the jargon of academia, his writing bears little semblance to the prose of Bataille. But it was the special digestion of Bataille's sacred sociology into conventional academic meter that was going to buy him fame.

6.2. Madness

In the early Sixties, starting with his first major opus, *Madness and Civilization* (*Folie et déraison,* 1961), Foucault began to articulate his synthesis of the Bataillean "experience." On the basis of extensive archival research and internships in the medical environment, he developed, as a doctoral student at France's premiere academe, the thesis that madness is, in fact, a construction, an invention. It is the clinical categorization of a triumphant bureaucracy that, because it possesses no notion of vitality's sacred fire, has classed,

punished, tamed, and relegated all forms alien to it into this prefabricated box of so-defined "abnormalities."

His first chapter opens with a vista on the wasteland left behind by the great plagues and the leprosy that had raged in the premodern era.

> Leprosy withdraws, leaving without employ [the leprosariums and its rites], which were not destined to suppress it, but to project it onto a sacred distance, to fix it onto an inverse exaltation.[7]

The tenor was unmistakably Bataillean: this was a foreplay on the wrestling match between homogeneity (the leprosarium) and the/ heterogeneity (the disfiguring plague). From the corrosion of the pest, Foucault transported his narrative aboard the literary trope of the *Narrenschiff* —the historically unfounded, but evocative ship of fools (*la nef des fous*) carrying lunatics and rejects along the banks of hostile boroughs. Thereby he sought to inject new vigor into the fighting cause of "madness" by adding tacitly a new chapter to Bataille's "heterogeneity of the slave."

> This navigation of the madman ends up tracing, along the contours of a geography that is half-real, half-imaginary, the *liminal* situation of the madman […]. The insane can only find his truth and homeland in this barren expanse between two realms that could not belong to him […]. Water and madness have long been connected in the dream of the European man.[8]

Insanity is "liminal," it breeds "at the margins," and its rebellious drift is that of liquidity, moistness. Adopting Gnostic imagery, Foucault assimilated the vital purity of madness to *water:* "Madness is the liquid and streaming exterior of rocky reason […]. Water [is] an infinite, uncertain space, dark

disorder, moving chaos."[9] Reason equals discourse, which dams the energy of chaos. Bataille had written that "there is horror in Being"; this horror is that of "repugnant animality."[10] As he proceeded to delineate the physiognomy of the insane as "sinner," Foucault borrowed the selfsame images of the master (and his style as well):

> When, at the final hour, the man of sin appears in his hideous nudity, one notices that he possesses the monstrous figure of a delirious animal […]. The animal that haunts [the] nightmares of man […] is his own nature, that which will bare the merciless truth of hell […]. Already in this disorder, in this universe of madness, one may discern the outline of what shall be the final cruelty.[11]

Next came the challenge of knowledge, or rather, of Bataillean *non-savoir* (non-knowledge), along with a paean to Bataille's apocalyptic cult of Satan the acephalic *Dioynusus redividus.* Witness:

> Madness fascinates because it is knowledge. It is knowledge first of all because all [its] absurd [manifestations] are in truth the elements of a difficult, esoteric, closed knowledge […]. What does it announce, this knowledge of madmen? Doubtless, because it is forbidden knowledge, it anticipates at the same time: the reign of Satan, and the end of the world; the final bliss and the ultimate punishment; the almighty power on earth and the infernal downfall […]. The earth catches fire […]. The world sinks into universal furor. Victory belongs neither to God nor the Devil; it belongs to madness.[12]

Foucault bestowed upon madness divine, evenhanded qualities; those, indeed, of the White Goddess —dispenser of birth and creation (including intellectual genius), and vengeful dispenser of death, misery, and destruction.

> Absolute privilege of madness: she reigns over all that is bad in man. But does she not reign indirectly over all the good that he may achieve: over the ambition that foster political wisemen, over the greed that make riches grow, over the indiscreet curiosity that animates philosophers and savants?[13]

Ambition and greed? But aren't these the "virtues" routinely extolled by the Liberal-conservative worshippers of the "free market"? Since when have these traits become the object of a radical's affection?

Foucault contended that madness as a positive discipline was born out of conflict —a conflict between the *critical conscience* and the *tragic experience:* here, again, we find Bataille's Gnostic tension between discourse and experience. Folly, Foucault continued, could only be grasped "with reference to" the antagonistic realm of *reason.* "Madness has a twofold way of being *before* reason: it is at the same time on *the other side* of it and *under its gaze.* Madness is then caught in the *structures of the rational.*"[14] As Bataille had done for "evil," Foucault enjoined: "We must accept [folly], even embrace it."[15] Finally, the leftist touch to complete the picture could not be forgone: "The madman," he added, "partakes of the obscure powers of *misery.*"[16] It is always good political form to root for the "poor." "The poor," Foucault declaimed, "form the bedrock and the glory of nations. And one must exalt and pay homage to their misery, which is insuppressible […]. The poor: eternal face of need, symbolic passage of God made man."[17]

So, Foucault had chosen his camp: the heterogeneity of the Slave. But notice first of all the homiletical tenor of the above quote: hardly the language of a self-professed religion-hater; and notice also how conservative this stance truly is: Foucault

apprehended the poor as an irremovable fixture of the world. He hypostatized them and hoisted the poor's rag-flag from the plush comfort of his upper-class lodgings. And sly Gnostic-poser that he was, he couldn't even renounce the myth of Christ. In fact, he appropriated it by playing the very Bataillean trump of Christ's espousal of the "sacred impure." "One must not forget," he admonished, "that, in a way, Christ honored madness over the entire course of his human life; he has sanctified it just as he has sanctified the healed infirmity, the forgiven sin, poverty destined to eternal riches."[18]

Foucault's examiners found the project intriguing, though they reckoned, disapprovingly, that the candidate thought "in allegories,"[19] and that, in the last analysis, the work was not about madness at all, but about the cerebral style of classifying mental pathology.

Foucault, as he said, was carrying out the "archeology of an alienation." He was fathoming how modern man had cast upon the madman "his own alienated truth."[20] Yet the stress of his thesis was laid not on the violent punishment that the inmates might suffer, as an empathic stance would have led one to do with a view to denouncing the practice, but on the *conditioning* of that patient's soul. The implicit denunciation was against the doctor's desire to "organize the guilt" of the madmen, not of the bodily castigation of the insane.[21] "Venereal patients, homosexuals, blasphemers, [and] libertine alchemists" became the tenants of the madhouse, and it was their sins of "unreason" (*déraison*) that had brought them there. Hiding behind "their *crimes* and neuroses, lay a sort of common experience of *anguish.*" Trapped in the asylum, these

others spontaneously wove "an underground network." The Marquis de Sade, himself a famous victim of confinement for most of his life, became their bard, and he was the one that for the first time in history formulated a theory of "these lives of unreason." For Foucault, it was in such chronicles of madness and exclusion that resided true knowledge, the "great collective memory of the peoples."[22] His commentary on the Sadean episode is identical to Bataille's. "The advent of sadism," Foucault wrote, "occurs at a time when unreason, locked up for over a century and silenced, reappears, no longer as a mundane character, no longer as an image, but as *discourse* and desire. And it is no accident if sadism, as an individual phenomenon bearing the name of a man, is born of internment […]."[23]

The true "sin" for Foucault was modernity's attempt to *neutralize* the "dark rage, the sterile madness that lie in men's hearts."[24] The real folly was to have made madness a "calm object" of clinical observation.[25] Foucault did not resent the ancient, sovereign conception of madness as a malady, an affliction or a curse that God would cast upon men to punish them. What he found unbearable, and a sacrilege in his conception of existence, was that the modern God had now taken the guise of an accountant that "organized the forms" of madness, and enumerated its "varieties."[26] This indictment is, we recognize, but a variation on the theme of Bataille's modern, "altered power" intruding into the primordial vitality of the core. In Foucault's variation, the energy of the core radiated outwardly as *madness,* and the underlying "community" became the great family of the insane, whose

orgiastic praise Bataille had sung all his life. "The madman," Foucault lamented, "found himself purified of his animality, or at least that part of his animality that was violence, predation, rage, savagery." What he was left with was only a "docile animality."[27] All of which brutish traits, as his present-day academic and middle-class audience misunderstands, or pretends not to understand, Foucault found tempting, alluring, positive in their genuineness—as genuine attributes "of the core." He further justified his position, suggesting allusively that his book "is not a history of knowledge, but rather a history of the rudimentary movements of an *experience*."[28] Of which "experience" he spoke is, again, no mystery: it is Bataille's. If a text, as Foucault pointed out, becomes a labyrinth, at the center of this labyrinth there lurks a minotaur:[29] Bataille is the minotaur in the Foucauldian maze.

As was to be expected, *Madness and Civilization* culminated in hagiographic pathos by paying homage to Nietzsche, who died "mad," and the ferocious genius of the Marquis de Sade. These are Foucault's early "tragic heroes," all of them sons of Dionysus, "the old master of drunkenness, of anarchy, of death forever received," whose power could be tapped "just outside 'the gates of time'"[30]— that is, where knowledge, as Bataille would say, becomes non-knowledge, and the monstrous archons have their abode. "Madness," Foucault concluded, "conjures an inner world of foul instincts, of perversions, of suffering, and of violence, which had been theretofore relegated to the realm of sleep. [Madness] evokes a depth which gives meaning to the freedom of man; this depth exposed to daylight by madness is evil in its savage state. […].

The madness of desire, senseless murders, and the most unreasonable of passions are wisdom and reason for they are of the order of nature. All that which morality and religion, all that which a badly built society have been able to smother in man, comes alive in the death-chamber (*le château des meurtres*)."[31]

Madness and Civilization garnered a few good reviews (including a positive note by the famous historian Fernand Braudel) and established Foucault's academic reputation. He had wished for "great public recognition," which wasn't yet achieved, but it was a good start.[32]

6.3. Acephalic Scrabble

Thereafter Foucault began to experiment.

