

**The Fruits of Knowledge:
Sociology and the Contemporary Post-modern Discourse
on Sex/Power**

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"Before February 1883, Man did not exist, and Woman was impossible to pin down for a lunch date." With this bold inaccuracy, the esteemed Belgian historian Michel Poirot ignited a mild conflagration of rhetoric, the likes of which we are only once again beginning to see. Many American sociologists have only a fading familiarity with the essential grounds and ethereal conclusions of the resulting Continental discussion, and given the increasing returns to rhetorical abstraction in the singles scene, could profit from a critical summary of post modern theory and the sociological response.¹ Here we wish to review this debate, and through a dialectical process of gainsaying the works of others, demonstrate that the "late post-modernist" regime of power/sex/knowledge/television has been superseded by evolutions in the trans-oceanic code of Capital ("*Kapital*", as Marx liked to call it), and is in the midst of mutating into a new nexus of localistic yet alienated sex/power structures of inescapable banality, not unlike Gilligan's Island.²

Through a close reading of the Ramones' "Blitzkrieg Bop," Mark Dissleworth has demonstrated that the early capitalist world-system (ala Wallerstein) required the actualization of the "play of forces" (ala Hegel) of domination and recognition as-of-yet latent in the re-gendered colonial trade. From this

¹. The classic summary is the Franco-Germanic collaboration, *Post-Modernism: A Brief Report Issued from the Front*, by Jacques E. Chaurtes and Phil. T. Boxer, and the feminist critique in *Bitter Days: The Post Modern Period* by Anita Ragg and Leah Tard. Other seminal works are Delude and Bizarri's *Contrariwise!* and Luce Iratluuff, *Society of the Speculum*.

perspective, the asexual masculine industrial production was an anomaly whose genetic account must be (repro/de)duced from the rupture in that very (genetic) code of value itself. It is not surprising that in addition to drawing circles on paper, theorists have gone back to Nietzsche's *Revaluation of All Values*, and added slashes and parentheses. For example, J. Mappel Bon-bon (*Re-valuing the Value of Valor: Explorations in Medieval Machismo*) provokes us by arguing (a bit stridently, thinks the present "author"³) that not only are we not in "capitalist" society (which can easily be disproved by the absence of men with watch-fobs and vests), but we have never left the Middle Ages. Bon-bon closes with a specious argument as to his own claim to the duchy of Blattersburg. But where is Wo/Man?

In a self-proclaimed "crazy" synthesis of the works of the great anthropologist Jean Levi-Jeans and the raving schizophrenic P. D. Q. Schreber, Gloria Rogonoffsky argues that not only is the post-capitalist power/sex system derivable from the structuralist interpretation of parsnip exchange in Polynesia (immortalized in the words of one of Levi-Jeans' informants: "Why eat my own parsnip, when my wife's brother's son's wife is my uncle?"), but there are startling similarities in jewelry.⁴ Calling for

². See my, "Where is Ginger's voice? Contra Gilligan's challenge to the Skipper's Patriarchy." *Hallucinations* 3:14-31.

³. This should not be taken in any way to imply that the present "author" believes that there can be an "author," that Author/(ity) exists, or that s/he is an "author".

⁴. But see Z. Cudderchew's *The (RE/PRO)duction of Uddering*, which argues that Rogonoffsky was wrong to assume that one can unproblematically study the circulation of the Lacannian phallus as if it were the "sign" of surplus-value (as in Marx's caustic [though only anachronistically homophobic] remarks on the time of turn-over, *Capital Vol 2*), since the "primitive" ero-economy does not make the gesture of the subject-ive internalization of reified primordial patriarchal schemata of gender oppression (*Urdick*) (which creates the object of the subjugated subjectivity by subjectively internalizing the subject of the father to which one is re-presented [in the simian sense] as an object). That is as much to say that instead of resolving the Oedipal crisis by *passing on* the phallus to the son, the fathers in Levi-Jeans' original study often *collected* them, presenting them later for discounts when upgrading canoes. Cudderchew stresses that this also undermines the existentialist dynamic of Simone de Beauvine's *Woman and the Dialactic of Self and Udder* (Wisconsin: USDA, 1942). Shall we then follow Cudderchew in her call for a "political economy of the teat?"

