

---

## The Enlightenment Gone Mad (I) The Dismal Discourse Of Postmodernism's Grand Narratives

RAINER FRIEDRICH

“Postmodernism is the enlightenment gone mad”  
—Stanley Rosen

**P**OSTMODERNISM IS a diffuse phenomenon that has proved unpropitious to definers. Hardly a wonder, when one of its theorists can come up with twelve different postmodernisms.<sup>1</sup> Compounding this difficulty, as Umberto Eco has observed in the postscript to *The Name of the Rose*, is the tendency of “postmodern” to become “increasingly retroactive”; in the end, Eco quips, “the postmodern category will include Homer.” No longer a quip, it has already happened. On the strength of Helen’s depicting, on a robe she is weaving, “the many struggles the Achaeans and Trojans endured for her sake at the hands of the war-god” (*Iliad* 3), the late Paul de Man claimed the Homeric epic as a self-referential postmodern text! Such retroactive designation, combined with the widespread indiscriminate use of the postmodern category, threatens to render it altogether vacuous. Or nonsensical *à la* Lyotard: “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.”<sup>2</sup>

### THE DISMAL DISCOURSE

YET FOR ALL the diffusion, there is a discernible commonality among the various branches of postmodernism. They have in common a penchant for passing death sentences and issuing death certificates, promulgating, with either insou-

cient glee or ponderous gloom, the death of reason; the death of the enlightenment; the death of universalism; the death of normativity and law; the death of meaning and truth—in short, the death of almost everything that the Western intellectual tradition stands for in general and that modernity has claimed in particular. With exorbitant virulence, postmodernism has turned against the anthropocentric and subjectivistic-individualistic tenor in modernity, in particular against its focus on the thinking subject, with the denigration of the Cartesian cogito, yielding further death certificates: the death of man; the death of autonomous subjectivity; the death of the self; the death of the author. Such pervasive negativity, often speaking in apocalyptic tongues, is the chief defining feature uniting the many postmodernisms. This had prompted Jacques Derrida to ridicule his own postmodern camp for the tendency of “going-one-better in eschatological eloquence . . . the end of history . . . the end of the subject, the end of man, the end of the West, the end of Oedipus, the end of the earth, *Apocalypse now*.”<sup>3</sup> By his own admission, Derrida, as we shall see, has been no stranger to the apocalyptic tone he derides. A dark discourse of death, postmodernism usurps the epithet from yesterday’s dismal science and accedes to the status of today’s dismal discourse.

This essay is in the train of Jürgen Habermas’ *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, a trenchant philosophical analysis of post-modernity and post-structuralism, and of Richard Wolin’s *Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*—a genealogy, equally trenchant, of the postmodern discourse, complementing Habermas’ work in terms of intellectual history.<sup>4</sup> Though inspired by both works, this essay has a different accent and focus: the demonstration that the chief postmodern discourses practice the very thing they anathematize: the *grand récit*, the totalizing metanarrative, the overarching discourse, the all-encompassing theory.

## POSTMODERNISM'S GENEALOGY AND ELECTIVE AFFINITIES

THE SEDUCTION of unreason is the leitmotif in Wolin's genealogy of postmodernism—the siren song in any discourse that hails from Nietzsche, whose philosophy is postmodernism's *fons et origo*—to such a degree that postmodernism might as well be dubbed the Second Nietzsche Reception. Wolin's constellation of themes in his title and subtitle points to important connections between unreason and Nietzsche's vitalistic anti-metaphysics, so seductive to modern and postmodern intellectuals, and so conducive to a romance with fascism. Wolin's title alludes to Michel Foucault's famous celebration of the “sovereign enterprise of unreason” in *Madness and Civilization*,<sup>5</sup> elevating madness to the rank of liberator from modernity's totalitarian regime of reason. Together with Desire and Death, Madness is postmodernism's marginalized and repressed Other of Western civilization and modernity, waiting to be empowered. A stunning allegation, for what made the twentieth century reek of death was precisely totalitarian fascism's madness taking centre stage, along with its notorious death-cult and irrationalism. “Viva la muerte!” “viva la morte!”: these slogans of Spanish and Italian fascism were reverberating throughout fascist-dominated Europe. It was reason that was the marginalized and repressed party.

Postmodernism's genealogy goes hand in hand with its elective affinities. Promoting madness as liberation from the tyranny of reason is perhaps the quaintest attack on what the post-structuralist *mâitres-à-penser* have dubbed logocentrism. This central term of the postmodern discourse is an intellectual loan from twentieth-century German irrationalism, which sought, driven by Nietzschean vitalism, to dismantle the *Logozentrismus* of Western thought as life-corroding and to replace it by life-affirming *Biozentrismus*.<sup>6</sup> In the parlance of both German irrationalism and French postmodernism, logocentrism figures as the tyrannical regime of the rational *logos* and of the reasoning subject in the Western tradition. Manifest, as it is, in the prevalence

of its categories—rationality, logic, universality, autonomous subjectivity, humanism, normativity—it is said to have infested all spheres and branches of Western civilization. Treated as co-extensive with “Western metaphysics,” logocentrism has become the *bête noire* of postmodern anti-metaphysicians and anti-foundationalists of all stripes.

Postmodernism’s provenance points to one of the oddest turns in recent intellectual history. The most pronounced and radical faction of postmodernism, post-structuralism, with its master thinkers Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida, is chiefly a Gallic phenomenon. Its ascendancy during the past decades signaled a startling *volte-face* in French intellectual life: France, the birthplace of the Enlightenment, of the humanism of the universal Rights of Man and the Citizen, and of republican liberty—this France has witnessed within its borders, with the rise of post-structuralism to cultural hegemony, the flouting of these splendid achievements, with the concomitant flaunting of anti-rationalism, anti-humanism, and anti-universalism; the trashing of autonomous subjectivity; and, perhaps worst of all, the indulgence in willful obscurity in thought and expression—this in the nation that used to pride itself on the *clarté* of its discourse: “*ce qui n’est pas clair, n’est pas français*” (Rivarol). The debunking of human rights and the denunciation of the institutions of republican freedom as tools of an insidiously veiled will to power completes this depressing picture.

There is a profoundly ironic twist to all this. The most vigorous critique of Gallic postmodernism comes from Germanic Critical Theory and Hermeneutics (Jürgen Habermas, Manfred Frank, et al.). And what passes now for Gallic used to be Germanic: French postmodernism qua Second Nietzsche Reception draws on the German irrationalist tradition that had grown out of the First Nietzsche Reception. Thoroughly compromised after World War II due to its ideological role in the rise of National Socialism, German irrationalism went into exile. It crossed the Rhine and took refuge in Paris, where it informed and shaped the post-structuralist appropriation of

Nietzsche. Thus, as Manfred Frank has observed, when young Germans take up the French theories, they “are eagerly sucking back in, under the pretense of opening up to what is French and international, their own irrationalist tradition, which had been broken off after the Third Reich.”<sup>7</sup> The arrival of French post-structuralism in Germany meant the return of German irrationalism from exile, elegantly dressed up in the *haute couture* of French theorizing and purged of Teutonic provincialism by Parisian urbanity.