He set out to construe the Bataillean experience, and his intuitive contraposition of power and discourse as an abstract language-game, which would achieve a series of strategic and targeted ends. For one, the development of linguistic abstraction would sever the connection to all that "acephalic" imagery, which in an environment, such as that of Western academia in the postwar era, so profoundly and irremediably conquered by the most uncompromising form of cerebral speculation, could have never aspired to full citizenship. In other words, modern protocol required that the mystical and religious roots of the "experience" be expunged out of the context. Satan and especially God had been too long out of vogue.

And, more important, Foucault thereby gave himself further leeway to perfect the articulation of this sentiment and love for

chaos through language, which Bataille had failed to achieve. Foucault did so by mixing the discourse of the experience with a variety of other fashionable styles —nihilism, neo-Marxism, structuralism, and surrealistic literary criticism— so as to render the whole exercise, on the surface, a (fresher) reformulation of the politics of dissent, which, seldom, if ever, programmatically tolerates overt religious yearning, even of the infernal sort.

To make it palatable for the new Liberal readership, the Bataillean project would thus be recycled in the lingo of the Left with the superadded atheistic (and often purposely obscure) aestheticism of the French avant-garde circles. In the biennium immediately following the publication of his first book, Foucault purged of its mystical origins the treatment of the discourse speaking the tongue of evil, transforming it into this peculiar, abstract language-game:

> The totality of language finds itself sterilized by the single and identical movement of two inseparable figures: the strict, inverted repetition of what has already been said and the simple meaning of that which lies at the limit of what we can say. The precise object of 'sadism' is not the other, neither his body, nor his sovereignty: it is everything that might have been said […]. It is the mute circle where the language deploys itself.[33]

So now, there was no longer a mystical core, a symbol of an evil, a parallel reality, embodied by the base matter of the acephalic theology; all we have is "life" as a self-contained structure of language toying with itself, reflecting itself, duplicating itself ad infinitum without any possibility of exit, a space whose despairing closure and finiteness was echoed by

the violent cry of the madmen (Sade, Nietzsche, et al.). In this sense, Dionysus's drunkenness was no more the beckon to something "other," but was rather the alien call that there existed nothing other than this world of discourse, which was without issue. In essence, the view remained that of Bataille, but in practice, through this play of words, the silence of violence was here used as a lantern to illuminate exclusively the limits of reality as we conceive it, through the speechifying of concepts and "logical" reasonings. All else was mystique, which rationally speaking, meant nothing, and now all atheists and agnostics, not just the worshippers of excrement and "acephalic play," could have joined the party.

With the Gnostic teacher Basilides, we are back to the "God that is not" who creates out of nothingness, though the experience was presently flattened by Foucault into a linguistic game. So "God" became a "simulacrum," that is, "a vain image," "a falsehood that causes one to take one thing for another," "saying everything at the same time, and constantly simulating other than what it says."[34] Glossing the literary work of his friend Pierre Klossowski, another member of this fraternity, as well as Bataille's fellow goat-slayer in *L'Acéphale,*[35] Foucault buried the war of religions launched by Bataille into the folds of simulacra.

> Klossoswki's experience is situated approximately there, in a world ruled by an evil genius who would not have found his god, or might also pose as God, or who might be God himself […]. God himself put on the face of Satan in order to cloud the minds of those who do not believe in his solitary omnipotence […]. In these twists and turns, the perilous games of extreme similitude are multiplied: God who so

> closely resembles Satan who imitates God so well […]. This world would not be Heaven, or Hell, or limbo, but quite simply our world. A world, finally, that would be the same as ours, except that, precisely, it is the same […].
> Neither God nor Satan ever appear in this space. [In this space] one crosses […] a presence that is real only insofar as *God has absented himself* from the world, leaving behind only a trace and a void, so that the reality of the presence is the absence where it takes place.[36]

No longer does God embody himself into a bug to find, in anguish, that he cannot exist. This time around, it is the *words* that are being played in a silly card game, which appears to have no purpose, not even a beginning or an end. The words "bug" and "God" become scribbles on chits that are shuffled and reshuffled in a deal that suggests its own senselessness. The names are simulacra —mere labels— and the game itself renders the ideas, which these names represent, as unreal as the symbols themselves. We have entered the space of "hyper-reality" where the divide between truth and fiction is blurry. Foucauldians such as Baudrillard would be offered by the foreign press wonderful opportunities to play this sort of verbal hocus-pocus before large audiences, as when the time came "to comment on" the first Gulf War of 1991 (see chapter 9).

In this new, redesigned playground, Foucault could pay a lasting tribute to Bataille, indulging more Gnostic similitudes in a space pruned of all "exterior" divinity and sporting all the confidence of a pupil that had surpassed the teacher. In *A Preface to Transgression,* a commemorative piece written in 1963, one year after the death of Bataille, Foucault thanked

Bataille for murdering the transcendent God and thereby enabling everyone to share "an experience in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of Being, and consequently […] an experience that is *interior* and *sovereign.*"[37] But the anti-religious sentiment that pervaded this ode to the dead master is inevitably soaked with that *devout* denial of the god Apollo, which is the unmistakable mark of the grave-diggers of religion, religiously fanatic inquisitors in their own right. The battle of creeds was far from being over; if anything, it was now waged even more ferociously.

> But what does it mean to kill God if he does not exist, to kill God *who has never existed?* Perhaps it means to kill God both because he does not exist and to guarantee that he will not exist —certainly, a cause for laughter: to kill God to liberate life from the existence that limits it […] —as a sacrifice […]. To kill God in order to lose language in a deafening night and because this wound must make him bleed until there springs forth 'an immense alleluia lost in the interminable silence' —and this is communication. The death of God restores us not to a limited and positivistic world but to a world exposed by the experience of its limits, made and unmade by that excess which transgresses it.[38]

And so, the Bataillean notion of "communication" might be wholly salvaged and recycled, or better, exploited through a use of language, which owes its "transgressive power to an inverse relation, that of impure speech to a pure silence." "In Bataille," said Foucault, "writing is an undone consecration — a transubstantiation ritualized in the opposite direction, where real presence again becomes a recumbent body and finds itself brought back to silence in a vomiting."[39] This was, once again, the "project," whose realization, Foucault confidently forecast,

"lies almost entirely in the future," though "it is surely possible," he concluded, "to find in Bataille its calcinated roots, its promising ashes."[40]

We find anew in the above commentary Bataille's image of all-encompassing Violence being intermittently pushed back by the "brief respite" of discourse. Likewise for Foucault, the infernal, alien nature of the "outside" is perennially hinted at, yet it is perennially repulsed by the impotence (indigence) of words by clearing a field for discourse, in a continuous play of reverberation with no possibility of solution.

As one can see, the Bataillean archons have vanished from the picture.

Foucault asked the question: Am I speaking when I say that I am speaking? That seemed "undeniably true," Foucault admitted in the *Thought of the Outside;* "but," he countered, "things may not be that simple." "The subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse […] than a nonexistence in whose emptiness the unending outpouring of language uninterruptedly continues." He seemed to imply that we are but the orifices of this vomit from the outside, which we do not control. And so, returning once more to Sade, Foucault, in the spirit of Bataille, acknowledged the significance of the Marquis for the latter had "introduced into our thinking, for the coming century, but in the same way cryptically, the experience from the outside […], by laying desire bare in the infinite murmur of discourse."[42]

In 1969, Foucault broached once more the theme of the subject in scientific discourse, and asked in *What is an Author?* the question: "Who is truly speaking?" And answered: "No

one." The author, according to Foucault, "is a functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses […]. The author does not precede the works […]. The author is the ideological figure by which we fear the proliferation of meaning […]. What difference does it make who is speaking?"[42] Here the Bataillean identification of the subject with a point of "rebound," as that caesura in the ensemble of the kernel (*noyau*), which marks a discontinuous break as he utters "the thought from the outside," was recast by Foucault in a slightly varied fashion, but the idea was wholly unoriginal (hadn't also Bataille said: "I write to erase my name"?).

This viewpoint would eventually lead to the extreme relativism of the Foucauldians, who would employ this sort of argument to discredit one form of theoretical understanding vis-à-vis another, and bend the sophistry to suit a variety of political arguments. They would in fact imply that as multitudinous points of rebound, all authors are mouthpieces of the "unknowable without," and thus that all debate is bound to founder, and flounders in a Babel of equivalent nonsense.

But one may notice how this argumentation did not issue from a mischievous desire to relativize everything per se, but rather from the intent to attack a very particular form of thinking, and that is the pursuit of Truth for its own sake — what Bataille referred to as "absolute knowledge," the antagonist of Dionysian chaos.

Already at this stage, many critics began, with some reason, to discard this sort of cartoonlike Foucauldian fantasia as a con-job: clearly, if all authors are mere punctuation marks in the

overflow of discourse, what allows Foucault to situate himself above the common flow of speech, and, from that vantage point, discern, or discriminate with respect to one speech or another? What makes one discourse different from another? How can a creation of discourse, such as Foucault's own argument, speak of "discourse" in abstract? Why authors from the same cultural milieu can come to disagree violently about everything? And why do some men firmly believe in things others deride? And why does an individual go insane, and another one doesn't? And who is to say who is mad and who is not, if we're all scrawled commas in the senseless doodle of timeless existence?

This is a common and highly predictable objection, which is customarily leveled at all those who employ idealist systems of interpretation —systems that postulate some form of original, intangible principle (abstractly defined, be it earthly, material, or divine), of which individuals are said to be the tangible expression.

If this principle is made all-encompassing, unstructured, and absolute, *as it is* in Foucault (though Bataille was more ambivalent on this score), then the objection holds.

But no matter, the ball was rolling, and there was no stopping the ascent of Foucault, who would never, neither he nor his followers, respond to this criticism. Besides, the match here was never one about logical consistency, but, as we have argued repeatedly so far, it was rather about religious, and ultimately political supremacy.

