The Spectacle of the False Flag

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Eric Wilson put it clearly: if one wants to craft a realistic theory of political violence, one will find oneself entre dos aguas. On the Right, one will get no cooperation whatsoever from conservative hawks whose job is to salute the advent of the modern Liberal State as a teleological master-stroke: Liberalism, they affirm, is all humans have ever striven for ("democratic consensus"), and now it is here. In their vision, an organism as flawlessly balanced and efficient as the modern Liberal State is ipso facto immune to conspiratorial activity: the mere possibility of degenerative internecine feuds at the top is averted by the joint operation of transparency and democratic turnover. In this perspective, (political) crime is always the result of the psychopaths’ and misfits failure to adapt to the rigors of a fast-paced, individualist, “free” society. On the Left, progressive hawks (plus the doves, red-white-and blue) will also rebuke one's inquiries because one should know that it would be illogical for elites, whose business it is to protect/further their (economic) interests behind the impersonal façade of governmental protocol, to frame, defame, or liquidate their own (one or many, highest or low) in order to achieve whatever
hidden end they might have on their putatively “secret agenda.” Again, political violence is construed as a pathological disorder that is essentially foreign, extraneous to the conventional management of the modern State.

Being all “theoretical” space is thus obstructed, what is the skeptical politologist to do? *Il peut tricher*; one can cheat French-Style, like, say, Baudrillard. Like Baudrillard, one could argue that momentous, unusual events are the nightmares of our collective mind; they are the theatrical production of our collective subconscious. And it is because our collective subconscious is so corrupt, neurotically torqued, and terrified of holding up the mirror to its savage self that the shows of our day-to-day chronicles appear delirious, or, as they say, “irrational.” The delirium and “irrationality” of it all is to be interpreted as the oneiric labor of these demons we westerners have crammed, hidden in the basement of our psyche. It is astonishing to think that this post-Freudian chicken-halibut could have had any mass-traction at all—as it did, in fact, during the propagandistic campaign of Gulf One, (Iraq, 1990-1991); traction, say, over and beyond the usual Foucauldian fare of “there is no power at the center, but only at the margins.” In any event, all of these are just extravagant “literalyzed metaphors,” whose primary, obvious propagandistic goal is to efface political responsibility (authorship: who-dunit and why? To such questions the postmodern reply is: it is irrelevant; it is one big, “liquid” nightmare, and the demons are ours anyway). They are subtle to the extent that they include the issue of guilt, if tangentially, but defuse that line of thinking forthwith by drowning it in an avowal of public culpability, and immediately thereafter negate the issue wholesale with the suggestion that the political making of history is nothing but a virtual (video-)game. The computer’s gone crazy; and as for the
machine’s wiring, we all contributed to it, and eventually lost technical track of what we did, letting the Matrix run the programs and screw it all up, because we were the psychologically screwed-up engineers originally in charge of the project. This insane spectacle is, in the end, the unintended and sick phantasy of some “other,” impersonal process, which, occasionally, the little deacons of Liberal academia describe, piously, as “the great forces of history.”

The irony of the postmodern, post-Freudian twist is that in order to pre-empt in the spectator the temptation to indulge the anti-oligarchical drift (viz. they lie to you, they fabricate “events,” and if it is politically expedient, they will kill you and your children too), the Captains of Discourse (i.e., the Maecenases of all successful “public intellectuals”) have often run ahead of themselves by sponsoring (unknowingly?) the adoption of the metaphorizing of theosophy. (And was not Hegelism the most famous and shameless parody of spiritualist esotericism?). All these presumed phantasms and impersonal “processes,” which are deemed capable, by themselves and despite ourselves, of conjuring the surreal scenarios of present-day wars and social and environmental cataclysms, are what theosophists customarily designate as “archangelic forces.” Queer but simply true: one way or another, we never seem able to rise beyond our aboriginal attraction to mythologizing and archetypal mystery. And it could not be otherwise; Fernando Pessoa had said it: because it does not possess the knowledge of humanity’s beginning, all “social science” is, in essence, mystique. In this sense, the unforgivable sin of these late politological “theories” is not so much that they are bogus, corrupted and corrupting—in arguing that, barring greed (which all
conservatives mischievously worship anyway), the modern elite is guiltless by democratic default—but that they are aesthetically atrocious: they are the miserable rip-offs and “trans-vestitures” by artless hacks of esoteric and religious lore, always.¹ They fool no one.