an end to the current practice putting Woman in the center of (psycho)analysis, she deploys a meta-analytical classification schema based on Neapolitan ice-cream. Her explicit radical-libertarian avowal as to the counter-hegemonic aspect of bunny-ears (in her popular treatise, *Up Yours, Mr. Man*) of course drew quick rebuttals from radical-liberal feminists. Most prominent, of course, was Donna Migillicutty's *Femin-ism Un(punk)tuated*, a criticism of liberal political theory from Locke to Dworkin through an analysis of the visual "texts" of the *Suicide Commandos* 1977 tour. But the most devastating counter-analysis came from Lynda Shaker, who criticized Rogonoffsky's "anthroporeductionist embodiment of hypertexts of desire in immediate plasma-capital." Shaker's logic was unshakable: Rogonoffsky's reading had slipped into the materialist (and modernist) trope of positing *people*, when "meaty bodies" were "the mere mediated con(text) and pre(TEXT) of self-(sub/in)sistent super-strings of power/desire, which, unmoored from the signification of agency, can only refer to themselves in a solipsistic frenzy in which the impossibility of semantic realization is their hermeneutic sub(TEXT!)"

Empirical support was not long in the fabrication. Rex LaLane's selective study confirmed the error of the modernist reification to be one of gendering text(bodies). In *Engendering Disembodies: The Anti-History of the Present* he argued that "sex" was a completely modern phenomenon. While pre-moderns had deployed a "juxtaposition of bodies," this act was in no way related to the *gender* of those bodies (as R. W. Zweibach was later to show, before 1920 it was only in the rainy season that the number of genders "collapsed" from five to two)--and furthermore it was completely dissociated from "pleasure." The pre-modern "interrogation of bodies" took place not with a "partner" of the "opposite" "sex," but with any random body, for example, the body one happened to be married to. Furthermore, so far from being an act of "desire," it was understood that it produced purely visceral feelings of "muche loathynge,"

in the words of a contemporary.⁵ The inescapable conclusion: Man could not exist, because He had not yet been differentiated from Woman (Tiamat in the classical Babylonian epic; Olive Oil in the modern version). Only with the techniques of the Gutenberg press were new sites of specifically gendered power inscribed on bodies (and they were promptly covered with trousers).

the sociological challenge

For this reason, the sociologist Felix Mondieu feels that post-modernist discourse, with its panting attention to sex, bodies, and desires, is merely the smutty side of modernism taken to its (socio)logical extreme, and is therefore "a discourse that cannot comprehend the limitations of its own self-annihilatory abstraction, nor the reasons for this incomprehensibility." The misapplication of subjective power/sex forms of classification to the Popperian "disneyworld" of pure theory resolves itself not only as anachronistic, but ethnocentric--in Mondieu's words, "the worst (and most violent) kind of racism, that of Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*." By demonstrating that adherence to post-modern theory was highly correlated with a single eyebrow ridge, he undercut the post-modern claim to transcend a merely Kantian "aesthetic" of inter-subjective winks and nods. He further shows that far from representing a novel epistemological "break," post-modern theory simply returns to the classic antinomy

⁵. Similarly, other historical work finds heterosexual categorization an unintended consequence of modernist cinematic deconstruction of homo(social/sexual) somagenic ontology. See *The Modernizing Gaze: Gays Through Modern Eyes*, by Robert and Dennis Altman.

of realism vs. nominalism, and hence can at best be considered a “crack.”⁶ But most theorists have declined to accept this challenge, with the exception of Tennessee Gagga, who has darkly muttered that he will “fix his [Mondieu’s] wagon.” (So far, however, Gagga [in *Youreputtingmeontology*] has merely attempted to demonstrate that the textual oppression of sociolinguistics persists even when the texts are unread, and that the hegemony of the “monocloidal para-occidental narrative of exclusion” can be subverted by changing fonts.⁷)

⁶. While the debate between realism and nominalism harks back to the dialogues between the Greek philosophers Aristocetes and Clipodeclopedes, it has its classic expression in the famous debate between the Franciscan monk Roger Bacon, and the Rogerian monk Francis Bacon. This debate soon degenerated into an argument as to whether Francis should be spelled with an “e” for men, and if so, whether St. Francis was a girl; which Roger further supported by arguing that the original title of the famous mystic had not been “Francis of Assisi” but “Francis is a sissy.” Francis Bacon was later to collaborate briefly with King James in writing “The Collected Works of William Shakespeare,” but split from James who would not accept Bacon’s plan to condense the tragedies of Hamlet and Macbeth into a single play. (Most scholars have accepted James’s judgement as the wiser one, and not just because he was king, but *Hambeth* still makes for interesting reading today.)