Things are even odder when it comes to politics. “The ‘Post-modernism’ of Ernst Jünger in his Proto-Fascist Stage” is the title of a 1993 article published in a journal of the postmodern Left.<sup>8</sup> With a title like this in a left-wing journal, one would normally expect a critical tenor. Yet it’s an altogether affirmative piece, signaling that an affinity to proto-fascism seems to be no longer an embarrassment in postmodernist circles. It appropriates for postmodernism Jünger’s proto-fascist discourse on technology, sketched first in the 1930 essay, “Total Mobilization,” and then elaborated in 1932 in his most notorious political tract, *The Worker*.<sup>9</sup> What Jünger envisions in this book, the author of the article says, “corresponds in some important respects with what we have come to call postmodernism or postmodernity.” Thus Jünger is celebrated for having anticipated post-modernity in his 1932 book—a most elaborate blueprint for totalitarianism, which, quite interestingly, synthesizes both the fascist and the bolshevist varieties. An instant theoretical evangel for fascist intellectuals, Jünger’s brilliantly written book won over many others to fascism, chief among them Martin Heidegger. Ever the fastidious aesthete, Jünger himself found the Nazis too vulgar and never joined their party.

The term *proto-fascist* in that title refers to Jünger’s role in the Young-Conservative movement (during the Weimar period) that was aiming at a National Revolution.<sup>10</sup> The political offshoot of German irrationalism, this movement advocated the abolition of parliamentary democracy and the establishment of a national dictatorship. The Young-Conservatives were

more radical than the Nazis, whom they accused of compromising the cause of the National Revolution by participating in “The System,” a.k.a. the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic. Together with Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, Jünger belonged to the trinity of the Young-Conservative Revolution’s leading thinkers that, espousing Nietzschean voluntarism and vitalism, cultivated a form of political existentialism known as “decisionism”<sup>11</sup>—a politics of pure will that centers on the normatively unencumbered decision of natural leaders in situations of emergency and exemption. The prominence of its three leading thinkers in post-structuralist discourse attests to the startling fact that the German Young-Conservative Right of the Weimar Republic has intellectually colonized the postmodern Left in France and elsewhere. This elective affinity has rendered Young-Conservatism a force in the genealogy of postmodernism, which might even be viewed as a moderate reprise of the former—Young-Conservatism Lite, as it were, only this time in a leftwing key.

#### POSTMODERNIST DEBÂCLES

WOLIN SHARES the now widely-held view that the vogue of postmodernism has run its course: facing its own death-certificate, it is about to enter its long night. Or as Jan Kott’s aphorism has it, “post-modern sounds like post-mortem.”<sup>12</sup> Time and again, there have been reports of postmodernism’s demise, and they all have turned out to be exaggerations. What had triggered such canards were some of postmodernism’s stunning débâcles. A fresh look at the three most notorious ones (with a hitherto latent fourth making its debut) will highlight the dismal nature of postmodern discourse.

The most notable thing about the first débâcle—the posthumous discovery of the Nazi collaboration of Paul de Man—is that it needn’t have become a débâcle at all. What made it grow into one was not the *fact* of de Man’s Nazi-collaboration, but the *apologetics* deployed in his defense. Some com-

monsense explanation—say, an error of judgment committed in difficult times by an inexperienced young man—should have settled the matter. But no, this was out of the question: to any self-respecting deconstructor, nothing is as *dégoûtant* as common sense. The defense of the deconstructor Paul de Man had to be a deconstructive one. When Jacques Derrida delivered it, it showcased the abstruseness of the deconstructionist discourse. Predicated as it is on its tenet that everything is *always already also the opposite of itself*, it had Paul de Man emerge from a deconstructionist reading of his most anti-Semitic and collaborationist texts as a latent anti-fascist, who is said to have subtly subverted their professed anti-Semitism and collaboration; and on top of that, as the persecuted victim of his present-day critics, whose exposure of de Man's collaboration Derrida denounced as repeating Nazism's "exterminating gesture."<sup>13</sup> Apply this logic to Nazism and its real victims, and its abstruseness turns it into a mind-boggling monstrosity.

Much of the same logic prevailed in the Derrida-school's response to Victor Farias' revelation of the hitherto unknown depth of Heidegger's involvement with Nazism.<sup>14</sup> Since deconstruction's anti-foundationalism feeds largely on Heidegger's Nietzschean project of the destruction of metaphysics, it had the effect of a bombshell. It was again the apologetics deployed to defuse it that turned the whole affair into a débâcle of deconstruction. Deconstructionist logic identified the root-causes of Heidegger's Nazi-involvement as *humanism* and *rationalism*, said to be clinging as metaphysical residues to his earlier philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Note the grotesque implication: National Socialism—which invoked the dark forces of blood and soil, and preened itself on its irrationalism and (above all) its racist anti-humanism—figures in this logic as the apogee of humanism and rationalism! To make it explicit, one Derridean unabashedly asserted that "Nazism is a humanism"<sup>16</sup>—a stunning misuse of language, robbing either term of its meaning. Besides, one can make a convincing contrary case: the residues of humanism and rationalism in Heidegger's thought enabled him to keep his distance from the racist biologism of National-Socialist ideology.

The débâcle that most compromised postmodernism came about through “Sokal’s Hoax” in 1996, when *Social Text*, the flagship journal of postmodern Cultural Studies, fell for the Swiftian satire of the mathematician and physicist Alan Sokal of New York University. The editors of *Social Text* mistook this lethal send-up of postmodernist and post-structuralist doctrines for a serious contribution to its *Science Wars* issue and published it.<sup>17</sup> Sokal’s satire had assembled various postmodern theorems on science in order to expose their fatuity. Numerous quotations from the writings of the master thinkers of post-structuralism and flattering references to their disciples in Cultural Studies, plus the author’s mastery of the postmodern lingo—all this conspired to blind the editors as to the satirical nature of Sokal’s text. Its main target was the postmodern *bêtise* of pronouncing on science by reducing it to social construction and rhetoric. The overall effect was a tableau of Aristophanic irony: *Social Text*’s brave band of science-busters marching into the first battle of the war they had declared on the rationality and objectivity of the natural sciences—a war that, with the Trojan Horse of Sokal’s satire in their ranks, they had already lost before it started. This was bad enough; what made matters worse was again the apologetics, most drastically exposing the poverty of the dismal discourse. Unwilling to leave bad enough alone, *Social Text* editors and their apologists made absurd claims: Sokal either had got things right *malgré lui* or had actually expressed his true views; but, caving in to the pressure of the science establishment, renounced his article by dubbing it, *après le coup*, a satirical hoax. There are still people around who, seduced by the author’s command of the postmodern argot, misread, just as the *Cultural Studies* editors did, Sokal’s deliberate nonsense as an exciting testimony to a scientist’s cross-over to postmodern science.<sup>18</sup>

Postmodern science: this oxymoron is at the core of an hitherto latent débâcle of postmodernism—here and now to be forced into the open. It compromises one of its canonical books, Jean-François Lyotard’s *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; 1984)—a text incessantly cited as



postmodernism's authoritative discourse on the natural sciences. With a knowing air, the author of this postmodern evangel pronounces on developments in modern physics and mathematics; then distills from these his postmodern science that he extols as an effective subversion and overthrow of scientific rationality through antirational paralogic. Years later, Lyotard himself inadvertently turned his evangel into a débâcle. In a fit of candor, or more likely in a typical postmodern display of insouciance and nonchalance, Lyotard disclosed in an interview that he had been talking through his hat when writing about science. The author himself unmasked this key-text of postmodernism as an intellectual fraud: *The Postmodern Condition* is "the worst of my books," he confided to the journal *Lotta Poetica*, in which "I made up stories, referred to a quantity of books I'd never read, apparently it impressed people."<sup>19</sup> It certainly did and still does: with its impact undiminished, *The Postmodern Condition* has retained its status as a canonical book, holding fast to the chimera of a postmodern science. Published in a little-known Italian journal, Lyotard's confession has remained one of postmodernism's hidden débâcles. The canonical *Postmodern Condition* has thus turned out to be Lyotard's Hoax. But unlike Sokal's, Lyotard's is a real hoax, confirming the very point of Sokal's satirical piece.

