

At the Cutting Edge of the French Disease

Miguel Amorós

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The theoretical regression occasioned by the disappearance of the classical workers movement allowed a strange philosophy to rise to a hegemonic position, the first philosophy that was not born of the love of truth, the primordial goal of knowledge. Weak thought (or postmodern philosophy) transforms this concept of truth into a relative concept, which it derives from a mixture of conventions, practices and customs that vary over time, something that is “constructed” and therefore artificial, without any foundation. And along with the truth, every rational idea of reality, nature, ethics, language, culture, memory, etc., is subjected to the same treatment. Furthermore, various authorities of the little world of postmodernism have not hesitated to define some of these ideas as “fascist”. Finally, recuperating Nietzsche, there is no truth, only interpretation. This systematic demolition of a way of thought that was born with the Enlightenment and proclaimed the constitution of freedom, and that, by giving rise to the modern class struggle, would also lead to social critique and revolutionary ideologies, therefore possesses, for those who, rather than bathing in the clear waters of authenticity, prefer to wallow in the mud of fraudulence—college professors and students for the most part—the appearance of a radical demystification carried out by inflammatory thinkers, whose goal would seem to be none other than the liberating chaos of the most extreme individuality, the proliferation of identities and the abolition of every norm of common behavior. On the day after this deconstructionist bacchanal, nothing of any value remains, nor is there any universal concept left standing: existence, reason, justice, equality, solidarity, community, humanity, revolution, emancipation ... all of them would be stigmatized as “essentialist”, that is, as abominable sins “*pro natura*”. On the spiritual level, however, the negative extremism of the post-philosophers displays suspicious similarities with contemporary capitalism. A radicalism on such a scale stands in stark contrast not only with the political ideas and choices of its authors, some of whom are dyed-in-the-wool academics, while others are strictly conventional types, but is perfectly in accord with the current phase of capitalist globalization, characterized by the technological colonization of life, a perpetual present, anomie and the spectacle. It is a complementary doctrine for those for whom life is easy. No one will disturb the professors of “post-truth” at their desks. And, thanks to the priority bestowed by domination upon instrumental thought, and consequently, thanks to the slight importance that dominant thought concedes to the “humanities”, various pseudo-transgressive bubbles and every kind of speculative doubletalk completely without relation to the surrounding reality have

appeared, uncontested, in the universities, giving rise to a falsifying confusion in modern critical thought that enjoys an extensive noisy media accompaniment.

The postmodern praise of normative transgression corresponds to a certain degree with the disappearance of sociability in the urban conglomerations. In accordance with the new weakness in matters relating to philosophy, nothing is original, everything is constructed, and therefore everything teeters on a pedestal of clay. Political economy, classes, history, the social fabric, opinion ... everything. Therefore, if there is no valid social relation, or real collective liberation, or dialectic, or definitive criterion for judgment with respect to these things—what meaning do norms, means and ends have? They arise from nothing and end in nothing. This nihilism is very much in accordance with the nihilism of the market economy, since the latter grants no importance to anything that does not have economic value. This is why it should not seem strange that the eulogy for dehumanization and chaos that is so typical of the deconstructionists goes hand in hand with apologetics for technology and its world. Weak thought, among other things, celebrates the hybridization of man with machine. Is it not the case that a mechanical nature is superior, because it is so free of constraints, to human nature, which is the slave of natural laws? The nihilism inherent in mechanistic logic reflects and responds to the abolition of history, the evaporation of authenticity, the liquidation of classes and the apologetics for narcissistic individualism; it is therefore a product of late capitalist culture, if the latter can still be called a culture, and its function is none other than the promotion of ideological adaptation to the world of the commodity as the latter descends into chaos. In relation to what exists, postmodern philosophy is a philosophy of legitimation.