⁷. Gagga has also been alone in opposing the neo-positivists’ sarcastic re-appropriation of Jacques E. Chaurtes’ theory of the “differiebob,” and his extension of DeSausure’s claim that meaning only is “really, really meaningful” if you can tell what something is not. (From his lectures: “Say, I think I’m in the subway. What the hell does that mean? The real thing is I’m not on the bus, right?”) Chaurtes derived from this that the “tall tales” of Western hegemony’s cultural genocide could only be opposed by deconstruction of the faculty with which a single reading negated subaltern interpretations. (Indeed, Chaurtes for a while toyed with the idea of using the EEO legislation to force such re-readings, but ultimately abandoned this as unrealistic.) But if indeed textual authority comes only via its aporiatic declension (Weber’s prophet: “But I do not say unto you...”), then, reasoned sociologists Bruce Wayne and Richard Grayson, “There is a logical hole in Chaurtes”; he cannot claim authorship of his critique of authorship, and hence cannot answer what Poirot called Nietzsche’s “first question: Who has the copyright?” Wayne and Grayson hence tried to claim Royalties on Chaurtes’ book, *Inseminations*. Agger argued that when Chaurtes negated the possibility of the valorization of any one reading he explicitly exempted himself in footnote 256; Chaurtes confirmed this later: “my differiebob is different from *their* differiebob.” But Wayne and Grayson have forced a re-examination of the structuralist assumption that meaning only exists via difference. Contra Mary Hartman’s claim (in *Dirty, Dirty!*) that inter-categorical mixtures are always seen as taboo and cognitively upsetting (she points to the Aardvark, the minivan, and the spork as examples), “practice” theories find only provisional and strategic bounds. (For example, recent Biblical scholarship suggests that the Levitical prohibition on combining flax and wool, far from representing a horror of mixtures, was actually a strategy to avoid static cling.)

Furthermore, such stubborn clinging to the "phallusies" of modernistic scientism has only isolated Mondieu from respectable cafe society. Recall that Levi-Jeans had shown that the primitive mind consisted of a cycle of representations (or *grRehp-pghrEE-zen-TAY-shee-YONG!* in French)⁸ each of which referred to another through the twin processes of analogy and forgetfulness. Through a subtextuary reading of the letter "A" in a particularly racy passage from Pepys, Poirot then demonstrated that precisely such a "closed cybernatorium of self-representing representations" characterized pre-Modern European science (then called "Naturall Spekulation" or "telling lies"), "in which each interrogation of Nature in the quest for Knowledge ultimately referred back to the constructed efforts of another local Knower, just like people leaving a restaurant and indicating that someone else will pick up the tab."⁹ Finally, the defrocked Marxist Jean Latida (on whom, below) demonstrated that with the rise of "Me-Generation" capitalism, in which all domestic production grinds to a halt due to confusion over when presidents' birthdays are observed, and the "lumpenaristocracy of labor" is completely satiated through the material abundance from replicators¹⁰ and "twenty-zillion channels of hard-core, soft-rock, pornoviolent homeshopping networks...beamed directly into your brain [*sic*]," we again find ourselves in an order in which the representation represents nothing but its own falsity of representation (and which he therefore follows the pre-Socratics in calling "bullshit"). So who then is left in the epistemic order in which there is a noumenal world at all? Only Mondieu, with a stack of marked-down books. And

⁸. For an introduction to the debate on how to translate a French word into its identical English counterpart, see Dewey Needham, "Collective Conscience or Collective Conscience?," translator's preface to Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Schools of Primitive Religion*.

⁹. *Categories without Categorizers: or How One Scavenges for Knowledge with Your Eyes Closed*, p. 1 (cf. pp. 2-4603).

¹⁰. Here Latida seems to be thinking of a fictional device as seen on *STARTREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*. For a review of the literature as to whether Latida's theory holds up when it is recognized that there are no replicators, see Davy Spreadsheet, *Latida and Contemporary Theory: Where No "Man" Has Gone Before*.