PERFORMATIVE SELF-REFUTATION:  
RUMORS OF THE DEATH OF THE GRAND NARRATIVE

*The Postmodern Condition* proclaims the most-often-cited of postmodernism's numerous death sentences—the one pronounced on metanarratives, also known as *les grands récits*: totalizing philosophies, theologies, theories or ideologies of general development, often involving salvation or emancipation, such as Christianity or Marxism promise. J.-F. Lyotard's book is the *locus classicus* for their obituary: it defines "postmodern as *incredulity towards metanarratives*"<sup>20</sup> and translates this incredulity into a program of dismantling them once and for all. This is generally regarded as the defining forte of

postmodernism, said to complete the Nietzschean-Heideggerian enterprise of the destruction of metaphysics. Post-modernity deems itself the death of the grand narrative. Valorizing, as it does, discontinuity and contingency, and abhorring the unifying universal that is operative in the *grands récits*, post-modernity espouses—or so it claims—instead the multiplicity of disparate and diffuse “little narratives,” *les petits récits*:

We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives—we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse. But . . . the little narrative [*petit récit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention.<sup>21</sup>

Yet the sweeping proclamation of the death of all metanarratives is itself a totalizing metanarrative. It connotes all the postmodern death certificates, each of which is a *grand récit* in its own right. In their ensemble, they amount to postmodernism’s overarching metanarrative totally contesting Western civilization. In current philosophical parlance, this is known by the somewhat unwieldy term, performative self-refutation. Its ancestry reaches back to the notorious Cretan’s proposition that all Cretans are liars. Performative self-refutation occurs when an argument undercuts itself in the very act of its enunciation, by the form and means through which it is performed. In the attempt to abolish it, Lyotard’s postmodernism is itself practicing the discourse of the grand narrative.

The grand narrative of the end of the metanarrative is not the only one of Lyotard’s *grands récits*. *Libidinal Economy*, the most Sadean of Lyotard’s books, offers the grand narrative of libidinal intensity as an ubiquitous universal force. Here the dismal science and the dismal discourse converge: “every political economy is libidinal.” Its totalizing Sadean mechanism is patent when dealing with the early industrial proletariat’s conditions of extreme misery, once described in all their horror in Friedrich Engels’ classic, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. It translates this misery into erotic *jouissance*: the proletariat is alleged to have wished,

willed, and desired the ruin of its health in the hell of mines, foundries, and factories, along with the disintegration of personal identity in anonymous slums, because it experienced all this as the gratification of masochistic desire. It was only when its libidinal intensity grew too strong and thus became unbearable, that the proletariat turned to revolt.<sup>22</sup> *Libidinal Economy* amounts to a bizarre metaphysics of libido, a totalizing metanarrative involving emancipation: the liberation of Desire as the marginalized and suppressed Other.<sup>23</sup>

Yet this is not all. Confronted, after his verdict on grand narratives, with a triumphalist capitalism acting out its grand narrative of market-fundamentalism, Lyotard changed register. Capitalism's triumph became part of a narrative he dubbed a "postmodern fable" (*moralité*).<sup>24</sup> This tells the story of energy from the beginning of life on earth to the ineluctable disappearance of the solar system, and beyond. Spanning nine billion years of development, of which capitalism's rise to an unrivaled global system is but a tiny subdivision, it grows into the grand narrative of entropy and negentropy. Negentropy denotes the force counteracting entropy through the organization of energy into ever more complex systems, ultimately enabling mankind, according to Lyotard, to "elude the catastrophe by abandoning its cosmic site, the solar system." The catastrophe is entropy—"a tragedy about energy. Like *Oedipus Rex*, it ends badly. Like *Oedipus at Colonus*, it admits a final remission."

Lyotard does his level best in trying to present his postmodern fable as a non-metanarrative. He insists that it is not a narrative of emancipation, for there is no human subject to be emancipated: "humans are an invention of development. The hero of the fable is not the human species, but energy." The human species, in his fable, "is taken for a complex material system; consciousness, for an effect of language; and language, for a highly complex material system." Humankind is presented as the effect of the development of energy: it will, if all goes well, develop into "the negentropic system" that will make possible "the final exodus . . . far from the Earth." One discerns the usual suspects: postmodern anti-subjectivism as-

serting a process without a subject; postmodern anti-humanism reducing humanity to an effect of such a process, the outcome of which is not the rescue of an emancipated humankind, but “the rescue of a very differentiated system, a kind of super-brain”; and post-modernity’s linguistic-textualist ontology that turns all and everything into the effects of language. The fable’s lack of finality, the absence of a promise of, or the hope for, a “final perfection,” Lyotard claims, are proof that his postmodern fable is not a totalizing metanarrative.<sup>25</sup> It ends with a Nietzschean flourish, echoing the amorality of *Libidinal Economy*: “the fable is unaware of good and evil.”

It’s a nice try, and a very elegant one at that, a far cry from the feverish rhetoric of *Libidinal Economy*. But Lyotard is protesting too much. Calling it a fable—that is, a *petit récit*—cannot conceal that its content is that of a *grand récit*, and one of emancipation to boot.<sup>26</sup> For all the post-structuralist spin that Lyotard puts on his *moralité* of entropy and negentropy, the fact remains that it is the *human* brain—unmaking and remaking itself to strive for ever-increasing complexity—that becomes the motor and the agency of the process. In Lyotard’s grand narrative, the human brain may have originally been the effect of development; but once it has attained the capability of self-consciousness, self-reference, and self-critique, it takes charge of the process as its chief agent. In short, the Lyotardian fable of mankind’s escape from the doom of entropy surpasses in scope all known metanarratives as *the* grand narrative of human self-emancipation from its ties to a doomed earth. So much for his incredulity towards metanarratives!

As for performative self-refutation: at the height of his insouciance, Lyotard offers, as another definition of post-modernity, its ready acceptance of paradox coupled with disdain for coherence. “Post-modern science,” he says, “is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, non-rectifiable and paradoxical”—with the consequence, it would seem, that one does not abjure reason and its principles with impunity, and that goofing and screw-ups are the price one pays. Thus postmodern discourses, when critically

analyzed, emerge as pitted against themselves and become the opposite of what they claim to be.