6.4. The Making of a Constitutional Heresiarch

6.4.1) A cruddy book for the Big Break

In 1966, Foucault had published his second book, *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*), in which he had proclaimed the "death of man." It was originally intended, as he confessed, for the consumption of two thousand academics; but the establishment thought otherwise and hurled the suddenly pleased Foucault on to the grand stage of intellectual stardom: *L'Express,* the high-selling weekly, titled an article "The Greatest Revolution since Existentialism" and splashed his portrait on the front page. Marie Chapsal, who had paid a late homage to Bataille in 1961, was the author of the review. The book appeared in April and immediately became a best seller.[43] Foucault now was the rage; every Parisian intellectual worth his salt had to provide some evidence that he or she had read the book.

The Order of Things is a quintessential academic piece: a 400-page comparative analysis of the recent taxonomic history of the social sciences, biology, and philology. Foucault had thought of it as a "game" —one of those games with which academics jockey for promotion. It was meant to be a conventional display of "competence" for employees only. He would later confess that it was "fiction, pure and simple."[44]

The tone of the book is numbing and an air of distraught futility pervades the entire exercise. As *Madness and Civilization* was meant to trace the vagaries of the "other," *The Order of Things,* instead, was written, according to his author, to reconstruct the history of the "same." The search for "the same" allowed Foucault to engage in an interminable

sandwiching of similes —of stories of a tale writing itself over again in a series of fragmented tales that form the same tale; of painters painting between mirrors bouncing and reflecting different glimpses of the original, et cetera. It's the game of the "sign" and the "similar" yet again, which chase one another, and while doing so end up

transcribing one timeless sequence —a yarn always identical to itself— that renders the historical dimension of human travails, in fact, meaningless.[45] "Man," one heard again, "is but a certain laceration in the order of things"; he "is but a recent invention, barely two centuries old, a simple fold in our knowledge."[46] Hero of "the same" is Don Quixote, "all his Being is but language, text, printed folios, history already transcribed."[47]

Not even economics —of which Foucault was spectacularly ignorant— was spared.[48] Of interest is, for instance, his unquestioning acceptance and Bataillean treatment of Malthus's overpopulation postulate, that is of the dogma that Nature is avaricious, and that there is not enough food to feed us all. Aside from having been systematically belied by experience, Malthusianism stands truly as the standard tenet — possibly the most heinous— of Liberal-fascist *conservatism:* it is the unfailing argument settler of all those fiercely bent on justifying the ineradicable presence of poverty.

> In every instant of its history, humanity finds itself laboring under the threat of death: every population, if it does not find new resources, is destined to extinction […]. It is no longer in the games of representation that the economy finds its principle, but on the side of this perilous realm where life vies with death […]. *Homo oeconimcus* is not the subject engrossed

> with his own needs and the objects capable of satisfying them; he is the subject that spends, uses and loses his own life in order to escape the imminence of death.

Spin doctors and kingmaking publicists must have been searching this indigestible tome long and hard for a quotable passage by which to caption Foucault's sudden launch. Fortunately for all, it came at the very end:

> Thus, we may well bet that man will dissolve like a face drawn in the sand by the line of the sea.[49]

Good enough.

The Order of Things would later be unanimously acknowledged as Foucault's least incisive, least read, least quoted, and most forgettable work. And yet it was the title that marked the commercial break. This was the signal that the French establishment was opting out of its "dialogue" with Marxism, which had served as its counter-altar for dissent, and shifting its endorsement to the Foucauldian system. A step of not inconsiderable significance. The discourse of Foucault appeared to be a more subtle, more malleable catalyst for "opposition" than the conventional and exclusivist rhetoric of class struggle and anti-capitalist emancipation. It might have attracted disaffected Marxists, and thus divided their camp, and, better still, it did not seem to have any reformist agenda whatsoever, no blueprint for social improvement: in terms of social betterment, for the utter vagueness and unsubstantiality of Marxism's "Communist system of tomorrow" this new brand of Leftism would substitute simply *nothing*. In the hands of Foucault, the mere notion of "revolution" or "politics" was bound to become something altogether different.

> A study of political knowledge would concern itself neither with the moment of the emergence of revolutionary consciousness nor with the biographies of revolutionaries […], it would examine the emergence of a discursive practice and a revolutionary knowledge which together generate strategies and give rise to a theory of society and of its transformation.[50]

France's diehard Leftists attacked the book head-on: they deplored in Foucault's "game" the absence of a "creative subject."[51] Evidently, they implied, a philosophy of protest and dissent needed some head upon which the opposition could pin responsibility: be it the slave driver, the capitalist, the populist dictator, or what have you. These "structuralist" fables that told the story of Language writing itself like some sort of giant, cruciverbalist demon who traps human speech in the straitjacket of preexisting syntax and "encoding" words; for the traditional Left, these word-mongers' cockamamie fables, well, they took the thrill out of the struggle. They cleared the arena of the villain —whoever he might be. Foucault kept his cool and slyly countered that "Marxism [existed] in the XIXth century thought, as a fish [existed] in water; that is, it [ceased] to breathe anywhere else."[52] Jean-Paul Sartre, France's incumbent superstar of Marxist dissidence, rankled like a wounded Prima donna: Foucault, he maligned, was "the last barricade the bourgeoisie can erect against Marx." "Poor bourgeoisie," Foucault would retort years later, "if they needed me as a 'barricade', then they had already lost power!"[53] The funny thing, of course, was that neither side was wrong — especially in light of the overarching fact that neither Foucault nor Sartre, neither Marxism nor "Structuralism," nor anybody

or anything else really comes to mean anything unless the head-hunters of *L'Express* decide otherwise.

Foucault, for his part, should have been more candid and less modest: clearly, it was not Marxist dogma which Liberal democracies were afraid of, but of compact, unifying mass movements of social resistance against privilege broadly defined. In the West, Marxism had pretended to take this charge to a degree, but never overwhelmingly and radically. Real complications do begin when the middle class unites with the workforce against the ruling oligarchy (high finance, the military, and State bureaucracy), and the Foucauldian formula seemed an effective antidote against this positively worrisome, yet somewhat remote, eventuality. The clans in the West had lost no power whatsoever, but Foucault was nonetheless "needed." He was worth to them more than he knew.

Despite the editorial triumph, Foucault did not hide his embarrassment at this instantaneous, truly undeserved stardom, and grew "increasingly irritated by the uncomprehending enthusiasm of his new large public."[54] So much so that, wholly dissatisfied with *The Order of Things,* he begged the publisher to discontinue it, in vain. Possibly out of shame for such a contrived success, he vanished for two years at the University of Tunis. Everyone agreed that "there was something enigmatic" about this abrupt departure for such an improbable post.[55]

And so, Foucault left, and missed the big show.

Europe's students' protests erupted in 1968.

6.4.2) To the Archbishopric: Tenure, Bricks & Black Velour

The French establishment brought him back in October of the same year, enticing him with a chair of philosophy at the newly created campus at Vincennes outside the Parisian city walls, as an exquisite ploy to shove outside of town the dissenting rabble around the newly appointed (Bataillean) guru of revolt. Having apparently sobered from his capricious bout of Tunisian coyness, Foucault accepted, and, sporting *désinvolture* and God-given entitlement as well as flouting transparency and merit like all academic barons in good standing, he exploited to the full the power he was accorded by distributing all the available positions to his protégés — including his lover, Daniel Defert.[56]

Campus life in the late Sixties, especially at Vincennes, was indeed chaotic: daily protests, clashes with the riot police, slogan chanting, scuffles, insult hurling, class boycott, and tear gas galore. Allegedly, Foucault had "crazy fun" with all that. Playing his role of "the radical Prof." to a T, "he had been arrested for the first time, and his status in the eyes of his *gauchiste* colleagues and comrades was enhanced accordingly."[57] But, as much as he revered chaos, blood, madness, and sovereignty, he came to find the continual bedlam in the department and interruption of his lectures by the troublemakers so unbearable that he fled the campus rather swiftly.[58] Otherwise he was seen fronting a few political protests, absorbing on one occasion the shock of anti-riot squads and hurling on another a few bricks at the police from the rooftop of his department, "careful not to dirty his beautiful black velour suit."[59] For the rest of the time, he lived and

breathed at the Bibliothèque Nationale: unlike Diogenes the Cynic, whose figure he said to admire, Foucault had not the slightest intention to live in tatters, spit on the rich, sleep in a tub, and masturbate by daylight in Place Vendôme —the circumstances were "different," of course.

Indeed, in December 1970 he was deemed worthy of the highest honors and came to be inducted into France's foremost academic fraternity: the Collège de France. This was truly Foucault's "public consecration." The Collège was not part of the university system. It had no student body and awarded no degrees; its honorary panelists were simply required each year to deliver twelve two-hour lectures, which were open to the public.[60] In his acceptance speech he sketched the (Bataillean) guidelines that would later find systematic formulation as his theory of Power/Knowledge.

> [Foucault] implied, for one, that he had nevertheless broken the mold by going beyond scholarly discourse and resurrecting, in its place, a long-forgotten kind of "true" discourse, one filled with untamed power. Such a discourse, if one were unafraid of the dangers it carried with it, might provoke, as the works of the ancient poets had, 'respect and terror.' By inspiring human beings to think and act differently, it might even change the world, 'weaving itself into the fabric of fate.'"[61]

What a ceremony this must have been! Aglitter and inflated with all the pomp *power* could muster, enveloping this newly inducted "iconoclast" with a crowd of dignitaries donning their finest jewelry and costumes, while he preached about "power" and its forthcoming discourse. Past the shields and picket lines of riot police in combat gear,

Parisians entered the halls of the Collège to partake in the liturgy of "some secular high mass."[62] Rising like a feather from one glowing promotion to another, *he,* Foucault, was presently allowed to "lecture" *them* (the dignitaries) about the undisclosed potential of a (Bataillean) project that could provoke "respect and terror." Whose terror? As if *he* did not know? As if *they* did not know? Did not know that the "true discourse" was Bataille's elegy of sodomy, Aztec sacrifice, eggs in urine, madness, excrement and "the threat to the civilized order?" Truly, whom was Foucault trying to bamboozle? If he himself was the first to recognize that the elites of power were clever, what could have possibly made him believe that he could outsmart them? They gave him fame in '66, and tenure in '68. He then threw bricks at the *flics* (the cops), and they dubbed him academician of France. Wasn't it obvious?