Mondieu is thus singularly unable to deconstruct the dynamics of contemporary power\sex\knowledge, i.e. the discourse on the transcoding of the gaze of desiring labor-power to the infrared screen of the cyborg. For as Polish information theorist Plukya Haraway writes, we are now caught between body and machine, between an orgonic "liquidity trap" attempting to maximize pseudo-pleasure and a disciplined consuming machine ejecting crisp dollars into the post-capitalist economy, in short, half embodied desire, half ATM (therefore the cruel irony of the ubiquitous "your request is being processed").¹¹

On the other side of the epistemological gap, the challenge comes from the German philosopher Johann Blabbermouth¹², who argues that the "groovy" potential of modernist discourse has been unappreciated due to the fact that the speaking or uttering [*jammerung*] has simply not been allowed to take place in a free environment and for long enough. He reappropriates the pragmatic tradition of windiness, and advocates setting out more glasses of water. His work has failed to appeal to most American readers, however, perhaps because of their tendency to doze. But the implicit challenge to the polyvocality of postmodernism has been responded to by Europeans with more time on their hands--Jean Latida incorporates Blabbermouth's "rational rationality" in his discussion of modernism's domination through syntactic abbreviation, and reasserts the Heisenbergian implications of DeSaussure's pivotal finding as to the arbitrary connection between sign (gross domestic product, to use one of Latida's

¹¹. "A Manifesto for Deputy Tellers," 1986. The University of Chicago Press informs me that by an agreement of 1978 between themselves ("party of the first part") and the PMLA ("Part-y of the second pART") the word "paradigm" must be used once in this essay. This meta-referential deployment of the mere statement of oppression as (in Lukacsian fashion) the annihilation of that oppression (which is nothing other than the distorted consciousness of the oppressor) hereby absolves me of any further obligations.

¹². See his *Once More, Towards a Theory: Thinkin' 'bout Talkin'*, especially Volume 1 (*Reasonable Rationalizations for High Society*) and Volume 57 (*Colonization of the Book Fair*).

examples) and referent (the code of pre-adolescent fashion, which he calls "doctrine" or "humiliation"). Blabbermouth, writes Latida, merely repeats Engels' error (in a posthumous letter to Kropotkin) of assuming that Man is unique in his ability to "communicate universally;" while the loudspeaker may have "modernized" it, it is an ability we share with parrots. Latida cites against Blabbermouth's "sentimental reconstruction" of Weberian theory Weber's own criticism of this philosophical assumption: "I have had it up to here with that essential-generic-powers shit [*gattungswesenkräfterei*], and the next f***er who mentions it to me gets it in the kisser."¹³

to the end of the conjunction of the "self."

At the same time, another of the most distinguished sociological theorists, Henrietta Gigglewaggle, has taken the anti-meta-narrative of the eclipsing of the historical "self" with the hysterisized body-inscription of power-as-homeostasis as the basis for an empirical research programme. Gigglewaggle's reading of pre-Arthurian guides to manners (such as the famous *EAT MUCH CHOP HEAD*) and *Spider Man no. 4*, indicate that Poirot was absolutely correct (though he himself was not aware of this)--the "self" that modernism created, and almost succeeded in patenting, is in fact in the process of dis-integrating under the pressure of newly globalized and instantaneous means of communication (Telstar satellites 1 and 2) and the crisis of "socialist (or Reaganite) capitalism" which manifests itself (un)paradoxically in capitalism's refusal to undergo its final crisis. While on the one hand, Gigglewaggle interprets the loss of Wo/Man as a "mere" symptom of this dissolving of grand identity and grand theory into a babble of shrieking ex-hippies, the condition of her department (where most of her empirical fieldwork was conducted) "replicating in the universalistic locality of impure

¹³. The translator and the "author" have been unable to locate this reference.

theory the ontological amortization of the master code of capital/identity," on the other hand she neatly disposes of the bugbear that critical theory could never answer, namely "if capitalism is so doomed, how come it ain't dead?" (Marx, as is well known, had not only prophesized the death of capitalism, but had sold tickets in advance). Both are encapsulated in the thesis that the transient self of modernity will soon disappear whence it came, and we shall have to return to the pre-modern practice of denoting the "uttering body" with an inward jabbing motion of the hand, thumb extended.

...and liberation

Perhaps the most important implication of recent work in these critical studies is that "liberation" is necessarily a moment in the dialectic of oppression ("Freedom is slavery," as Orwell presciently put it), that the very constraints of syntax, the discursive field, in which the call for liberation is made are the most significant double-play of power. And the shift to the "disinformation economy" positively positions *theory* as the revolutionary potential for truly proletarian consciousness, a consciousness that refers to no abstract "self," but only to the discursive politics of the gesture and the raspberry; i.e. to post-modern theorists them"selves." This new universal class of deconstruction workers, brought into ever closer contact through the factories of industrial semiotics, assumes a new centrality in the political pragmatics of paradox; displaying the evertightening hermeneutic circle around the neck of "talking freedom," each speech act further reifying the disciplinary matrix of the syntax of the sign, yet unable to refrain from the very profusion of utterance constituting semiotic slavery.