This philosophical trend that was born as a reaction to the revolt of May '68—a revolt that emerged from “the underworld of the *Zeitgeist*” (Debord)—was welcomed in the American universities as the very paradigm of critical profundity, and from there “French Theory” spread to all the thought laboratories of capitalist society, descending into the juvenile ghettos in the form of a bold and radical intellectual fashion. Given its ambivalent and malleable character, the liquid syllogisms of postmodernism have found their place in the toolboxes of every variety of new-wave ideologist, both among the most chameleon-like civil society activists, as well as among the most up-to-date anarchists conversant with the new trends. And there is even a new kind of anarchism, born from the breakdown of historical bourgeois values, based on subjective affirmation, an activism without goal or plan, and total amnesia, which has in most locations replaced the old ideal, born of reason, that originated in the class struggle and forged a universal ethics and whose revolutionary achievements were deeply anchored in history. In the *French Theory*, or, as it may be more felicitously denominated, the “*morbus gallicus*” [Latin: the French Disease—historically, syphilis], whose bastard offspring is post-anarchism, historical references have no place; they merely reveal nostalgia for the past, something that is very much to the discredit of any deconstructionist. The social question is dissolved in a multitude of questions relating to identity: questions of gender, sexual preference, age, religion, race, culture, nation, species, health, diet, etc., which are the focus of debate and give rise to a peculiar political correctness that takes the form of a tortured orthography and a discourse chock-full of hollow clichés and grammatical confusion. A sampler of fluctuating identities replaces the historical subject, people, social collective or class, its absolutist affirmation obviates the critique of exploitation and alienation and, as a result, an “intersectional” interplay of oppressed minorities replaces collective resistance to established power. Liberation is thus supposed to come from a playful transgression of the rules that shackle these identities and oppress these minorities, rather than from a global “alternative”

or a revolutionary project of social change that includes every demand, something that is undoubtedly considered to be totalitarian, because once new rules are “constituted”, they will lead to more power and therefore to more oppression. Libertarian communism, viewed from this perspective, is nothing but a form of dictatorship. Critical analysis and anti-capitalism itself, thanks to the suppression of the past, and therefore thanks to ignorance, give way to the interrogation of norms, the contortion of language, and an obsession with difference, multiculturalism and individualism. And this does not lead to coherence, for the category of contradiction has been abolished, along with the categories of alienation, supersession and the totality. To construct or to deconstruct, that is the only question.

It is certainly true that the proletariat did not “realize” philosophy, as Marx, Korsch and the Situationist International desired, that is, it did not proceed from its emancipatory desires to practice, and today we are paying the price for its failure to do so. It is nonetheless also true that, in the development of the class struggle, a kind of critical thought arose that situated the working class at the heart of historical reality, and which was defined as Marxist, anarchist or simply socialist. These tendencies entailed an attempt to grasp reality as precisely as possible, as a totality that unfolds in history, in order to thereby elaborate the strategies by means of which the class enemy could be defeated. It was assumed that the final victory was inscribed in history itself as a goal. The proletarian assaults on class society failed, however. And as capitalism overcame its crises, the postulates of proletarian critical thought were engulfed by contradictions, and new formulations were required. There were various attempts to satisfy this need and we do not have time to enumerate them here. All of them, however, were characterized by the clarity contributed by the perspective of the battles for liberation, but they were immersed in a context of retreat and defeat, and then gradually disconnected from practice. Reading them, however, reinforced the conviction that a free society is possible, that struggle is useful and that we must never give up, that solidarity among those who resist makes us stronger and education makes us more lucid.... The struggles waged by minorities, far from dismantling social critique, helped to enrich it. Questions of identity, far from being secondary, acquired an increasingly greater importance as capitalism penetrated everyday life and destroyed traditional structures. Aspects of exploitation were denounced that had previously hardly been noticed at all. At first, the universal and identity converged; the solutions for racial segregation, sexual discrimination, patriarchy, etc., were not conceived separately, but from the perspective of a global revolutionary transformation. No one could imagine that black racism, a society of Amazons, a gay capitalism or a vegetarian dictatorship would be something to be desired. The social revolution was the only framework within which all questions could really be posed in all of their scope and resolved. Without the social revolution, there were only elitist specialization, the sectarianism of the ghetto, activist estheticism and stereotypical militancy. This was in fact the trail that was blazed by the postmodernists.