But, thus, the question is poorly cast. No one was fooling anybody: each was exploiting the other for an aim that was ultimately the same for both —to finish off that sentiment, scorned by Bataille, of converting all human activity into a movement, unconditional, for the good, away from privilege, sovereignty, and violence.

Both the elites of power and the Foucauldians knew. And they struck their bargain under cover of deceit, the ones posing as enlightened rulers acknowledging dissent, and the others as proud dissenters claiming their due (i.e., academic chairs and honors).

Now that he had reached the summit of the *cursus honorum*, he began in his capacity of archbishop of counter-power to

"issue statements" to the press though a spate of interviews. "We must free ourselves," he intimated, "from cultural conservatism […]. We must see our rituals for what they are: completely arbitrary things, tied to our bourgeois way of life […]; it is good to transcend them in the manner of play, by means of game and irony: it is good to be dirty and bearded, to have long hair, to look like a girl when one is a boy (and vice versa); one must put 'in play', show up, transform, and reverse the system that quietly orders us about. As far as I am concerned that is what I do in my work."[63] The "unity of society," he insisted, "should not be considered except as something to be destroyed": Foucault proposed a cultural "attack" against bourgeois mores via the shortcuts of drugs and intoxication, the breaking of sexual taboos and all prohibition, and an exploration of the communal dimension.[64] So, in brief, as a tenured destroyer, Foucault was but rehashing a "summer-of-love" version of the old matriarchal carnivals of sex inversion and blending it with a pinch of Gnostic banter and Bataillean "theopathy." Nothing new under the sun, ever.

In 1971 he was invited by the Dutch TV to comment on the movements of (Leftist) rebellion around the world, in the form of a one-on-one debate with Noam Chomsky, who could not comprehend the man. "I mean, I liked [Foucault] personally," Chomsky later reminisced. "It's just that I couldn't make sense of him. It's as if he was from a different species, or something."[65]

Foucault refused to outline any "ideal social model," and went on to contemplate with approbation the possibility that the revolting masses in several international settings might

institute against their former oppressors regimes of bloodiest vendetta. He would reiterate the same proposition in his dialogue with the French Maoists, envisioning with enthusiastic fascination a resumption of "popular justice," as meted out in 1792 in post-revolutionary France: a form of methodical lynching, whereby suspected class traitors "were forced to run a gauntlet of clubs, pikes, axes, knives, sabers, even, in one instance, a carpenter's saw." The upshot of this sanguinary chain assembly was a pulpy sauce of torn epidermis and quartered human limbs of what had been over a thousand men and women. As a counterreaction from the "core," Foucault thought there was merit in releasing "a certain number of ancient rites which were features of 'prejudicial' justice."[66]

6.4.3) Pierre Rivière: Foucault's very own Psycho

Never capable of anything wholly inventive, Foucault was so mired in the footprints of Bataille that it wasn't long before he longed to have a Gilles de Rais of his own. He, too, now wanted a sanguinary mascot. So, he searched an archival collection of the nineteenth century until he exhumed the memoir of a young killer by the name of Paul Rivière. He got his pet criminal at last. A cruel creature with a penchant for torturing small animals, Rivière resolved one day in June 1835 to settle scores with existence: he slashed the head of his pregnant mother, bashed the skull of his brother, and carved out the head of his sister. Allegedly, he had wished to avenge his father, whom the mother had driven away. Once

apprehended, in Sadean fashion, Rivière legitimized his crime by appealing to the natural right of the stronger, and finally declared that he calmly awaited retribution for his deed through the cleansing of death.

What had here resurfaced was but another Bataillean epic of the defiant bull, loving capriciously one last time as it disembowels the toreador before charging, despaired, into the void of its preordained sacrifice. Foucault "thought that Rivière's acts warranted […] 'a sort of reverence'." The memoir was published in 1973 with a commentary by Foucault himself and the ethnographic annotations of a team of researchers he had assembled for the occasion. "So strong was their imaginary affective bond with the murderer that the group members were even reluctant to take royalties from their published account of the case, and thought of using them to finance a foundation named after him."[67]

> Rivière's memoir, [Foucault] declared in […] an interview, was "so strong and so strange that the crime ends up not existing anymore."[68]

None of this, of course, has found its way into the edited, bowdlerized primers and readers of Foucault in the United States. Instead, what has been cleared though censorial customs is Foucault's depiction of the ways in which modern rationality, embodied in the bureaucracy of control, has vexed and tormented the refractory souls of society: the weak, the indigent, and the insane. The editors would manage to sell the Bataillean project, wrapped in Foucauldian packaging, as a cry of universal compassion raised against the cold cruelty of the modern "system." Formidable.

The years 1971–73 was Foucault's biennium of political activism. The stated goal of his militancy was the empowerment of "others." Of these "others," prison convicts were especially dear to his heart. These years were particularly rife with prison mutinies, and Foucault clearly interpreted the phenomenon as heterogeneity pressing insistently against the fences of the disciplinarian society. He would frequently take to the streets to manifest in defense and on behalf of the prisoners' rights and demands.[69] Indeed, the study he would conduct of the world of the prison was going to affect deeply his late career. And, again, Bataille, the master, had already dropped a hint even in this regard. "Intellectual despair," Bataille had written in 1929, "ushers neither in cowardice nor in reverie, but in violence. Thus, it is out of the question to forsake certain investigations. It is just a matter of knowing how we may exercise our rage, of knowing whether we shall like lunatics circle around the prisons, or topple them altogether."[70]

6.5. Surveilling Eyes without a Face: Power/Knowledge

"The publication of *Surveiller et punir* (*Discipline and Punish*) in 1975 was surrounded by considerable publicity."[71] In this book, Foucault delivered his theory of Power/Knowledge, which, further refined in the following years, has ever since become his *pièce de résistance*. The book featured yet another re-elaboration of Bataille's theory of power within the framework of the "disciplinarian environment."

In this sequel, instead of being the victim of the *clinical* system, the bloody madness of the core was cast as the victim

of rational organization within the *carceral* environment: Foucault was presently escorting the reader from the asylum to the jail —and the message was going to remain the same. *Discipline and Punish* chronicled the ways and means by which the modern penitentiary institutions have since the seventeenth century —at the dawn of modernity— regimented the untamed power of humanity's rebellious animality.

The book opened with a detailed, almost voyeuristic, description, for its insistence on anatomical thoroughness, of the torture and execution of Robert-François Damiens, a drifter who had attempted to assassinate King Louis XV in 1757. The episode would lead one to believe that the study would be a screaming denunciation of the savage cruelty of premodern France, and of its demoniac recourse to atrocious forms of capital punishment. And as such, indeed, the whole of Foucault's work is generally presented to the student audience of America. But this is a selective, often incompetent, and ultimately misleading, presentation of Foucault's intent, which was in truth wholly the opposite.

Foucault was once more re-evoking the Bataillean fascination with ceremonial torture. He revisited the old reels: again, the reader was shown the thronging of villagers around the bonfire of sacrificial execution, ready to commune before death, each celebrant soon to be bound to the other by the vertiginous glue of spilled blood and torn innards.[72] Until the late Renaissance, this religious appetite of the mobs for blood had been satisfied one way or another, but then things changed.

Modernity cauterized the killing; in the name of "reason," it

made it "humane." It was this particular development —the aseptic art of murdering and reforming— which *Discipline and Punish* promised to dissect. Foucault found this novel "economics of punishment" culpable of having displaced the solemn and sovereign killing of throbbing flesh.[73]

> And a fact is yet unmistakable: in a matter of decades, the mangled body, the dismembered body —the body amputated […], and exposed, had disappeared. The body as a conspicuous target of penal repression has disappeared […]. In the execution-show a benumbing horror shot out of the scaffold; it enveloped both the henchman and the condemned.[74]

Foucault bemoaned the institution of regimented exercise, schedule, penal regulation, and orderly management of the convicts, all of which to him were "absolutely incompatible with"[75] the heroic explosion of what he called *l'éclat des supplices* — "the glimmering outburst of death-by-torture." To the latter he seemed not at all opposed. "Modern justice," he wrote, "and those meting it out are, as it were, ashamed to punish […]. Punishment has gone from being an art of unbearable sensations to an economics of suspended rights."[76]

Liberalism is utopia. It has been the dream —or rather the nightmare— of encompassing the whole of social life into relations mediated by market transactions, and the results so far have been a progressive destruction of communal sentiment, of the workers' dignity, and of the environment (K. Polanyi).[77]

Liberalism has also been the nightmare of organizing this economic crippling of society into a self-disciplining grid of commandments, which would have relieved the policing organs of the bulk of their monitoring duties —all in the name

of (mechanical) efficiency. This transformation is sufficiently known, and its critique is not at all a prerogative of the (post) modern Left. What is peculiar to Bataille's and Foucault's denunciation of Liberalism's criminal philistinism is the substitution of prophylactic methods of control for the sovereign ways of violence.