The mother of all postmodern performative self-refutations, their archetype as it were, is found in deconstruction's totalizing critique of logocentric reason. Jacques Derrida himself gives it its most pronounced expression:

The unsurpassable, unique, and imperial grandeur of the order of reason . . . is that one cannot speak out against it except by being for it, that one can protest it only from within it; and within its domain, Reason leaves us only the recourse to stratagems and strategies. The revolution against reason . . . can be made only within it.<sup>27</sup>

In order to dismantle logocentric reason, deconstruction is bound to have recourse to—logocentric reason! It has *to reason against reason*. Thus Deconstruction remains inescapably trapped in the “unsurpassable, unique, and imperial grandeur” of reason's order; and it is to Derrida's credit that he, unlike his fellow post-structuralists, is fully aware of it. To try to escape it, Derrida would have to resort, as he does elsewhere with other terms, to the procedure of putting “under erasure” (*sous rature*), i.e., of crossing through in the cited passage that which he is forced to use and practice, but aims to deconstruct: REASON. Crossing *through*, not crossing *out*: it could not be crossed out because reason, while being deconstructed, is nevertheless operative as the indispensable framework and vehicle of its deconstruction. But to no avail. This elegant sophistic trick of having it both ways, inherited from Heidegger,<sup>28</sup> would simply highlight deconstruction's fatal flaw: that it has to feed on, and is thus parasitically dependent on, what it endeavors to dismantle. Invisible erasures perforce accompany all operations of deconstruction, using the panoply of LOGOS (reason) to dislodge and dismantle *logos* and ~~truth~~, and implicitly making truth-claims for deconstructive tenets. Thus, far from being able to demolish the *logos*, it confirms its ineluctability. Through its parasitic dependency on the very *logos* that it tries to deconstruct, *Deconstruction deconstructs itself by revealing itself as a latent logocentrism*.

The same parasitic dependence on the object of their attempted destruction obtains in the Nietzschean and Heideggerian project of the “destruction of metaphysics” and its modern derivation, enlightenment reason. Here is Derrida on the Nietzschean and Heideggerian anti-metaphysical discourses:

But all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a kind of circle. This circle is unique. It describes the form of the relation between the history of metaphysics and the destruction of the history of metaphysics. There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language—no syntax and no lexicon—which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.<sup>29</sup>

Postmodernism’s wholesale critique of enlightenment reason, arising from these roots, faces a similar dilemma. It implicates itself in the most virulent performative self-refutation, as Habermas has demonstrated.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the whole development from Nietzsche via decisionism to post-structuralism appears to be one colossal performative self-refutation. The postmodern enterprise of enlightenment-bashing from Nietzsche to Foucault and Derrida is predicated on the enlightenment (“the implicit postulation of precisely what it seeks to contest”). Or rather, the postmodern enterprise is itself enlightenment: what has started in Nietzsche’s critical thinking, and continues in the postmodern discourses, is the attempt to enlighten the enlightenment about itself and its perceived evils. The Nietzschean and postmodern critique of enlightenment reason is essentially the application of enlightenment reason’s own principle, critical reflection, to itself. Kant had done this, aiming at circumscribing the legitimate realm of pure reason; his critique was, in fact, reason’s self-critique, the only possible form of *Vernunftkritik*. But the totalizing nature of the Nietzschean and postmodern critique of enlightenment reason—critique of reason *tout court*—aiming, as it does (unlike the Kantian) not at its delimitation, but at its destruction, gives rise to nothing less

than reason's self-cannibalization—just like that of Appetite in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: "And Appetite, an universal wolf / (so doubly seconded with will and power) / must make perforce an universal prey / and last eat up himself."<sup>31</sup> This can only result in a dreadful irrationalism. It is this, in Stanley Rosen's striking aphorism, that renders postmodernism "the enlightenment gone mad."

#### POSTMODERN METANARRATIVES

LYOTARD'S TRANSGRESSION against his own verdict on grand narratives has effectively undercut postmodernism's incredulity towards metanarratives. The totalizing metanarrative is not dead; on the contrary, it is alive and well, and resides in postmodern discourses. Our incredulity about postmodernism's incredulity will serve as the scalpel for a critical anatomy of its dismal discourse overall, and of individual discourses as well—those of Nietzsche and Bataille in Part I, Foucault and Derrida in Part II—in order to lay bare their inherent metanarrative structures.

#### DEATH AND REBIRTH OF THE DIONYSIAN WORLD: NIETZSCHE'S GRAND NARRATIVE

"That new party of Life which would tackle the greatest of all tasks, namely the breeding of humanity to a higher species, including the merciless extinction of everything that is degenerating and parasitic, would make possible again that superabundance of Life on earth from which the Dionysian world must grow again."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

FOR POSTMODERNISTS, Nietzsche marks the beginning of the end of the *grand récit*. At first blush, his work indeed seems to avoid metanarrative structures, due to his philosophical style, favoring the aphorism, the essay, and the fragment, while expressly rejecting the systematic treatise as dishonest<sup>32</sup>—and thus offering some model for eschewing the grand narrative. But this is a surface phenomenon. There is

a sustained tenor, a unifying subtext, in his writings that has them cohere in a powerful metanarrative.<sup>33</sup>

Chief among the hallmarks that attest to postmodernism's Nietzschean provenance is, as we have seen, anti-metaphysics qua anti-foundationalism. That's what postmodernists enthuse most about. Nietzsche's central tenet is that behind our world—philosophically disparaged since Plato as the apparent world, the world of mere phenomena—there is no other world, no so-called true world of essences providing the foundations for first principles; our world is *bios* and *physis* without any *meta*;<sup>34</sup> and in order to get a purchase on it, we have to stop the Platonic disparagement and grasp the ubiquitous and pervasive force that energizes it—the will to power.

Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical enterprise is a cluster of related doctrines. Its epistemological skepticism is so radical that it borders on cognitive nihilism (“truths are illusions one has forgotten to be illusions” [W III.314]; “there are no facts only interpretations” [WP §481]); and the corresponding relativism comes in the refined form of perspectivism (“there is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival knowing” [GM III.12]). Each one of these has performative self-refutation written all over it: that truths are illusions is presented as a truth; that there are no facts, only interpretations comes as a factual statement; that there is only perspectival (i.e., relative) seeing and knowing is an absolutist proposition.<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche believed that he had securely placed his discourse beyond such criticism through his rejection of argumentation (“what needs to be proved is of little worth” [TI, “Case of Socrates,” §5]) and through his denunciation of logic as plebeian and decadent (“hypertrophy of the logical faculty” is “indicative of decadence” [TI, “Case of Socrates,” §4 and §7]). As a consequence, he espoused the preponderance of rhetoric over logic; his voluntarism enthrones the will in lieu of reason, with the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* giving way to *sit pro ratione voluntas*. All this amounts to a misology, which goes with the proud amoralism of “beyond good and evil”; on this



feeds, in turn, a pronounced aestheticism (“for us, only the aesthetic judgment is law”; “existence and the universe are eternally justified only as aesthetic phenomena” [*BoT* §5]). The Nietzschean doctrine of the ubiquitous and pervasive “will to power” informs postmodern cratology, aided by Nietzsche’s chief critical procedure, genealogy, with its specific mode of unmasking lofty principles and ideas by tracing their genesis to their “mesquine Herkunft” (*WP* §7), their shabby descent, or in exposing them as camouflaged and shame-faced forms of the will to power. Postmodernism has swallowed this cluster of Nietzschean doctrines hook, line and sinker, blissfully unaware of the inherent performative self-refutation. Furthermore, Nietzsche’s talk of the prison-house of language, and his elevation of the corporeal over the intellectual,<sup>36</sup> postulating the “hegemony of physiology,”<sup>37</sup> has prompted postmodernism to make language and the desiring body the chief sites of its discourse.