In the face of such institutionalized disingenuousness and various standardized *tricheries*, the task Eric Wilson has set out to achieve is remarkable: he is creating a politology of subversion, which satisfies all the chrisms of scientific inquiry, while retaining on the one hand a commitment to truth, without sacrificing on the other the concern for giving proper expression to the mystical dimension of collective behavior. Of the one, truth, the modern-day academic has no motivated apprehension, and of the other, mysticallity, the late postmodernists have made so fantastic a bamboozlement as to have managed to reclaim, on the Left, all the vast discursive/propagandistic acreage once tenanted by Marxism (& its derivatives). Eric is driving a wedge into the gentrifying concrete of the discursive space to open a “third pasture” in which we may regroup and begin to understand.

In spinning the narrative yarn linking JFK’s assassination to Watergate—covering one of the crucial decades of the Cold War (1963-1974)—the first step he undertakes, and it is the most important, is to *identify the battling factions*. He re-adapts Carl Oglesby’s scenario according to which much of the political instability of the time was due to the uncomfortable cohabitation of the imperial designs of two U.S. clans, an Eastern, Anglophile, finance-driven brethren versus a fraternity of Southwestern oil-men. To this, he then superimposes Peter Dale Scott’s “*parapolitical*” schematics, whereby historical events may be viewed

¹ In a different context, this is also true of Marxism and Libertarian (Liberal) teleologism.
as the reverberations of “deeper” machinations—hidden from public view, that is. In the making of such machinations, the “parapolitical” comes into play when the elite shifts gears, allowing an osmosis which permits the introduction of criminal elements into the secret of princes, and, reversely, shoves the princes into the lower layers of the gutter. The alliance resulting from this two-way trafficking—your standard tale of the functionalism of Mafia and crime in modern society—is, in point of academic etiquette, inadmissible. But, de facto, confess it or not, it is routine, and in this story of “false-flags,” it is analyzed in detail in order to explain how it played in the overarching confrontation between “Brahmins” and “cowboys.” The “osmosis” occurring in the bowels of the technocratic apparatus elicits, in turn, the further assumption that the State is, in fact, “dual”; in other words, the regime is organized in such a way that, under “exceptional” circumstances—Eric’s extensive work on the politology of Carl Schmitt bears on this aspect—, some of its “bureaus”—generally, the political offices of the security apparatus—may spawn a variety of clandestine cells, whose task is to wage civil battle outside the legal perimeter of the State. This means that all “regular” administration—of justice, information, and security—is suspended as the rival factions proceed to cut all administrative nodes in half, as it were, re-appropriate and re-direct them in view of the forthcoming season of escalating hostilities. The fictionalizing beauty of the set-up is that while the fight among clans unfolds “deeply,” i.e. entirely hidden from public scrutiny, there concomitantly “forms” on the media stage, as if inevitably bubbling over, a game of theatrics for mass consumption. The game is designed to sway “public opinion” with the final objective of topping off the “deep” victory with popular acclaim. All terrorist activity (whether it pits, say, Neo-
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Fascists vs. Communists in a civil confrontation, or patriots vs. Islamists in a geostrategic deployment) is, in this case, the theatrical production with which the Intelligence bureaus impress, shock the crowds, and mold the “word on the Street.” At this juncture, Eric applies Guy Debord’s “situationist” critique to emphasize how these “games” have a weird habit of taking on a life of their own, replicating themselves in recognizable patterns and symmetries, which appear dictated over time by the choice of actors (agencies) and locales (“situations,” “geography”). It is here that we find a hint of that sensation of being cosmically played—everybody, that is, not just the masses but the players too—by tricksters “bigger” than all of us.