> The utopia of the judiciary pudicity: to take away existence while preventing pain to transpire, to deprive of all rights without inflicting suffering, to impose sanctions bereft of sufferance […]. Double process: erasure of the spectacle, annulment of pain.[78]

In the sovereign days of old, for instance, the executioner would open the stomach of the victim and tear out the entrails with haste, so that the condemned "might have the time to see."[79] Crime and punishment fused into "atrocity, not as an obscure acquiescence in the lex talionis [an eye for an eye]," but rather as the affirmation by power of its armed splendor. Following Bataille by heart, Foucault recapitulated: "The form of monarchical sovereignty, while projecting from the side of the sovereign the surcharge of a bursting, unlimited power — a power irregular and discontinuous —allowed on the side of the subjects the latitude for a constant illegality; the latter was like a correlate of this type of power."[80]

Foucault made an insistent use of *dialectics,* especially in connection with the suggestive tension between the heterogeneity of the master and that of the slave. The epic of crime, to Foucault as for Bataille, was a beautiful duel among sovereign equals, forever unresolved: the baroque romance of the castigating prince and of his "correlate," the low-class

assassin. The popular success of this endless saga "is, apparently, the discovery of the beauty and the greatness of crime; it is, in fact, the affirmation that the greatness, too, has a right to crime and that the latter becomes itself the exclusive privilege of those that are truly great."[81] Bataille had said it before, and Foucault parroted: the populace had no fear of capital executions.[82] They were an ancestral, indispensable rite. Hence, modern-day reformers, recognizing this difficulty, saw to it that punishment would not find itself "concentrated in a few privileged nodes," and that it would be "arranged in homogeneous circuits susceptible of operating everywhere, in continuous fashion and down to the finest grain of the body social."[83]

Foucault went on to recount that the clinical eye of the bureaucracy became far more preoccupied with the "*soul*" of the subject than with his body, which presently had to vanish from view, with its gooey secretions, suppurating decay, and organic tallying of death. Through a "metamorphosis of the punitive methods," the attention of the henchman shifted from the physique to the "heart, the mind, the will" of the victim.[84]

The disciplinarian apparatus took hold of the convict's body and began to fashion it, so to speak. To discipline, drill and train it. Until something singular came to pass. One modern day, this tormented body found itself "invested by power relations"; it was being "plunged into a political field."[85]

Now, without the preparatory reading of Bataille, a statement of this sort would seem unintelligible. The reader wonders: Whose power? And whence did this power issue? Was Foucault speaking of an elitist power? Of a supernatural

principle? Which?

In the introductory of *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault had just begun to rescript the novella of Bataillean *pouvoir.* Let us see how the fantasy unfolds.

> That is to say that there may be a "knowledge" of the body which is not exactly the science of its functioning […]. This knowledge and this mastery constitute what one may call the political technology of the body.[86]

Phenomenal language that he was creating.

So, what of this "mastery," of this mysterious "power?"

> In sum, we must admit that this power is exercised more than it is possessed, that it is not the "privilege" acquired or conserved of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its own strategic positions.[87]

This is now easy: two characters lead this scene. Bataille's crushed and diffuse energy of the core ("violence"), which is no longer truculently wielded but merely "exercised" (as "power"); and Foucault's absurd suggestion that "the dominant class" is, in the end, not overwhelmingly "powerful." The elite truly ends up dominating nothing, if, as he held, it is but the outcome, one of a myriad, of "the strategic positions" of this indefinite power.

Now, why the *real* dominant classes should like to see this type of "discourse" prevail in the classroom is not difficult to fathom. Notice, however, that Foucault had altered the Bataillean metaphor. The original clash between heterogeneous forces and the bulldozing might of the Liberal State gave way to a different picture. In Foucault, one could say that the plane of existence became the bottom of a sea of

lifeblood, which modernity had then begun to enclose as a sort of lagoon with a view, as it were, to exploiting the force of the sea for its own energetic requirements. The shattering encounter of mechanized steel and billowing fluid, and the unpredictable swirling that ensues could be seen condensing at any time in an innumerable variety of configurations (power formations) —antagonistic ones— liable to shift and dissolve at every turn.

> [Power relations] define innumerable points of accretion, loci of instability, each being a potential trigger of conflict and of struggle, which might set off an inversion, at least a transient one, of the strength ratios. The reversing of these "micropowers" does not therefore obey the law of the all-or-nothing […]. One should rather admit that power produces knowledge […]. There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor is there knowledge that does not constitute at the same time power relations. These relations of 'power/knowledge' should not therefore be analyzed by starting from a knowing subject who would be free or unfree with respect to the system of power.[88]

"To analyze the political investment of […] the microphysics of power," Foucault went on, one had to abandon "the violence/ideology opposition, the metaphor of property, the model of the contract or of the conquest."[89] This was no longer the face of Bataille, but a de-personalizing decomposition thereof.*

* Half of the Bataillean fresco has disappeared from view. In the Economic Surplus chart (Figure 5.2, p. 167), it is as if all social tension had been limited and confined to the gray area, which depicts the circle of contemporary, homogeneous power —the power of Liberal democracies.

The Marxists were right (on this one): Foucault had made *the subject,* with his crimes and tragedies, disappear —he was gone. But so was the legacy of sovereignty, the temptation of fascism, the king, the ruffians, or a piece of the truth. All gone. Even "power," for that matter: Foucault had pulverized it into "micro-powers."

Notice the advice: we are encouraged to drop altogether the notion of oppression, ideology and property; in other words, we have to cease thinking that there are clans dominating and enforcing rules in order to shield, and perpetuate, their privilege. There may be networks, conceded Foucault, that seem to agglomerate more power than others, but this occasional condensation reflects a common state of disequilibrium, of imbalance that is a natural outcome of this unrestricted flow of primordial power (whose nature, however, remained unaccounted for). Foucault called this undue accumulation of power at a given node of the network "metapower."

"But this metapower," he qualified, "can find its footing only where it may root itself in a whole series of multiple and indefinite power relations that supply the necessary basis for the great negative forms of power."[90]

This is a self-contained circuit, without exit. "Power" This is a self-contained circuit, without exit. "Power" is ceaselessly processed and reprocessed by varying aggregations of social control (for reasons Foucault cannot explain), and even when we perceive that a particular group dominates, he suggested that this predominance is but the apex of a series of power relations that have formed at the periphery, and have ramified

therefrom to the center and *not vice versa.* In other words, there isn't a power structure oppressing from the center; but only a diffuse pool of lifeblood, hardening itself in chance patterns that reflect only one struggle: the discourse of reason versus the fire of blood; and each of us may find himself or herself at one time or another on one or the other side of the barricade. In other words, we could all be subjugators. And those wielding power with infamy could go free, for the Foucaudian theory exonerated them from ever becoming accountable to society.

This was "a game" all right. Other than his forensic narratives, Foucault never offered historical verification of any sort. Bataille had attempted to poison the well by telling a twisted tale of twisted truth, but with Foucault, the system had shifted gears: the elite came, in fact, to commission a novel from a certificated "theoretician" (Foucault), who ripped off the theory of a novelist (Bataille).

In *Discipline and Punish,* the body politic became the collection of our human bodies shaped by Power and stamped with knowledge —the Power/Knowledge of the Leviathan-State.[91] But since power was supposedly diffused, the tension, again, found no solution. Power obtruded, Power coerced, and the inherent virtues of heterogeneity, thus squeezed and constrained, exploded, spitting the victims back at the oppressor in a collective reflux of defiance. Dialectics, again: action and reaction, forever. To the Bataillean Foucault, carnality is life, blood is life; and these new, victimized, tamed, and feeble bodies of modernity were the larval integuments of souls that have been whitewashed by the ethic of the

bourgeois. Inverting the terms of the famous Gnostic adage, Foucault sentenced: the soul is the prison of the body.[92]

> Discipline 'fabricates' individuals […]. It trains the confused multitude of bodies and forces […]. It is not triumphant power, which building upon its excess can trust its omnipotence; it is a modest suspicious power, which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy. These are humble modalities, minor procedures, compared with the majestic rituals of sovereignty or the great apparatuses of the state.[93]

The bodies have been "disciplined" and cut with the double-edged scalpel of "docility" and "utility." For Foucault, one could no longer speak of "slavery." Slavery was a violent appropriation of bodies. Modernity, on the other hand, has striven to "conceal the chains," as Jünger would say.[94] Likewise, Foucault remarked that it was the "elegance itself of discipline to be able to dispense with [slavery's] costly and violent relationship, while being capable at the same time to obtain results at least as great."[95] By means of a thorough chequerwork and gridding (*quadrillage*) of individual behaviors, this new Foucauldian power, characterized by "a scattered localization," has proceeded to "fabricate" individuals in special "monitoring" facilities (the prisons) by exercising what he called "cellular" discipline. "Compared to the majestic rituals of sovereignty," disciplinary power "owed its success to the use of simple tools" and to an artful application of the "hierarchical" principle. Echoing Bataille once more, Foucault accused "this machinery of control" of "homogenizing," of "*normalizing*."[96] But, disingenuously, he cautioned: "One must cease always to describe the effects of power in negative terms:

it 'excludes', it 'represses' […]. In fact, power produces; it produces reality, it produces fields of objects and rituals of truth […]. [Power] has its principle less in a person than in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, of surfaces, of lights, of gazes […]. It doesn't matter who exercises power. Any individual, almost at random, can run the machine."[97]

"Any individual, at random?"

In the final part of *Surveiller et punir,* Foucault ran ahead of himself. Indeed, he reissued the corroborated, notorious and conspiratorial hypothesis according to which the prison, because it regurgitates inmates that have learned no useful trade and cannot perform any useful task, fulfills in fact its covert role as "a factory of delinquents." These squalid byproducts make up an army of derelicts, which the system itself may draw from as a convenient source of pimps, prostitutes, scabs, terrorists, *agents provocateurs* and assassins. By so arguing, in fact, Foucault ran the serious risk of wrecking his entire thesis:

> The prison has succeeded very well in breeding delinquency […], a species of illegality politically and economically less dangerous —ultimately manipulable; it has succeeded in producing delinquents— a milieu that is apparently marginalized, *yet centrally controlled.*[98]

So, it seemed, after all, that "metapower" is actually capable and *willing* to exercise control by infiltrating and sabotaging this milieu from within (*noyautage*) —which is the dirty work proper of a State's secret services. The end product being the studied cultivation of "a redoubtable force of riot and plunder"; a mafia so to speak, through which, "the illegality of the

dominant class" could "canalize and recuperate the enormous profits" of sexual pleasure, arms trade, drugs traffic, and alcohol bootlegging.[99] "It is at this time," Foucault wrote, "that we witness the direct and institutional coupling of police and delinquency. Disquieting moment in which criminality becomes one of the cogs of power. A figure had haunted the previous times, that of the monstrous king, source of all justice and yet fouled up by crime; a new fear makes its appearance, that of a sinister entente between those who uphold the law and those who violate it. The Shakespearean age during which sovereignty struggled with abomination within the same personage is over."[100]

What happened to that "random individual" fit to govern on any given day? How does he play into all this? And what of the fact that this culture of illegality has been a stable and defining feature of our Liberal democracies for roughly two hundred years, with no possibility of change on the horizon yet? It looks as though the magic of "dialectics" has been out of commission on that front, as much as everywhere else. But could Foucault care? Most likely not, lost as he was in his Bataillean shtick (funded by France's arch-disciplinarian State), whose sole concrete suggestions was the vaporous hearkening to a Shakespearean age of monstrous kings. And so it was. This odd treatise of social sci-fi ended on a contradictory note. Details.