The postmodern reception of Nietzsche dwells for the most part on his iconoclastic “philosophizing with the hammer” and its negative hermeneutics. This accounts for postmodernism’s own air of iconoclastic negativity. Yet when the “philosopher with the hammer” set out to smash metaphysics; to dismantle its epistemology, rationality, and morality, and to genealogically unmask cognitive and moral truths as either illusions or disguises of the will to power—in short, when engaged in this iconoclasm, he was not content with being merely iconoclastic. On the contrary, with his destructive work, he was advancing his own affirmative philosophical design by removing what stood in its way. Making heavy philosophical weather about the notion of “Life” (*bios*), Nietzsche set against the metaphysical dualism of phenomenal world / intelligible world his naturalist-vitalist monism.<sup>38</sup> He conceived of his dynamic vitalism in terms of an all-encompassing cratological voluntarism: “What is Life? Here we need a new, more definite formulation of the concept ‘Life’: My formula is: Life is will-to-power,” expanded in an apostrophe to his disciples as, “*This world is will to power—and nothing besides. And*

you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!” (WP §254; §1067). Evidently, Nietzsche suspends his perspectivism and skepticism when advancing his own agenda.

By philosophizing with the hammer—his version of deconstruction—Nietzsche practiced what he termed a strong “purifying active nihilism.”<sup>39</sup> It is to combat and overcome the weak “passive nihilism” of European decadence, the end-result of Platonic-Judaic-Christian metaphysics. Deriving, as it does, *bios* and *physis* from the *logos* of the intelligible or true world, metaphysics thereby devalues Life and Nature, and thus, willy-nilly, ends up in nihilism. The metaphysical notion of the ‘true world’ has been the “most dangerous attempt yet to assassinate Life” (WP §583). Nietzsche’s active nihilism implies a conceptual litotes: negation of negation. As the vitalistic negation of the metaphysical negation of Life, it was affirmative of Life, with a powerful purpose behind it: all this anti-metaphysics, anti-foundationalism, and genealogical unmasking was to clear the ground for restoring Life and Nature to their central place and highest rank in philosophical discourse, in order to recreate a lost Dionysian life-world.

This leads right to the heart of Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative. The theme of the destruction and the rebirth of the Dionysian world forms its central axis, either end of which is marked by a transvaluation of values. The first one—ancient Judaic / Socratic-Platonic / Christian—resulted in the de-naturalization of values; the second one—modern Post-Christian / Nietzschean—designed to reverse the disastrous results of the first one, aims at their re-naturalization.

Once upon a time, so the Grand Narrative goes, there was a world free of decadence and nihilism, presided over by Dionysus, emblematic of the eternal Yes to Life in all its aspects, including the terrible and the tragic ones. It was a healthy pagan world of active Yea-saying to Nature, Instinct, Power, Domination, Rank, Strength, Exploitation, Slavery, Heroism, Struggle, Body, Health, Hardness, Terribleness, Ecstasy, Intoxication, Passion, Sensuality, along with festivals of Cruelty celebrating Life. In this Dionysian world, culture is equated with Life as lived,

shaped, and refined by the noble and strong—a culture that, for all its refinement, did not deny, rather affirmed, the inherent beast-of-prey nature of Man. The natural hierarchies—conquerors/conquered; masters/slaves; the strong/the weak; the noble/the base; men/women—were intact. Rank ruled: “equality of all” was an unknown notion. An unencumbered will to power held sway, uniting its vigorous yea-saying to Life with an equally vigorous nay-doing to all that enfeebled Life; for “Dionysian nature does not know to separate doing No from saying Yes” (*EH*, “Destiny,” §2). The ethos of the Dionysian Life-world, based as it was on the natural aristocratic values of the strong and noble classes, was on this side of good and evil—pre-moral, that is. The aristocratic antithesis of *good/bad* provided the criteria: what affirmed and enhanced Life and its forces was good as well as true and beautiful; what negated and subverted them was held to be bad as well as false and ugly.<sup>40</sup>

The pre-moral Dionysian life-world had no need of a metaphysical beyond as a home for foundational first principles and highest moral values. Instead, a healthy paganism obtained, “the religious affirmation of Life” (*WP* §1052), not sicklied o’er by “monotono-theism” (*Antichr.* §19), nor by morality. The Dionysian world of old reached perfection in ancient Greece: from the soil of the Dionysian grew the Apollonian as its complementing counterpoint, to give rise to the supreme Dionysian culture. It distinguished Hellenic Dionysianism from the Dionysianism outside the Greek world, which, lacking the Apollonian counterpoint, remained largely crude and unformed.<sup>41</sup>

This splendid Dionysian life-world perished in the first “transvaluation of values,” brought about by a twofold “slave revolt in morals,” one Judaic, the other Hellenic. Good/evil replaced good/bad. The masses of human failures—the weak, sick, lowly, impoverished, crippled, ill-bred, oppressed, ugly, degenerate, and enslaved—prevailed over the few powerful, strong, noble, wealthy, happy, beautiful, well-turned-out, and free; they succeeded in establishing their *ressentiments* as highest values, organized as religious morality that was to domi-

nate Europe for the next millennia. The Judaic slave-revolt replaced the aristocratic value-equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = beloved of God) by a priestly one; the Hellenic slave-revolt subverted it by the Socratic-plebeian equation of “morality = reason = happiness.” The Grand Narrative is somewhat vague as to how both revolts relate historically and genetically to one another. But no matter: what does matter is that both their transvaluations and their theological-metaphysical construction were fused in the morality and metaphysics of Christianity: “Platonism for the people” (W II.566) is the Grand Narrative’s sobriquet for it.

Assuming briefly a dark and ponderous tone, the Grand Narrative makes heavy apocalyptic weather about the death of the Christian god: “Nihilism stands at the door . . . the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer” (WP §I, 2). But the apocalyptic tone quickly fades: it is, after all, the death of the very God whom the Grand Narrative relentlessly denounces as “the deity of the sick”; “the God of the physiologically degraded, of the weak”; “the contradiction of Life”; “the will to nonentity declared holy”; a god who “himself is so pale, so weak, so decadent even the palest of the pale were able to master him—our friends the metaphysicians, those albinos of thought.”<sup>42</sup> The demise of such a god could only be for the better. What is more: the death of God deprives Christian morality of its metaphysical grounding—the very morality that the Grand Narrative has denounced with equal ferocity as inherently nihilist (“Nihilist and Christian rhyme in German [*Nihilist und Christ*], and they do not only rhyme”).<sup>43</sup> Thus the Grand Narrative soon changes register. The focus is now on the active and strong nihilism: an agent of the will-to-power, it is to push decadence and passive nihilism to the tipping point, at which they will be transcended through the Second Transvaluation of Values. Designed to undo the results of the disastrous First Transvaluation, it initiates the renewal of the Dionysian world.