Stenographically, Eric’s thesis is the following: fundamental disagreement over the proper policy vs. Cuba—the conventional contraposition of maximalist hawks vs. pragmatic doves—leads to a half-baked plan of invasion, which fails miserably at the Bay of Pigs in 1961. According to the Pentagon hawks, Kennedy’s lack of firmness on this front is such that the situation further degenerates until it reaches a full-blown state of red-alert nuclear crisis in 1962. Determined to get out of the way what they perceive as a double-crossing incompetent, the secret squads of the “Dual State,” with a little functional help of the Mafia, resolve to eliminate Kennedy in a grand spectacle featuring the manipulation of a (suicidal) “political idiot” (Oswald), “manifestly” linked to America’s pro-Castro Communist underground—the final objective being that of prompting a mass popular outrage with which to launch a full-scale and, this time around, fail-safe invasion of Cuba. The design fails but, with the cowboys solidly in charge, Dallas’s regicidal build-up finds (“situationist”) release a year later, in the (fabricated) incident of the Gulf of Tonkin—a completely different sort of theater, yet one featuring identical actors still driven by 1963’s subversive momentum. A
decade of incineration and slaughter in Vietnam seals a generational catastrophe and a season of bungled political maneuvers, which have eventually brought to center stage a pivotal protagonist of this saga, Richard Nixon, a Californian “cowboy.” Something of a political visionary, Nixon plays his hand creatively by isolating, on the one hand, Russia’s economic deadweight with a new round of détente, and by wagering, on the other, America’s imperial future on an overture to China. To him, this last policy means sacrificing, in part, Europe, which he acrimoniously resolves to confront, financially and commercially. So acrimoniously, in fact, that the Europe-patronizing Brahmins (Rockefeller’s “Trilateralist” front), by way of a “situationist” reversal, orchestrate the grand Watergate scandal to oust Nixon ignominiously from the White House.

I keep restating how lamentable it is that we plow through current affairs, daily, doing our best to understand the dynamics at play, and inevitably fail, because we have yet to understand fully what went down during that essential phase in the history of power that was the Cold War. Eric Wilson is perfectly aware of this, and his piece is an admirable tour de force that should set the tone for a new history, and politology, of that absolutely critical period. I say absolutely critical because all post-Soviet, but even more so, all post-9/11 historical developments are entirely rooted in the politics, deceptions, and maneuvers of the Cold War. It is as if the post-9/11 strategists had exhumed, or rather, recycled virtually all the sets, props, costumes, screenplays of the past to play anew the late dismal game to which we are all (dejected) witnesses: Arab terrorists, nuclear proliferation, pandemics, chaotic migratory flows, evil Russians, wars by proxy in Africa...Of course, there are differences as
well, the chief one being that America’s bellicose odium toward Russia, these days, seems real enough, rather than entirely feigned, as it once was. Which is to say that our era appears more unstable and frightening than the old one—and I assume that such is the conviction behind Vladimir Putin’s declared nostalgia for the Cold War order.

Although I am by no means equal to contribute, à la hauteur d’Eric, anything insightful to the debate surrounding his captivating fresco of the Kennedy-Nixon epoch (my knowledge of the chronicles is yet too superficial), I shall nevertheless offer a series of disjointed observations on the Cold War, merely to round off the little I have just sketched.

I have never believed in the Cold War’s ostensible antagonism of capitalist West vs. Communist East. Like Eric, I think that domestic factional wars are what explain virtually everything, but they are extremely hard to dig out, or guess, because Power’s code of honor has bound, binds, and will forever bind all players to eternal silence. On the one hand, such literal “obscenity” (out-of-the-scene) of power, should fill us every day with revulsion—revulsion for the unspeakable corruptness of the powerful human being, and for the gloating pride and sense of perfect impenitence with which he usually takes his secrets to the grave; on the other, it is exciting in that it forces social investigators and politologists to become detectives and treat their research material like murder cases (if it were always so, how thrilling academic life would be!).