One last Bataillean rant with a dash of postmodernism and it would be over with. The book would sell anyway; "power" would see to it:

> Rather than a weakness or a malady, one must see [in crime] an energy that reaffirms itself, an 'explosive protestation of human individuality', which, doubtless, exercises upon everyone a strange fascination […]. It may thus happen that crime constitutes a political instrument that shall eventually be as precious for the liberation of our society as it has been for the emancipation of blacks.[101]

Here were, in embryo, all the defining ingredients for the contemporary politics of postmodernism: the aesthetic wink to violence, conservative pessimism, and the fixation with racial divides. In his *Two Lectures* (1977), Foucault added the final touches to his theory of power. Since he had to account in some fashion for the struggles of the world, he devised for the purpose the notion of "disqualified, subjugated knowledges" on the one hand, and "erudite discourse" on the other. The former is a re-elaboration of Bataille's "labyrinth of knowledges," and is here re-proposed as the broad category encompassing the talk and speech of the people. It is folk tales chanted at the periphery of the networks of power, or "popular knowledge": the testimony of madmen and assassins caught on record. But, Foucault warned, "it is far from being a general common-sense knowledge, […] it is on the contrary *a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it.* It is through the reappearance of these […] disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work."[102] "Erudite knowledge" was the sophisticated syntax of discourse which, say, the École Normale had drilled into Foucault, and which

he could not forbear from using, since he knew nothing else (a fitting application of Power/Knowledge).

"Let us call genealogy," he continued, "the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allow us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge *tactically* today."[103] One ultimately learned from the genealogy that "differential knowledges" were "incapable of unanimity [and] harshly opposed to anything surrounding them." Almost apologetically, Foucault justified this last claim by adducing the fear that if we were to "disinter," "accredit and put into circulation" a particular knowledge, we would be running the risk of "re-codifying" and "re-colonizing" everything in the name of this new discovery —and that was for him a risk never worth taking. He said so before: the unity of society and the "unitary discourse" must be destroyed.

But then the question arises: Why disinter a "subjugated knowledge" in the first place, if not to unite it with other tales of suffering? Because then, as the postmodern answer logically follows, we would be appealing inevitably to a universal feeling of justice, and, as we have repeatedly argued up to this point, this was everything Bataille and Foucault lived to shatter. Thus, the postmodern name of the game was a mock war of the knowledges. The marginalized tribespeople of the subjugated "lores," each brandishing the weapon of a disinterred tradition, were to crouch in their dimly lit corner and consume themselves with resentment, growling and ever prone to pounce on the "other" —especially the "Whites."

This was the discourse that was going to be imported in America and finessed into the talk of tribal mistrust.

> It will be no part of our concern to provide a solid and homogeneous theoretical terrain for all these dispersed genealogies, nor to descend upon them from on high with some kind of halo of theory that would unite them.[104]

At bottom, Foucault's pamphlet commanded that we cease to ask "the labyrinthine and unanswerable question: 'who has power and what does he have in mind? What is the aim of someone possessing power? […] Why do certain people want to dominate, [and] what is their overall strategy?'" Instead, for Foucault we should ask ourselves "how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted […] processes which dictate our behaviors."[105] Again, anyone approaching the study of power by localizing it in "central" loci, instead of apprehending its virtue to circulate in capillary fashion commits for Foucault a gross methodological error and thereby "impoverishes the question of power." "Power," he repeated, "functions in the form of a chain"; "and not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting targets; they are also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."[106]

> If you ask me, 'Does this new technology of power take its historical origin from an identifiable group of individuals who decide to implement its so as to further their interests or facilitate their utilization of the social body?' Then I would say 'No'. These tactics were invented and organized from starting points of local conditions […]. They took place in a piecemeal fashion, prior to any class strategy designed to weld them into, vast, coherent ensembles.[107]

6.6. Welcome to the Hotel California

6.6.1) Recantation, Race & Subjugated Minorities

The year was 1977, and the English translation of *Surveiller et punir* became available in America. A decade after the Parisian launch, the U.S. establishment co-opted the French *philosophe,* and booked him solid for a tour of American academe. U.C. Berkeley, of course, as counterculture's self-professed School of Athens seemed to have had first dibs on playing alma mater to the new French recruit.

> Students weaned on the Talking Heads and David Lynch flocked to his public appearances, cherishing this bald savant as a kind of postmodernist sphynx, a metaphysical Eraserhead whose demeanor was weird, whose utterances were cryptic — and whose philosophy, mirabile dictu, could nevertheless be summed up in a simple mantra, consisting of two words: "power" and "knowledge"…Bodies! Pleasures! Torture! Had philosophy ever sounded so sexy?[108]

This was going to be easy, and rich. The Yankees bought the Frenchman a ticket to ride so that aging beatniks could get a facelift, the angered "minorities" a custom-tailored discourse, and the (oppressing) authorities a nice break. In fact, to American eyes, the books of Foucault were but one long, sophisticated indictment of the hated Nurse Ratched, the villain of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest.*[*] The public presently

[*] Milos Forman's 1975 classic —one of the most iconic films of the Seventies—based on a novel by Ken Kesey and featuring a war veteran (Jack Nicholson) as the thuggish drifter whom circumstances —his being remanded to an asylum for criminal wrongdoing— propel into

had the opportunity of redigesting the movie, but with sophistication and learning, indulging, once more, that anguishing feeling that we are all like madmen trapped in the asylum under the disciplining watch of this manipulative, controlling, and freakish nun-like warden.

It was then all too simple to guess what the politically correct authority of Affirmative Action was going to do with the notion of "subjugated knowledges": instead of attacking the root of the problem, and unearthing brutally, once and for all, in a public and diffuse mass séance of collective culpability the deep reasons behind America's congenital racism; instead of tackling the malady at the core, spiritually and economically, the establishment opted for window dressing, and allowed the creation of a slew of facilities, departments, and curricula devoted to cultural, gay, women, African-American, Hispanic, Middle-Eastern,
and diversity Studies. Deep down, no one bought it, of course: for all that, America kept her distance from gays, minorities, and diversity in general as decidedly as ever. But as raw matter for manipulation, considering their collective state of disjointedness, all these groups were as malleable as could be: much as women had been yesteryear when the System successfully leveraged (the legitimate *doléances* of) feminism to bring women into the labor force so as (cleverly) to pay everybody less. And the more strident and uncomfortable the symbiosis among such "diverse" groups grew with time, the

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the role of an improbable anti-hero called upon to lead a general rebellion of the bedlam's misfits against the sadistic regime of a controlling nurse.

phonier the profession of a generalized commitment "to diversity." The appropriate recruiting institutions were staffed with middle- and upper-class Whites, and, to a far less extent, with non-Whites, who acknowledged with lukewarm reserve the overtures granted them (yet opportunistically played along).

Thus, was fomented this bunker-mentality of chronically simmering hostility that characterizes America's professional environment and society at large —an armed truce, so to speak, concluded against a background of ever-growing incomprehension between *all* the factions, including the "diverse" ones, which have come not infrequently to battle one another over stakes, attention, and the financial allotment of Affirmative Action.

This was yet in the future, but Foucault played it cool like the savvy political animal that he was. Shortly after his American adoption, he began to recant some (tenets) of his Bataillean crypto-faith. He could well afford to do so, considering how far he (and his Bataille) had journeyed. With the affected tone of cautionary introspection, he began to sound a warning against "the fascism in us all."[109] This was clearly a correction that, sooner or later, had to be made, considering, as mentioned earlier, how unconditional devotion to sovereignty, blood, and Aztec sacrifice would naturally place anyone in dangerous propinquity to the Nazis. "Nazism," Foucault fawned, "was doubtless the most cunning and the most naïve combination of the fantasies of the blood and the paroxysms of a disciplinary power. A eugenic order of society […], in the guise of an unrestricted State control […].

It is an irony of history that the Hitlerite politics of sex remained an insignificant practice while the blood myth was transformed into the greatest bloodbath in recent memory." "And yet," he went on to retract, "to conceive the category of the sexual in terms of the law, death, blood and sovereignty — whatever the references to Sade and Bataille, and however one might gauge their 'subversive' influence—is in the last analysis a historical 'retroversion.'"[110]

There, it was done: Bataille was somewhat disowned and his phantasmagoria discarded as "retroversion." Foucault finally acknowledged that we could never go back to those sovereign empires —they had vanished. Even the Marquis was discarded; admittedly Foucault reneged him with ability: "In Sade," he now wrote, "[power] is an exercise [carried] to a point where it is no longer anything but a unique and naked sovereignty: an unlimited right of all-powerful monstrosity."[111] In all honesty, this was Bataille's critique, but it did not matter: conceptually, none of Foucault's work is anywhere original. And besides, virtually no American knew who Bataille was, so…Enough of the Sadean fascination, then.

Foucault was presently among Anglo-Saxon Puritans, who commissioned tools from him, not decadent aestheticism. Foucault complied and jettisoned, remorselessly, the hero of his youth: in the end, the Marquis was but a cerebral cur himself, was he not?

> Too bad for the literary deification of Sade, too bad for Sade: he bores us. He's a disciplinarian, a sergeant of sex, an accountant of the ass and its equivalents.[112]

Very well; now, where did one go from here?

Nowhere.

