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"Welcome to the Beings of Instauration"

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Abstract

This short paper discusses an in-progress historical and theoretical study of the idea of "instauration" in the works of Francis Bacon, Étienne Souriau, and Bruno Latour. The paper first considers the historical influence of Bacon's philosophy on knowledge organization systems and library classification, including Denis Diderot and the philosophes, Thomas Jefferson, and 20th-century American library classification systems. It proceeds to consider instauration as it connects Bacon's knowledge organization to the process of institution-building, contrasting it with Souriau's and Latour's work on instauration as a way of considering ontology as embracing different modes of existence. Finally, it touches on Zoe Todd's indigenous critique of Latour and ontology to ask whether a revised theory of instauration could serve anticolonial explorations for knowledge organization.

1.0 Introduction

The term "instauration" has not taken hold in the English language, but our research has led us to tentatively conclude that knowledge institutions like universities, libraries, and archives, and the principles by which they are organized are fundamentally rooted in the concept, beginning with Francis Bacon's Instauratio Magna, or the Great Instauration (Bacon 2011).

The line, "Welcome to the Beings of Instauration" is borrowed from Bruno Latour's An Inquiry into Modes of Existence (Latour 2013, 151). Latour borrowed the concept from Étienne Souriau's 1943 The Different Modes of Existence, which Latour and Isabelle Stengers effectively reintroduced with the 2009 reissue and which became accessible in English with the 2015 translation (Souriau 2015). Still, the term "instauration" has not been widely pursued by scholars who write in English.

Our aims are threefold: First is concept work, to understand the ways that Bacon, Souriau, and Latour put this term to use. Second is to make sense of instauration as a colonial project in North America, and how it is useful for understanding Bacon's influence on institutions and the organization of knowledge. Third is to put it to use in an anticolonial sense, to consider the possibilities for a new instauration. This paper begins with a brief introduction of Francis Bacon, followed by an outline of the concept. We will close with the

open question, Is a new instauration what is needed? Is it possible? If so, what would that look like?

2.0 Francis Bacon

Many American library classifications use Francis Bacon's organization of knowledge according to the faculties of Memory, Reason, and Imagination. Thomas Jefferson used this framework to structure his personal book collection, which he sold to the Library of Congress after the War of 1812.

In addition to writing the Advancement of Learning, and the New Atlantis, Francis Bacon was a co-founder of the Virginia Company which financed expeditions in 1607 and 1620, as well as a member of the Company of Adventurers that established a settlement in Newfoundland. He drafted the second and third Royal Charters of the Virginia Company in 1609 and 1612, which outlined the rights of investors and settlers and the governing structure of the colony. According to Joseph F. McCormick and David A. Palmer (2021, para. 5), these "are among the founding documents of American constitutionalism."

McCormick and Palmer (2021) add that Bacon's vision of the House of Salomon in the New Atlantis inspired the establishment of the Royal Society, "laying the foundation for the collegial production of knowledge that characterizes modern academic networks and institutions." Importantly, as Zachary McLeod Hutchins explains, the New Atlantis "depicts an island utopia geographically linked to the Americas whose leaders support an institution of higher learning dedicated to reclaiming Adam's lost wisdom, and in this imagined intellectual enclave, significant progress toward the recovery of edenic idealities has already been made." (Hutchins 2014, 107).

Using Diderot and D'Alembert's Baconian outline for the Encyclopedie as a model, Thomas Jefferson began organizing his own library according to Francis Bacon's framework in the early 1780s. That design was replicated by the Library of Congress, which is today the largest library in the world and sets the standards by which research libraries organize their materials. Following Jefferson's example, the Baconian method was also used to classify books in several nineteenth-century American libraries, including the Library Company of Philadelphia, the and not surprisingly, the University of Virginia, founded by Jefferson. Scholars have demonstrated that the plans for the Massachusetts Bay Colony and Harvard were inspired by Bacon's New Atlantis and his Instauratio Magna, which outlined a plan for an academic institution.