Yet this is still future music. The dead Christian god casts his shadow on modernity’s de-Christianized world. Moder-

nity is the age of the passive nihilism of the “last men”: dwarfed, homogenized, mediocritized, depreciated, degenerate Europeans, “brutalized into pygmies.” Their passive nihilism is not even aware of itself as nihilism, because it is an “incomplete nihilism.” These last men, having “abandoned God, cling that much more firmly to the faith in Christian morality”;<sup>44</sup> and they do so in its secularized derivations: enlightenment, human rights, humanism, liberalism, democracy, socialism-cum-anarchism, women’s emancipation, *le suffrage universel*, parliamentary government—the whole enchilada of modernity’s decadence. Its root-cause is Christianity’s “concept of the ‘equality of souls before God’”; it

has passed . . . deeply into the tissue of modernity. . . . This concept furnishes the prototype of all theories of equal rights: mankind was first taught to stammer the proposition of equality in a religious context, and only later was it made into morality: no wonder that man ended by taking it seriously, taking it practically!—that is to say, politically, democratically, socialistically, in the spirit of the pessimism of indignation. (*WP* §765)

Thus, unsurprisingly, the Grand Narrative that extols natural rank and hierarchy inveighs most heavily against their most pronounced abnegation—equality, the “non plus ultra of nonsense on earth”; “the greatest of all lies,” denying that “the wrong (*Unrecht*) never lies in unequal rights; it lies in the claim to ‘equal’ rights.”<sup>45</sup> With intensified ferocity, the Grand Narrative rails against liberalism, democracy, and socialism among the movements and forces that espouse equality: liberalism is “herd-animalization,” democracy is “*misarchismus*,” and both “a degenerating form of political organization”; socialism, the “badly hidden will to negate Life”; and so on in this vein.<sup>46</sup>

In their ensemble, they present the powerful trend to the “total degeneracy of mankind: this degeneracy and dwarfing of man to an absolutely gregarious animal, this brutalizing of man into a pygmy with equal rights and claims is undoubtedly possible.” To combat this trend, “there must be a sort of will, instinct, imperative, which cannot be otherwise

than anti-liberal to the point of wickedness.” Enter the “new philosophers”—Nietzsche in the plural—the agents of the Second Transvaluation of Values: “minds strong and original enough to initiate the opposite estimates of value, to transvalue and invert ‘eternal valuations’; forerunners, men of the future, who in the present shall fix the constraints and fasten the knots which will compel millenniums to take new paths.” They are “commanders and lawgivers; they say: ‘Thus *shall* it be!’ They determine the Wither and the Why of mankind . . . their ‘knowing’ is *creating*, their creating is a lawgiving, their will to truth—is *Will to Power*.” In them, “a noble mode of thought is dominant, such as believes in slavery and in many degrees of bondage as the precondition of every higher culture.” They have to “teach man the future of humanity as his *will*, as depending on human will and to make preparation for vast hazardous enterprises and collective attempts in *discipline and breeding*.”<sup>47</sup>

By going beyond good and evil—the criteria of the slave- and herd-morality—and returning to the criteria “good and bad” of the master-ethos, the Second Transvaluation of Values is initially an inversion of the First one: “fair is foul and foul is fair,” as the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth* have it. Evil becomes good; and what the slave morality values as good becomes bad. Most notorious is Nietzsche’s condemnation of compassion, pity—*Mitleid* in German—ranked as one of the highest moral values, both Christian and humanist. Less known, but most telling, is why he so vehemently condemned it: the Second Transvaluation exposes *Mitleid* as the “principal agent in promoting decadence,” “the praxis of nihilism,” because “it thwarts . . . the law of selection. It preserves that which is ripe for death, it fights in favor of the disinherited and the condemned of life.” As such, it is “antinature itself as morality.”<sup>48</sup> Evil, by contrast, is extolled in the Second Transvaluation: time and again the Grand Narrative proclaims, “evil is man’s best strength”; “man must become better and more evil”; that “the most evil in man is necessary for the best in him”; “the evil man is a return to nature—and in a

certain sense his recovery, his cure from ‘culture.’”<sup>49</sup> “Return to nature” is the main tenor, the *cantus firmus*, of the Second Transvaluation, which is essentially the re-naturalization of values: “in place of ‘moral values,’ purely naturalistic values. Naturalization of morality.” Its “task is to translate . . . the denatured moral values back into their nature—i.e., into their natural ‘immorality.’” The Grand Narrative sums it up most pithily with the postulate: “Replacement of the categorical imperative by the natural imperative!”<sup>50</sup>

This radical fair-is-foul-and-foul-is-fair transvaluation is therefore far more than a mere inversion of the values established by the First Transvaluation:

Let us look ahead a century; let us assume that my attempt to assassinate two millennia of anti-nature (*Widernatur*) and human debasement (*Menschenschändung*) succeeds. That new party of Life (sc., the New Philosophers) which would tackle the greatest of all tasks, namely the breeding of humanity to a higher species (*Höherzüchtung der Menschheit*) including the merciless extirpation (*schonungslose Vernichtung*) of everything that is degenerating and parasitic, would make possible again that superabundance of Life on earth from which the Dionysian world must grow again.<sup>51</sup>

This is Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative in a nutshell. The reborn Dionysian world will differ from the lost old one in that it will give rise to a higher species. Mankind, for two millennia subjected to anti-nature and utterly corrupted by the forces of decadence and nihilism,<sup>52</sup> is in dire need of a thoroughgoing make-over. Mankind has to be *overcome*: man, as “last man,” has to be undone and then re-done as Overman: “not ‘mankind’ but Overman is the goal!” (*WP* §1001).

“Vast hazardous enterprises”; “collective attempts in *discipline and breeding*”; “breeding to a higher species”; “extirpation of all that is degenerate and parasitic”—these are the necessary measures to be taken to create the conditions for the return of the Dionysian world. They herald a gigantic design called *Great Politics* that arises from the Second Transvaluation. “Politics will have a different meaning”: “the time

for *petty politics* is passed; already the next century will bring the struggle for the dominion of the earth—the compulsion to *Great Politics*.” It is Dionysian politics: the politics of the *new party of life*: “The new philosophers can arise only in conjunction with a ruling caste as its highest spiritualization. Great Politics, rule of the earth, is at hand”:

The possibility has been established for the production of international racial unions whose task will be to breed and rear a master race (*Herrenrasse*), the future “masters of the earth”—a new, tremendous aristocracy, based on the severest self-legislation, in which the will of philosophical men of power and artist tyrants will be made to endure for millennia.<sup>53</sup>

Great Politics is apocalyptic politics in the grand style: it anticipates the future of mankind as a series of cathartic catastrophes necessary for transcending Western decadence and nihilism, thus bringing about the rebirth of the Dionysian in life and culture. The hazardous enterprises that the Grand Narrative forecasts and postulates are “unprecedented wars for world domination” and eugenic experiments on a vast scale. Great Politics, initially European, is supranational; with its pursuit of world-conquest, it becomes global.