The Foucauldian mantra had exhausted its mission already. The fans were humble, the fans were naïve: they wanted advice, direction, a code of mores, an ethos, something. Little did they understand, however, the presence of the "postmodernist sphinx" on their homeland. Foucault hadn't come to provide any of that. Mores? Conduct? Yes, he had said to dress like a boy if you're a girl, grow a beard and stink, get stoned, be promiscuous, and "resist at the margins." Fine, but America had done all that already. What next?

Nothing.

The Eighties had arrived. California, thankfully, had come to his rescue when in Europe he was swiftly passing out of vogue.[113] Foucault, the man, for his part, dissolved himself in the gay bath-houses of the Castro District in San Francisco, across the Bay Bridge from his new academic bastion. Allegedly he engaged in sadomasochistic dissipation so long, so intensely, and so carelessly that he untimely lost his life to it. It is AIDS that would finish him in 1984. But in so dying, he, at least, had been consistent: he played the System all right but lived to destroy himself in the end, to destroy life as he had sermonized from early on.

Indeed, he had already attempted suicide several times in his twenties. In the venues of passion and sexual torture of San Francisco, "You meet men who are to you as you are to them: nothing but a body with which combinations and productions of pleasure are possible"; it was "regrettable," Foucault added, that such places did not exist for heterosexuals.[114]

Regardless, his disciples kept tugging at the master's sleeves

for answers. How do I behave? What do I do? What do I do?

In reading a series of late interviews conducted by his Berkleyite adorers, it is almost endearing to watch these professors —grown, educated men— begging "this metaphysical Eraserhead" from France to tell them what to do with their lives. When the topic came to revolve around ethics, the interviewers, discreetly adverting to Foucault's homosexuality, inquired timidly whether a return to the Greek society would be a good idea —after all, ancient Greece institutionalized pederasty and tamed forms of matriarchal worship. "No!" thundered the master: "The Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy, and so on. All that is quite disgusting!"[115]

The disciples tried one more time when the discussion meandered through Christianity —which Foucault accused in typical Bataillean fashion of being the wretched practice of renouncing the self— and asked him how one was to "create [one]self." Create yourself, Foucault hissed, "as a work of art."[116] Which was an inexpensive way out that mustn't have pleased the pupils. How could it?

What "art?" According to which canons? And we are back to square one. A perfunctory going in circles.

6.6.2) Free-Markets for Freedom

Foucault had no more counsel to give; he never had any. Tiredly, he advised the students toward the end to read with care the works of the Austrian school of market Liberalism,[117]

as if they could learn therefrom new ways of achieving freedom (!).

Intriguing piece of advice: to think one could round off one's "sovereign" conception of liberty by reading the prophets of the most conservative schools of economics was strange —especially coming from a (closet) disciple of Bataille, who loathed utilitarian economics.

But as inconspicuously as it may figure, this is yet a crucial clue in this whole story: a story of accomplished faux-iconoclasts who do not simply exist in the Machine; faux-iconoclasts who happen to live in it most comfortably: certificated "dissidents" with a public persona, who draw salaries from a Structure they do not simply say they despise, but which they encourage publicly to oppose and defy. It is not just an issue of a charlatanism so brazen as to have become distasteful; when Foucault invites his hapless devotees to read the plastified gospels of the free-marketeers, he is, in fact, deferring to the higher (oh, so central) authority, to the Power of his disciplinarian paymasters: as central bankers have occasionally had the candor to explain,[118] a well-functioning market cannot come into being without the fastidious buttress of (State) regulation: the conventional contraposition of State vs. the Market is an intellectual con: the one cannot exist without the other. When it comes to *freedom*, when it comes to escaping the cage we live in, there is no way out; the House always wins: Foucault had but to acknowledge that he, like everybody else was nothing but an employee, albeit one graced by good fortune. Like the disciplinarian fascists he pretended to oppose, he was perfectly at ease with Malthus, or

"the Market" for that matter. Never did he seem to care and/or understand whether one could escape the ant colony at all, and how. He was paid not to.

Free-market suicide-bombers, on the other hand, are like the holy monks of a peculiar religious Order. This order was originally staffed under the protection of the Holy See of British Political Economy with a gang of Austrian archdeacons* revered as economic bodhisattvas, who were encouraged to preach with fetishistic lunacy a peculiar variant of Social Darwinism. According to their variant, the Messiah had indeed returned in the late seventeenth century (with the advent of Bataillean *"pouvoir*," in fact) to announce his Kingdom on earth. Like a Second Coming, the disembodied persona of the Free-Market Auctioneer (a reformulation of "the invisible hand") had come to announce the era of the Industrial Revolution. The new times were going to impart that providential twist whereby the savage, pre-modern mercantilist war pitting one agrarian nation against another came to be sublimated into a clean, civilized competition for *nonpartisan business success* rather than spoils. The race would be a commercial race, paced this time by *machines*, to be held on a level playing field —the divinized "Market,"— purged from bureaucratic interference, so as to give free rein to each individual's entrepreneurial potential. Having everything — land, labor, sex & love, life, artistic production, honor, etc.…— from then on been commodified, the cosmogonic outcome of such an epochal transformation has been to this day a

* The most famous of whom are Josef Schumpeter (1883-1950), Ludwig von Mises (1881-1963), and Friedrich von Hayek (1899-1992).

consumeristic bonanza; a Gargantuan harvest of goods propitiated by (the advent and commercial triumphs of) corporate princes —J.P. Morgan and J. Rockefeller all the way to their contemporary epigones,— accompanied by the promise of (material) prosperity for all —all except the mediocrities possessing no business flair whatsoever, "the lazy," "the communists," and all those losers (alas) penalized by the mafia-like meddling of nepotist interests acting behind the intrusive reach of the governmental bodies. Like the Batailleans, the Austrians, too, lament the parasitical and distortive infringements of the State (not on the rabble, but on the economy). That is why we have poverty, they say; it's not the fault of the J.P. Morgans, least of all the Market's. It is the fault of Caesar (and of the deplorable lack of skills of the sorry multitudes: long live the entrepreneurial tycoon!).

But despite what they all claim, Caesar, Morgan and the Market are one and the same. Together, they amalgamate into *Structure.*

The Austrians are like the Dominicans of the Holy English Empire, and the University of Chicago is their most notorious shrine: these conservative maniacs of the Modern Order masquerading as anarchoid luminaries —"Libertarians" they also like to call themselves— are anti-prohibitionists (favoring the corporate commercialization of narcotics) and their "rational," calculative approach to *crime* —Gary S. Becker's "classic" 1968 stylization thereof,— according to which* all of us are potential delinquents merely driven by opportunity and

* Gary Becker was a leading economist of the Chicago school (1930-2014). He was awarded the Nobel prize in 1992.

varying levels of aversion to risk,[119] was of great interest to Foucault.[120] He was very much tickled, of course, by the microeconomic fiction cherished by Neo-Liberal economists* that social processes are assimilable (in the economist's constructs) to the optimal outcomes of one grand, collective and unconscious mathematical calculation imaginatively carried out by God-knows-whom either on behalf of an aggregation of individual agents pursuing a common pleasure-maximizing objective, or on behalf of Society as a whole after factoring the individuals' routines in its algorithms (viz., through the so-called pecuniary calculus of utility, — profit-maximization). Behind what reads like a technical manual fraught with hollow equations, gratuitous stylizations that bear no relation whatsoever to reality (and by which economists, all of them plagued by their second-rate mathematical skills, desperately try to emulate physicists & engineers) lies an absurdly unrealistic fable of men-automata living their life "as if" a computer in their stomach were continually collating information programmed to devise their every step; each step being a point of consumption and budget-allocation along an optimal trajectory calculated over a complete labor-life-cycle within a robotized macro-Structure, itself driven by an overarching, de-personalized optimum-seeking computerized loop. Some robots (or the choices they make), end up on the optimal "frontier," while

* For Foucault, historically speaking, a "classical Liberal" was an intellectual hired (in the late XVIIIth and early XIXth centuries) to "make room" in the midst of Feudalism's dissolution for the emergence of market economics, whereas a "Neo-Liberal" was preoccupied with the exercise of political power in a market-driven economy.

other robots, apparently lesser ones, (tragically) strike out of luck with the maximization process (and end up treading on "sub-optimal" paths). This was exactly the sort of "knowledge" Foucault would expect from a professional economist, i.e., from a modern intellectual engrossed with the exigencies of "Power."

Best of all, for him, was not just the Neo-liberals' realization that crime is diffuse —i.e., a fact of life, or better, a behavioral option among many, and not a matter of biological or psychological "deviancy," — but, most importantly, that it was ineradicable: according to the school of Chicago, it would cost the apparatus too much to obliterate crime altogether: the best the System with its algorithms & budget constraints can do is to *minimize* the damage inflicted by criminal activity to "legal" society by allocating "efficiently" policing resources and judiciously meting out sentences and fines (economic calculus is then brought in to "prove" that whatever the State opted to do is exactly what mathematical optimization (i.e., God) would have dictated —for crafting such mathematized psalms to the greater glory of the State, George W. Bush could not but reward the worthy Becker in 2007 with the Presidential Medal of Freedom).

So, there you have it, it all jives: Bataillean transgression: we are all criminals; crime is unstoppable; the State dominates, yes, but not fully and never definitively, forced as it is, by Malthusian constraints of there not being enough of anything, to concede margins —Foucault dubbed them "fields of tolerance"— in which "illegality" may pulsate.[121]

It is fascinating to observe how these various fantastical and

fantastically disingenuous brews of corrupt (anti-sociological) fiction converge, mesh, blend with each other in the cauldron of State-approved discourse: everything, however crafted, however worded, from whichever locus of the spectrum it issues (be it a tale of orgiastic rape or a mathematized metaphor of criminal wrongdoing), ends up pushing, ends up diffusing always the same injunctions, always the same suggestions: life is violence; there is no escape; you cannot evade unless you play the game, and if you fail (on the Market), you're allowed to feel hatred; there is space, ever reconfigured, for you to hate and rage; possibly, the hatred will afford you a respite, a comeback, and *semper* via the Market, give *you* power for a season, or two; or you may die and vanish, simply, as most do: for in the end it makes no difference —not to Bataille, who will watch you rot in the muck with a smile bathed in tears, not to Foucault who is too busy collecting honorific titles while (spiritually) communing with the maniac Rivière, before evanescing altogether in the bathhouses of Frisco Bay, least of all to the Libertarians whose sole mission is to rationalize/justify (the wildly obscene) income disparity (prevailing in society) and the exploitation that underpins it: let "the Market" set the rates, and let the drugs be freely sold: the losers need them (sedatives), as do the dynamic entrepreneurs (stimulants); as for the drugs' impact on labor productivity —the actual, sole, and unspoken concern behind this whole, phony controversy of "the War on Drugs," — it will be minimal (all manufacture is in China anyway, the rest being services, which potheads can more or less handle): legalize! And thus, have we finally begun to do (the Austrians

& their followers have always had more foresight on this topic than their prohibitionist co-religionaries).