My guess is that the East-West contraposition was just one giant deceptive back-drop, set-up after the crushing of Germany, against which feuds of various geopolitical kind and import could be consummated in the face of diffuse popular cluelessness. And this applied just as well to the
Russians on one side of the fence as it did to the Europeans and the Americans on the other: the two enemies, in fact, were not to bother each other for matters of strictly political, and domestic, administration. Whenever they “clashed,” it was because they were having (theatrical) recourse to the “inimical clause” of the Cold War to solve, settle some particular issue of domestic control, which, indeed, required a “popular shock.” So, when they clashed, they were actually (theatrically) helping one another—“crises,” in this sense, were born out of “favors” one faction, depending on the occasion, would do the other. In this regard, I am still not sure what the Bay of Pigs really was: many say it was unthinkable that the very country that had organized the Normandy landing of WWII could have forgotten seventeen years later to provide air cover for a full-fledged invasion of an infinitely smaller and virtually undefended area. Could it be that JFK set the whole operation in motion exclusively to make it fail, publicize it, and then leverage the whole shameful flop to decapitate, say, the CIA’s leadership—merely for clannish advantage? And could it be, then, that the faction thus suckered, swearing revenge, planned Dallas, also as some kind of psycho-social experiment? An experiment, that is, designed to jolt the masses with a spectacle of raw, unmitigated violence— as it turned out: JFK’s splattered brain squirting out of his skull and being chased by Jackie to the far back of the limos’ trunk—in order to effect desensitization in the viewers for purposes of tightened social domestication? As Eric and I have discussed, if it was a revenge murder, there was no need to take such incredible risks in staging the assassination so sensationally; a discrete death by lethal inoculation, which could have been easi-
ly passed off as “cardiac arrest,” would have sufficed.

Planned spectacles of gruesome death aside—the discussion of such a fantastic thesis rather pertains to a dedicated exegesis of David Cronenberg’s superb 1982 horror movie, *Videodrome,*—my reading of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis is that it was a side-show of pure pretense, fully pre-arranged by both sides, to strike geo-strategic, as well as dramatic balance, which the greater Cold War Game periodically required, after the 1961 crisis of the Berlin Wall. The symmetry is explicit: each block had (agreed to have) an annoyingly defiant speck, a thorn of the enemy in its side: the Soviets had to tolerate the “free-city” of West Berlin smack-in-the-middle of their German protectorate, whereas the U.S. had to “suffer” Fidel Castro’s antics 90 miles off the tip of Florida. All staged, all phony, with Castro being the phoniest of all—as if the mammoth apparatus in charge of clandestine operations in D.C. could not erase Cuba and crush its dictator of papier-mâché at will.

As for Richard Nixon, in hindsight, he comes out, in my view, as the most interesting, most intriguing elder statesman of this whole story. It turns out he had been right all along: he had seen much farther ahead than his (imperial) peers. Our “globalized” word is, indeed, a Nixonian world. Today, the American hegemon is, notwithstanding French jinxing, stronger than ever: it has managed to contain fairly well a quasi-reborn Russia, and harnessed almost perfectly China’s enormous productive power (slave-labor) to its commercial sector (propriety of all remunerative patents). By foisting successfully its currency and multifarious financial securities on the rest of the world, the USA manages to dominate all markets for vital commodities, as well as to control its vassals’ finances and savings, which it conveys to Wall Street for financing its budget and military expenses. Europe, for her part, finds herself spiritually
sclerosed and economically paralyzed by a common, expensive currency that has undermined its world competitiveness and allowed her to be ravaged by Chinese imports, to the greatest delight of Anglo-America. These are all developments born of plans originally hatched by Nixon and his administration. He had been a great Neocon Founding Father. It was only fair, then, that the (Brahmin) establishment would, somewhat apologetically, rehabilitate him. Not by accident did a fellow cowboy, President Bill Clinton of Arkansas, seek him out, late in life, as an officious adviser on foreign policy, and eventually attend Nixon’s funeral in 1994 to pay his last respects to this unjustly disgraced prophet-warrior of the great Anglo-American Commonwealth.

The background to this key page of our recent history is richly detailed in the book you are about to read. In conclusion, it is my hope that such a contribution is Eric’s first installment of a vast and sorely needed opus of historiographical reappraisal of the Cold War, which, in the final analysis, will provide the theoretical and methodological bedrock for an educated understanding of contemporary political dynamics. Within this new framework, we shall be expecting Eric to provide us with the “deeper,” “parapolitical” significance of all the great mysteries of that time (in random order): the Rosenberg Case, the attempted assassination of John Paul II, the Dirty War in Argentina, the first terrorist wave (from the OLP to the RAF), De Gaulle and the OAS, etc. We very much look forward.

Buona lettura.

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Rome, Italy
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