For the future social order, the Grand Narrative prescribes a pyramidal hierarchy of three castes<sup>54</sup> of rulers, guardians, and laborers, reminiscent of the three estates in Plato’s *Politeia*. It is an oligarchic order (Nietzsche prefers to call it aristocratic),<sup>55</sup> an anarcho-despotic regime in which the strong rule without being encumbered by legal or moral codes in the exercise of their will to power, since they will legislate themselves. These “future masters of the earth,” the Overmen, go by various names: “Olympian men,” a “stronger species of men,” “higher men,” “philosophical men of power (*Machtmenschen*) and artist-tyrants,” a “higher type” constituting a “new, tremendous aristocracy”; the “legislators of the future”; “master race” and “ruling caste”; a “higher sovereign species,” “a stronger race,” a “stronger



species; a dominating race”; a “ruling race,” “Caesarian breeders and violent men of culture” (*Gewaltmenschen der Kultur*). Everyone is ranked according to the strength and health of his will-to-power and then assigned his appropriate place in this three-estate order: “I assess a man by the quantum of power and abundance of his will.”<sup>56</sup> Needless to say that the vast majority will be in the lowest caste, and most of them will be laboring as slaves—the “blind moles of culture”:<sup>57</sup>

We must agree to the cruel-sounding truth that slavery belongs to the essence of culture . . . the wretchedness of struggling men must grow still greater in order to make possible the production of a world of art for a small number of Olympian men. . . . Therefore we may compare glorious culture to a blood-covered victor who carries with him on his triumphal procession the vanquished as slaves, chained to his chariot.<sup>58</sup>

Yet most individuals will not even make it into the third estate. The “greatest of all tasks,” “the breeding of a superior species,” goes hand in hand with the “annihilation of millions of failures”;<sup>59</sup> for “the great majority of men have no right to existence.”<sup>60</sup>

The various facets of *Grosse Politik* show up throughout Nietzsche’s oeuvre, even where the term is not explicitly used.<sup>61</sup> The Transvaluation of Values and Great Politics relate to one another as theory and praxis do. A politico-philosophical program of a fundamental make-over of mankind is certainly a totalizing one. It is more than that: articulated as it is, as a violent eugenics, with the large-scale extermination of millions of the degenerate “weak and botched,” it renders the Nietzschean Grand Narrative totalitarian. No other thinker has used the biological terms *breeding* and *extirpation* with such abandon in order to apply them to mankind as a whole. It is this that renders the extermination fantasies of Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative so colossal in scope and scale. As the Nietzschean Ernst Nolte observes,

when one thinks the idea through to its logical conclusion, what needs to be annihilated is the entire tendency of human development since the end of classical antiquity . . . : Christian priests, vulgar champions of the Enlightenment, democrats, socialists, together with the shepherds and herds of the weak and degenerate. If annihilation is understood literally, then the result would be a mass murder in comparison with which the Nazis' "Final Solution" seems microscopic.<sup>62</sup>

What distinguishes the exterminations envisioned by *Grosse Politik* from the actual exterminations of the Nazis is the fact that Nietzsche's are *not racist*. Unencumbered by racism, they attain a vaster scope.

As part and parcel of the transvaluation of values, Great Politics is the political articulation of the central theme of the Grand Narrative: the restitution of the Dionysian world. It is, we recall, "the breeding of humanity to a higher species, including the merciless extirpation of everything that is degenerating and parasitic," that will "make possible again that superabundance of life on earth from which the Dionysiac state must grow again." Contrary to Nietzsche-apologetics, Great Politics with its eugenic program is not adventitious to Nietzsche's grand design. Far from being accidental and extraneous to his thought, it grows consistently, even cogently, out of the vitalistic-naturalistic structure of Nietzsche's anti-metaphysical discourse. As we have seen, in overcoming metaphysics, his transvaluation proceeds by aiming at restoring Life, Nature, and the Will-to-Power to their rightful place. The metaphysical conceptual pairs—*good/evil*, *true/false*—are discarded: "every high degree of power involves freedom from good and evil and from 'true' and 'false'" (*WP* §244); what replaces them is the non-metaphysical conceptual pair *good/bad*, differentiated into the aesthetic, vitalistic, and naturalistic sub-pairs *beautiful/ugly*, *strong/weak*, and *healthy/sick*:

What is good? Everything that heightens the feeling of power, of the will to power, power itself.—What is bad? Everything that is born of weakness.—What is happiness? The feeling that power is

increasing, that resistance is overcome (*Antichrist* §2).—Man’s feeling of power, his will to power, his courage and his pride—these things collapse at the sight of what is ugly, and rise at the sight of what is beautiful (*TI*, “Skirmishes” §20; emphasis added).—Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power.—The meaning of “knowledge”: here as in the case of “good” or “beautiful,” the concept is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. (*WP* §480)

The reborn Dionysian world is to be governed by the will-to-power of the superior species of the beautiful, strong and healthy, after being purged of the deformed, ugly, weak, and sick, the failures “who have no right to existence.” Once the categories and norms of an anti-rationalist, amoralist, voluntarist, vitalist, and naturalist anti-metaphysics take over and inform a grand political design of global dimensions such as *Grosse Politik*, eugenic breeding, along with eugenic extermination, follows as a corollary.

Tacitly exempted from the limitations and restrictions that its perspectivism and radical epistemological skepticism impose on all discourse, and especially on the metanarrative kind, Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative, undaunted, proclaims the totalizing doctrine of the will-to-power as a *fundamental universal force*. It provides its own foundation of truth: “How is truth proved? By a feeling of enhanced power”; “the *criterion of truth* resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power.”<sup>63</sup> Notwithstanding his anti-metaphysical posturing, Nietzsche’s totalizing Grand Narrative amounts to a metaphysics.<sup>64</sup> Usurping the place which reason and spirit hold in traditional metaphysics, the will-to-power, pervading, as the totality of vital and spiritual forces, all being and existence, acts as a unifying and, yes—*horrible dictu*—a *foundational principle*. Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative differs from traditional metaphysics mainly in that it replaces the latter’s two-world dualism by the monism of his “this-worldly” biocratocentrism. It substitutes the metaphysics from above by a metaphysics from below.<sup>65</sup>

“All that is modern can only serve posterity as an emetic” (GM III.19). Modernity, the age of the “last men,” figures in Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative as the height of European decadence, marked by the degeneration of instinct and the abolition of rank, two of his chief concerns. Modernism is a chaos of instincts: “The instincts contradict, disturb, and destroy each other: I have already defined modernity as physiological self-contradiction,” with the “modern notion of ‘freedom’ as one proof . . . of the degeneration of instinct.” The waning of rank is painfully patent in the predominance of equality, “this modern idea *par excellence*” that, derived from the Christian idea of the equality of all before God, has, as already noted, “passed deeply into the tissue of modernity.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet Nietzsche’s Grand Narrative discerns the seeds of salvation even in the most contemptible manifestation of equality: democracy. The idea of equality effected the “democratizing of Europe,” which, with the concomitant “homogenizing of the Europeans,” has produced “the type of numerous, talkative, weak-willed, and very handy workmen who *require* a master, a commander, as they require their daily bread.” In other words, it has produced “a type prepared for *slavery* in the most subtle sense of the term,” an “involuntary arrangement for the breeding of tyrants.” The democratizing of Europe yields slavery and tyranny—results, “on which its naïve propagators and panegyrists, the apostles of ‘modern ideas,’ would least care to reckon,”<sup>67</sup> as the Grand Narrative notes with Machiavellian glee. These inadvertent results of modernity will greatly facilitate the coming of Nietzsche’s postmodernity, the age that sees, through the transvaluation of values and Great Politics, the return of the Dionysian life-world: the homogenized European “last men”—those who will survive the eugenic extirpations of Great Politics—will easily settle into their new role of the “blind moles of culture,” slaves to the “tremendous aristocracy” of Olympian men. Dionysian paradise regained is the prospect that this first postmodern Grand Narrative holds out, enhanced and elevated to a higher plane by the creation of the new species.