From the System's pulpit, the sermon —Leftist, Fascist, French or otherwise— is always the same. Surrender & obey.

6.6.3) Suicide & the Glory

But none of this should have raised eyebrows anymore. At this stage, Bataillean sovereignty had been disfigured by the late Foucauldian discourse into full-blown postmodernism: the blood of the holocaust had been diluted in an insipid decoction of political correctness and a libertarian fancy for ethnic marketing. What else could Foucault have thought of to appeal to his U.S. audience? What more intuitive approximation of Bataille's labyrinth was there in the American imagination other than *the network of the market?*

Foucault has been the protagonist of a latter-day hero worship, and rare is the case when such beatification isn't fraudulent. The fraudulent nature of the Foucauldian system had become patent to many, especially in the final years, when, feeling death drawing close, Foucault revealed, as if answering at long last the question he had until then done his best to circumvent, that "there is no piece of conduct more beautiful or, consequently, more worthy of careful thought than suicide." "One should work on one's suicide throughout one's life."[122] Such were his parting words.

So much for compassion. And so much for a "theory" of dissent. To the last, he appealed and defended "everyone's right to kill himself," and swore half-jokingly that had he won money at the lottery, he would have invested it to set up special

institutes, where the sorrowful could come and amuse themselves to death in protracted weekends or month-ends, dissolving themselves in "suicide festivals" or "suicide-orgies," perhaps with drugs, and then disappearing.[123] He had done so himself, and, apparently, he was not dissatisfied with the outcome.

In any case, his had been an extraordinary career.

Extraordinary in every sense. Not least for having conned the vast majority of academics —the Americans above all— into believing that he was a sharp, hyper-skeptical advocate of life-loving justice, when, in fact, Foucault's Power/Knowledge is but a poorly xeroxed printout of Bataille's Dionysian delirium, which itself is perhaps the most remarkable and creative revisitation of infernal worship in the modern age.

Still, today, no one really reads, knows, or comprehends Bataille. No one believes the mad orbiting of his headless monster to be more than a straggling epicycle around the plasticized core of postmodernism. But Foucault is indecipherable without the knowledge of Bataille. And much of the present-day confusion stems from this unperformed archeology of Foucault, which is taken instead along conventional dead-ends, thereby squandering precious time in pedantic disquisitions propelled by the flatulent bursts of the usual (and, scientifically speaking, utterly useless) suspects: Nietzsche, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, etc.

In sum, the Foucauldian discourse has been successful in the United States for a variety of reasons. We may identify four chief ones. From the academics' viewpoint, it has allowed the

old leftist vanguard to save status and perquisites by going postmodern. Second, it has provided a readymade "philosophy" capable of *freezing* racial divides in the classroom and the workplace, by articulating an imaginary scale of differentiated "knowledges," which have then been used to project a fake sense of empowerment among the disadvantaged groups (the discussion of this aspect will be refined in the next chapter). Third, it has been highly beneficial to the authorities by preventing any comprehension or curiosity as to how power truly functions. And fourth, it has pandered to the late worship of globalization, which has made much of marketing's and the free market's alleged ability to erase national boundaries, diffuse "other" cultures, and defy centralization (this, too, is a significant development that will be dealt with in chapter 7). This brief recapitulation confirms that, if anything, the Foucauldian discourse was from the outset an exploit of propagandistic production. Though, *formally,* it might have issued from the methodological spheres of philosophy and literary criticism, its practical strength resided in its purely *political instrumentality.* As such, indeed, it has been used with spectacular effects in the contemporary realm of the modern epoch. And the succulent paradox of it all was that the narrative power —the *essence*— of this unique propagandistic tool was the sociological reverie of a forgotten pornographer.

The next chapter is a survey of the various treatments that this singular discourse has undergone at the hands of contemporary postmodern thinkers in a number of disciplines —treatments that have themselves laid waste to the intellectual

terrain whereupon dissent should wage its daily battle against iniquity, all forms of bullying overbearance, and mendacity. The consequences of this discomfiture will be assessed in chapter 9.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 346.
2. James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 16.
3. David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p. xi.
4. Michel Foucault, *Présentation* of Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes* (OC) (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), vol. 1, p. 5.
5. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 137.
6. Ibid., p. 109.
7. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'age classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972 [1961]), p. 18.
8. Ibid., p. 26.
9. Cited in Miller, *Passion,* p. 100.
10. Bataille, OC, vol. 8. p. 102.
11. Foucault, *Folie,* p. 37.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 40
14. Ibid., p. 237.
15. Ibid., pp. 46–53.
16. Ibid., p. 89, emphasis added.
17. Ibid., pp. 510–11.
18. Ibid., p. 205.
19. Miller, *Passion,* p. 104.
20. Foucault, *Folie,* p. 113.
21. Foucault, *Reader,* p. 146.
22. Foucault, *Folie,* pp. 139–47.
23. Ibid., p. 453.

24. Cited in Miller, *Passion,* p. 101.
25. Foucault, *Folie,* p. 552.
26. Ibid., p. 245.
27. Ibid., p. 593.
28. Ibid., p. 104.
29. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 129.
30. Cited in Miller, *Passion,* p. 105.
31. Ibid., pp. 642, 657.
32. Macey, *The Lives,* pp. 114, 117, 158.
33. Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, vol. 2* (New York: Free Press, 1998), p. 96.
34. Ibid., pp. 127–28.
35. Roland Champagne, *Georges Bataille* (London: Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 13.
36. Foucault, *Aesthetics,* pp. 124, 126, emphasis added.
37. Ibid., p. 71.
38. Ibid., p. 73.
39. Ibid., p. 133.
40. Ibid., pp. 72–73.
41. Ibid., p. 150.
42. Foucault, *Reader,* p. 119.
43 Macey, *The Lives,* p. 160.
44. Ibid., p. 480.
45. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses, Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 49.
46. Ibid., p. 15.
47. Ibid., p. 60.
48. To get a taste of Foucault's gibberish on the theme of monetary economics, consult Foucault, *Les mots,* pp. 180, 187, 198, and 202.
49. Ibid., p. 365.
50. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 203.
51. Ibid., p. 201.
52. Ibid., p. 177.
53. Miller, *Passion,* p. 159.

54. Ibid., p. 158.
55. Macey, *The Live*s, p. 184.
56. Ibid., p. 221.
57. Ibid., p. 226.
58. Miller, *Passion,* p. 181.
59. Ibid., p. 175.
60. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 241.
61. Miller, *Passion,* p. 184.
62. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 243.
63. Miller, *Passion,* p. 180.
64. Ibid., pp. 199–200.
65. Ibid., p. 205.
66. Ibid.
67. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 251.
68. Miller, *Passion,* pp. 227–28.
69. Macey, *The Lives,* pp. 257, 285.
70. Bataille, OC, vol. 1, p. 211.
71. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 334.
72. Bataille, OC, vol. 2, p. 371.
73. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir, naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 13.
74. Ibid., pp. 14, 15.
75. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 104.
76. Foucault, *Surveiller,* p. 16.
77. Karl Polanyi, *Great Transformation, The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1957]), especially pp. 108–15.
78. Foucault, *Surveiller,* p. 17.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., p. 90.
81. Ibid., p. 72.
82. Ibid., p. 67.
83. Ibid., pp. 83, 90.

84. Ibid., p. 22.
85. Ibid., pp. 28, 30.
86. Ibid., p. 31.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., pp. 31–32.
89. Ibid., pp. 32–33.
90. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* p. 64.
91. Foucault, *Surveiller,* p. 33.
92. Ibid., p. 34.
93. Ibid., p. 172.
94. See chapter 8, pp. 139.
95. Ibid., p. 139.
96. Ibid., pp. 140, 144, 151, 172, 175, 185.
97. Ibid., pp. 196, 203.
98. Ibid., p. 282, emphasis added.
99. Ibid., pp. 282, 283, 285, 288.
100. Ibid., pp. 288–89.
101. Ibid., p. 296.
102. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* pp. 81–82, emphasis added.
103. Ibid., p. 83, emphasis added.
104. Ibid., p. 87.
105. Ibid., p. 97.
106. Ibid., p. 98.
107. Ibid., p. 159.
108. Miller, *Passion,* pp. 320–21.
109. Ibid., p. 239.
110. Foucault, *Reader,* p. 271.
111. Ibid., p. 270.
112. Foucault, *Aesthetics,* p. 227.
113. Macey, *The Lives,* p. 430.
114. Miller, *Passion,* p. 264.
115. Foucault, *Reader,* p. 346.
116. Foucault, *Reader,* pp. 350–51.
117. Miller, *Passion,* p. 310.

118. Guido Carli and Eugenio Scalfari. *Intervista sul capitalismo* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008 [1977]), p. 114.
119. Gary Becker, "Crime and Punishment: An Economic Approach" *Journal of Political Economy*, 76:2 (1968).
120. Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la Biopolitique — Cours au Collège de France, 1978-79* (Paris : Gallimard, 1979), pp. 30-34, 106, 137, 229, 258-65.
121. Gary Becker, François Ewald, and Bernard Harcourt, *Becker and Foucault on Crime & Punishment —The Second Session* (May 15th, 2013), The University of Chicago Press, p. 2.
122. Miller, *Passion,* p. 351.
123. Ibid., p. 55.