According to Hutchins, Harvard university was imagined to become "an institution inextricably connected to projects of edenic restoration, as Bacon understood when he named Bensalem's exemplary academic institution both Salomon's House and the College of the Six Days Works" (Hutchins 2014, 107).

The Great Instauration provides an agenda for institutionalizing science in the Americas: "that commerce between the mind of man and the nature of things, which is more precious

than anything on earth, or at least than anything that is of the earth, might by any means be restored to its perfect and original condition" (Hutchins 2014, 107).

Harvard's library history begins with the formation of Harvard's library collection (1638), when John Harvard bequeathed his personal library of 329 titles in over four hundred volumes and one-half of his estate towards erecting the college. John Harvard's library catalog listed Bacon's Essays, The Advancement of Learning, a 1620 edition of the Instauratio Magna, and Sylva Sylvarum (1627), which included the New Atlantis.

Nearly thirty years later, Solomon Stoddard, prior to becoming one of the leading clergymen of the Bay Colony, was elected as Library Keeper. Appointed in March 1667, Stoddard is widely regarded as the first American librarian. His successor, Samuel Sewall, is famous in American history as a diarist and one of the judges who sentenced several women to death in the Salem witch trials, a decision he later regretted and denounced as a sinful act. Other librarians followed until 1772, when John Winthrop, a leading man of science, patriot, descendant of the founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and would-be president of Harvard, was appointed to the post.

3.0 Instauration

The term instauration is connected to the terms institution, instantiation, and installation, but it has historical and philosophical specificity that we need to unpack. For Bacon, instauration is connected to re-stauration, or the restoration of the sciences to the state they had in an idealized antiquity. Instauration is part of a complex which includes, for Bacon, the general advancement of learning as a frontier in the advancement of Empire — the British Empire — and the principal theater of this frontier is the settler-colonial project of North America, or the embodiment of his New Atlantis.

For Bacon, instauration likewise functions as both ontological and institutional. The Great Instauration which he proposes concerns the creation of a true ontology through the observation of particulars, over and against the received ontologies of the ancients. Thus for Bacon ontology is not known in advance as it is to the scholastics. Rather, it must be instaurated, carefully and cautiously through the patient accumulation of evidence. a failure of instauration results from leaping to conclusions from particulars to universals too hastily, and leads to a false ontology. Thus, ontology for Bacon is always provisional and subject to revision (Bacon 2011).

Simultaneously, instauration for Bacon is inherently institutional. The construction of the "tables of nature" as typified by the Sylva Sylvarum (Bacon 1627), is not just an intellectual exercise but is of decided interest to the State and Empire. Thus, the Great Instauration does not end in the encyclopaedism of the Tables of Nature: it begins there, and proceeds to the instauration of real knowledge-institutions which will form a cornerstone of Bacon's vision for Empire and the domination of Nature by humankind. The relies on his fundamental formula identifying knowledge with power. The function of knowledge,

accumulated within a correct ontology, is to instaurate institutions which perpetuate and command Empire.

In contrast, for Souriau (2015), instauration is the process by which a being comes into existence along one of the modes of existence, connected with the extent to which it embodies such a mode. Souriau gives the example of a sculptor making a statue as an "instauration." The artist regards the statue as complete to the degree that it truly instaurates the statue's subject. Latour (2013) later expands this idea for his felicity and infelicity conditions in the imaginary anthropology of the moderns, conducted in his *Inquiry Into Modes of Existence*, a project driven in part by his curiosity about the ontological anemia of the Moderns. He attributes this lack to the absence of beings in the process of instauration, which has led to a limit on the types of collectives that can come into existence. He wants us to understand how facts were made and how the Moderns made facts and how science has attained its power, at the expense of experience. In the case of Latour, the modes of existence are explicitly connected to institutions which Western society instaurates. He is, however, less sanguine than Bacon about the inherent, totalizing power of ontology, raising questions about how to instaurate good institutions, whether institutions can be trusted, and whether the civilization to come can be praised (Latour 2013).

