

## NICK BENTON'S GAY SCIENCE This Week – “Saint Foucault? Are You Kidding?” Part One



By Nicholas F. Benton

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This new column is a supplement to the global affairs column I've been writing and publishing weekly in the Falls Church News-Press since 1997. This new commentary series focuses on LGBT issues, reflecting on the future, the present and the past, especially the 40 years since I was a “gay pioneer,” who as a seminary graduate co-founded the Berkeley, Calif., chapter of the Gay Liberation Front in 1970 and founded The Effemist newspaper in 1972. I founded in 1991, and continue to own and edit the weekly Falls Church News-Press, a general interest Washington, D.C. regional newspaper, which celebrated its 1000th consecutive weeks of publication, and counting, this July.

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“Gay Science” is the title of an 1882 book by Frederich Nietzsche, and I am not a fan. So he has his “Gay Science,” and I have mine. The term comes from a common usage pertaining to the “science” of writing poetry. Nietzsche was an influential figure in a current running from Max Stirner through Martin Heidegger that was a cornerstone thread of anti-socialist, pro-individualist, “will to power” thought and policy in the emergence of the modern industrial state that fueled the rise of European fascism. Following World War II, it morphed into modernist and the infamous post-modernist currents in philosophy and social policy, bonding with the works of Ayn Rand, the Structuralists and others to espouse an extreme form of anarchism and nihilism, merging with notions of libertarianism and radical hedonism, and brought to us in the emerging 1960s counter-culture through the influence of the Beats and the likes of gay French philosopher Michel Foucault (see James Miller's “The Passion of Michel Foucault”).

Not coincidentally these currents, and their powerful social influences, cohered with those in the corridors of the most powerful financial institutions in the world who demand the elimination of government oversight and regulation in their pursuit of greed and Social Darwinist objectives. The Reagan revolution brought these elements into national power. Federal Reserve chief Alan Greenspan was a devotee of Rand. People were put in charge of regulatory agencies who were angrily and ideologically opposed to regulation. The Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute took control of the intellectual and policy debates in Washington.

This is the same force of history that hijacked and almost killed the LGBT movement in the earliest days of the post-Stonewall era, and may do it again. Tirelessly expounding a relentless demand for excess, for pushing beyond the limit against social convention, its proponents drove sex from romance to mechanical excess in the major urban centers, converting a happy, burgeoning LGBT community into a string of financially-lucrative businesses catering to what Foucault, best known for his “History of Sex Part I,” and his kind pushed as the revolutionary nature of unbridled sexual excess. So-called sexual “core groups” became the consequence in major cities, and their multiple STD infections spread to the wider gay population through “bridges.” Larry Kramer described all this in his warning-shot book, “Faggots,” published in 1978 and more recent documentary, “Gay Sex in the '70s.”

Efforts to contain this descent into a social context in which exotic infectious diseases exploded were angrily decried as reactionary and homophobic by leaders of gay organizations who were often owners or friends of owners of these sex-related businesses, even as it became clear that an unbridled continuation of the practices was wantonly subjecting young gay men to horrible disease and certain death by the scores of thousands. This was all well documented by respected gay journalists from that era, including Randy Shilts (“And the Band Played On”) and Gabriel Rotello (“Sexual Ecology”), and others. None of this is academic for me. I lived through it and experienced it up close and personally.

HIV infections and frank AIDS are again on the rise – not only devastating the African subcontinent and Third World, generally, but once again increasing exponentially in large U.S. cities. Young gay men say they needn't be concerned because it is now curable.

I heard this line participating in a Washington Blade inter-generational symposium that I participated in as part of the events marking the 40th anniversary of Stonewall in the summer of 2009. Hardly alone in this, I warned them of the threat of therapy-resistant mutations of the virus. The seeds of another, even more horrible explosion of mass suffering and death within the U.S. LGBT world are being sewn as we speak.

The way forward is to step away from the unquestioned core notions of our popular culture, as defined both from within and without by 40 years of radical hedonistic dominance, including that being LGBT is all about sex, alone, and not sentiment, romance, sensibility and purpose.

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