Weak thought also exploited the goldmine of the ideological crisis by recuperating authors and ideas, but with results and conclusions that were totally at variance with their original intentions and meanings. Once the revolutionary subject was neutralized in practice, it had to be abolished in theory, so that struggles would remain isolated, marginal and incomprehensible, enveloped in a cretinizing and self-referential verbalism suitable only for insiders and specialists. This was the mission of *French Theory*. There was a surge of sophisticated and cryptic confusion that consecrated the intellectual caste as privileged sages and as the chosen people for the crowds of their followers, mostly university students and academics. The “*mal francés*” [Spanish: the “French Disease”—see above] was the first irrationalist philosophy associated with a more

or less well-paid administrative or bureaucratic lifestyle, and for good reason: its revision of the social critique of domination and its attack on the revolutionary idea performed magnificent services for the cause of domination. The idea of power as a ubiquitous atmospheric element that embraces everything, condemns every collective practice in favor of an ideal whose purpose is the renewal or reconstruction of this power as a kind of snake that eats its own tail. Power is not, it would seem, embodied in the State, Capital, or the Market, as it was when the proletariat was the potentially revolutionary class. Now, all of us are Power; it is everywhere and everything. The revolution is thus redefined as a decoy deployed by Power to rejuvenate itself in extreme situations, on the basis of new values and norms that are just as arbitrary as those that it had itself abandoned. The discrediting of the social revolution is very useful for real power in times of crisis, insofar as any organized subversive opposition that attempts to take shape (a social subject that tries to constitute itself) will immediately be denounced as an exclusionary power. In short, it will be denounced as an evil “narrative”, just like the class struggle. The rejection of the idea of class necessarily also takes the form of class hatred, the legacy of past domination that is operative in the post-rational imagination. Finally, all revolutionary and libertarian communist pretensions are nullified by gender fluidity, polyamory, transversalism and the vegan regimen. Once the individual problematic is resolved in this way and the common cause is definitely rejected, the way forward is then cleared for a collaborationist and participatory opposition, one that is ready to play the game and of course to vote, to occupy positions of power and to manage the prevailing order with a radically identity-oriented discourse, and, incidentally, a radically civil society-oriented discourse that is now so popular not only among the neo-leftists who have so recently become members of various government institutions, but also among the prematurely senile leftist youth who have been fully integrated into the system since their birth.

The critical horizon, a prisoner of the French Disease, is therefore horrifying, just like life in the Western urban world that is completely saturated by capitalism. It is the end of reason, the spiritual closure of a declining world where resistance to power was once possible, the evaporation of historical class consciousness, the apotheosis of relativism, the absolute triumph of fraudulence, the perfected reign of the spectacle.... You can refer to this phenomenon by whatever name you like, but it is above all the intellectual effect of the historical defeat of the proletariat during the seventies and eighties, and therefore of the disappearance of two whole generations of social combatants and of their inability to transmit their experience and knowledge to subsequent generations, which could have inoculated the latter against the postmodernist psychosis and its unintelligible jargon. There is a clear line of genealogical demarcation that more or less coincides with the appearance of the youth “milieu” or ghetto at the end of the eighties, and also with the relation of the latter to the process of gentrification of the downtown districts of the cities; and finally, one is altogether justified in positing a relation between the spread of the postmodern disease with the development of the new middle classes. The destruction of the revolutionary social movement and the catastrophe of theory are two aspects of the same disaster, and therefore of the double victory, practical and ideological, of capitalist, patriarchal and statist domination. Even so, the debacle is never total, because conflicts are proliferating at a much faster rate than identities, and the will to liberation in common is stronger than the narcissistic desire for individual success. Ten minutes of pathetic virtual fame are nothing in the storm-tossed sea of a permanent state of war. The class struggle reappears in the critique of the world of technology, in the struggle against aggressive machismo and in the defense of territory, in the community projects oriented towards going beyond capitalism and in the battles waged by small-scale farmers against indus-

trial agriculture and the commodification of life. It is likely that in the turbo-capitalist countries these conflicts will not be susceptible to being pigeonholed as focal points of “intersectional” antagonisms, or “gender”-based issues, or other reductionist tags of identity, which are perfectly compatible with a reformist casuistry based in the “social economy”, but wherever an authentic front of mass struggle crystallizes, such trivialities will be turned against themselves and will be consumed in the flames of universality.

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