The *Inquiry Into Modes of Existence* begins with the question of how a climatologist should respond to a science skeptic, as Latour (2013) wrestles with unforeseen consequences of his own earlier assertions that scientific results are socially constructed. In this instance, the dilemma is that an average citizen is unwilling to accept the results the climatologist states which suggest great destruction to the biosphere will emerge as a result of human actions. Latour concludes this preface by stating that the solution is that we must trust institutions again, particularly the institution of science, because although the scientific results are socially constructed the institution itself must be trusted as a guarantor of socially verified facts (Latour 2013).

This now brings us to Latour's Gaia. For Latour, Gaia is the unforeseen consequences of humanity's reckless interventions in the biosphere by means of industry. Like Bacon, he feminizes Nature, but here he invokes the name of an ancient Titan. For Latour, Gaia is the inverse of Bacon's Nature — she is vengeful, and her feedback loops threaten to punish humanity harshly for the imbalance they have caused. This vengeance is seen as impersonal, not motivated by any malice, but is instead the natural consequence of a disruption of homeostasis which Western humanity has caused through amassing too much power and making use of too many resources, disrupting systems in which humankind is embedded and threatening the collapse of society. For Latour the solution is the opposite of Bacon — rather than perceiving Nature as inert, lifeless, and waiting for the sadomasochistic operation of our mental capacity — we must acknowledge the ontological dignity of non-human beings, including other lifeforms, purely material beings, spirits, and other orders of existence and other orders of existence, although this aspect is under-developed in Latour's inquiry.

Zoe Todd's critique of Latour (2016) is situated within this space — it hinges on the fact that, although Latour is using the Greek name Gaia to personify his goddess of Nature, the principles to which he alludes look suspiciously like those which have been represented in indigenous knowledge systems from time immemorial. This leads Todd to brand ontology as "just another word for colonialism" (Todd 2016, 4) in that Latour does not acknowledge his debt to indigenous ideas, essentially whitewashing them within a Western framework by putting them in the language of Greek mythology, while failing to acknowledge their source. This Todd formulates a dilemma: while it is problematic for Western authors to mis-appropriate indigenous ideas and knowledge systems to serve their theories as exotic or Orientalist fetishes, it is equally problematic for Western authors to pass off indigenous ideas as emerging *ex nihilo* as a new, bold, cutting edge theory penned by a European philosopher when indigenous peoples have been advancing such ideas for thousands of years.

It is doubtless the case that Latour was, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by indigenous ideas and indigenous knowledge systems in his conception of Gaia. It is also the case that the destruction of the biosphere and the genocide of indigenous peoples in America are both the inevitable byproducts of the settler-colonial Empire, of which Baconian science was a principle support. Without a reckoning with the unconscious Baconianism remaining within science there is no way to be truly "inclusive" of indigenous knowledge systems: as is the case with Latour's climatologist and the inability of the State to absorb knowledge about the destruction of the biosphere, the contradiction is inherent. Accepting and respecting indigenous knowledge systems is a threat to the project of Empire, not just in that they are metaphysically dangerous to the imperial project in that they suggest relationality, rather than resources should be valued, but also in that the Empire cannot even implicitly acknowledge indigenous sovereignty.

4.0 Conclusion

Latour's take on Souriau seems like an appropriate ending point: "The responsibility of the masterpiece to come—the expression is also Souriau's—hangs all the heavier on the shoulders of an artist who has no model, because in such cases you don't simply pass from power to action. Everything depends on what you are going to do next, and you alone have the competence to do it, and *you don't know how*. This, according to Souriau, is the riddle of the Sphinx: 'Guess, or you'll be devoured!' You're not in control, and yet there's no one else to take charge. It's enough to make anyone wake up at night in a cold sweat. Anyone who hasn't felt this terror hasn't measured the abyss of ignorance at whose edge creation totters. [...] the act of instauration has to provide the opportunity to encounter beings capable of worrying you. Beings whose ontological status is still open but that are nevertheless capable of making you do something, of unsettling you, insisting, obliging you to speak well of them on the occasion of branchings where Sphinxes await" (Latour 2013, 160–61). If a new instauration is what is needed, then what might that look like? If knowledge organization systems instaurate institutions, can we praise the civilization to come?

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