The return of Dionysian life, overcoming two millennia of anti-nature, is to repair the instincts and restore natural rank.

“TO ABANDON THE WORLD OF THE CIVILIZED AND ITS LIGHT”:  
BATAILLE’S GRAND NARRATIVE

“Affirm the value of violence and the will to aggression insofar as they are the foundation of all power.”

—Georges Bataille

GEORGES BATAILLE is the outstanding Gallic saint in the post-modern calendar, second only to its Germanic arch-saint. The key twentieth-century figure in the genealogy of postmodernism, he fused the Second Nietzsche Reception with the reception of D. A. F. de Sade, which made the Sadean discourse a shaping force of the postmodern.

A *soi-disant* Marxist, Bataille espoused a quite idiosyncratic Marxism, couched as it was in the specifically Bataillean, and quite un-Marxian, oppositions of “heterogeneity/homogeneity” and of “sacred/profane.” Of a subversive proletariat Bataille expected a “fiery and bloody revolution,”<sup>68</sup> designed to release the suppressed effervescence of life—manifest in “violence, excess, delirium, madness”—by unleashing the dark forces of elemental impulses, drives, and instincts. No doubt his is a pronouncedly Sadean notion of revolution rather than a Marxian one:

Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, gushing blood, sudden catastrophes and the horrible cries of pain that accompany them, terrifying ruptures of what had seemed to be immutable, the fall into stinking filth of what had been elevated—without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.<sup>69</sup>

The Bataillean discourse is a creative version of Nietzschean vitalism, fortified by a heavy dose of Sadean thought, with some Marxist capitalism-critique thrown in, and further amplified by the anthropology of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss.

A strong influence on Bataille's intellectual evolution was Alexandre Kojève's lecture-series on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It was delivered annually at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* between 1933 and 1939 to an illustrious audience of Parisian intellectuals—among them, besides Bataille, Merleau-Ponty, Caillois, Lacan, Queneau, Klossowski, Aron, Weil, and Breton. To be sure, Kojève's take on Hegel was decidedly Left-Hegelian; in fact, it was Marxist. Kojève's Hegel was thoroughly informed by the old Feuerbach and the young Marx; thus the *Phenomenology of Spirit* emerged from these lectures as a construct of Hegelian, Feuerbachian, and Marxian discourses all rolled into one. Consequently, the *Phenomenology's* section on the “lord-bondsman dialectic”—better known as the “master-slave dialectic,” and one of the sources of Marx's theory of the emancipation of the proletariat—was central to Kojève's reading of Hegel.<sup>70</sup> This is Hegel's philosophical allegory of history as a process giving rise to civilization through the imposed discipline and self-restraint of human labor. The sovereignty of the lord imposes this discipline and self-restraint on the civilization-creating labor of the bondsman. Yet beyond that, lordship has no further part in the civilizing process; for, as Kojève pithily sums up the result of this dialectic,

Mastery is an existential impasse. The Master can either make himself *brutish* in pleasure or *die* on the field of battle as Master, but he cannot live *consciously* with the knowledge that he is *satisfied* by what he is.—Understanding, abstract thought, science, technique, the arts—all these, then, have their origin in the forced work of the slave.<sup>71</sup>

Nietzsche should have seized—yet never did—upon Hegel's master-slave dialectic as a godsend (if that's the word for the God-is-dead apostle). It would have been grist to his polemical mill: the apogee of the Western metaphysical tradition, Hegel's absolute idealism, elevating the servile labor of the bondsman over the sovereign mastery of the lord! The height of decadence!

It was left to Nietzsche's Marxist disciple Bataille to deliver the master's response: not questioning in any way the aptness of Hegel's account, Bataille nevertheless inverted Hegel's (and Marx's) valorization: he sided with the lord's sovereignty and hedonistic expenditure against the bondsman's servitude and productive labor. Bataille thereby initiated in French intellectual life the habit of taking up Hegelian themes and putting a Nietzschean spin on them—an "explosive mixture," as V. Descombes has characterized it, *un hegelianisme noir*, "a certain Hegelian reasoning gone wild."<sup>72</sup> Yet it is rather a Nietzschean reasoning, high-jacking Hegelian themes and turning them on their head. Note well that Bataille's Nietzschean reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic goes beyond preferring expenditure-loving sovereignty to civilization-building productive labor; it entailed the denigration of human intelligence and discursive thought on account of their provenance from servile labor: "man's intelligence, his discursive thought," he disdainfully notes, "developed as functions of servile labor."<sup>73</sup> By extolling in a Nietzschean vein, and against the Hegelian and Marxian grain, the lord's sovereignty and denigrating the bondsman's cultural achievements, Bataille established two central postmodern themes: first, the espousal of a will-to-power-based sovereignty—as opposed to the popular sovereignty of democracy disparaged by Nietzsche and his modern as well as postmodern disciples—and, second, the total contestation of Western civilization, the fruit of the bondsman's labor. "It is time to abandon the world of the civilized and its light," Bataille announced in the programmatic piece, *The Sacred Conspiracy*, which opened the first issue of his short-lived journal *Acéphale*.<sup>74</sup>

With this announcement, Bataille's Grand Narrative is well underway. What is to replace the abandoned world of the civilized? It's a question best answered, first by cataloguing what the Bataillean discourse valorizes as well as what it denigrates; and then, by bringing out the underlying intellectual structure that relates these two catalogues to one another.

This is what, from the perspective of Nietzschean vitalism and Sadean naturalism, Bataille's discourse valorizes, at different levels and with differing accents, and what he extols as the forces of Life's effervescence: unreason/madness; transgression; subversion; the primitive; excess; delirium; ecstasy; horror; animality; instinctual life; elemental impulses; corporality; orgiastic drives; destructiveness; aggression; violence; violent politics; cruelty; sadism and Sadeism; algolagnia; the sacred in terms of myth, ritual, sacrifice (both animal and human), orgiastic religion, and re-enchantment of the world; Dionysianism; headlessness (the *acéphale*); formlessness (*l'inform*) and monstrosity; non-genital (i.e., non-reproductive) sexuality; all sexual perversions; obscenity; death; eros fused with thanatos; will-to-power; imperative sovereignty and charismatic leadership; collectivity; affectivity and affective politics; "general economy" of excess, waste, and limitless loss; expenditure without return (*dépense*); war as the most wasteful and destructive form of expenditure; trash; filth; decomposing corpses; all excrements: shit, urine, pus; all bodily fluids: menstrual blood, mucus, vomit.

An ensemble Bataille's mother would hardly have approved of. From the same vitalist-naturalist perspective, Bataille's discourse denigrates: reason as a life-corroding regime in the modern world; autonomous subjectivity; individuality; enlightenment; civilization; the rule of law; legality and normativity; morality; bourgeois society; liberalism; democracy; rational politics; economy of productivity and utility; capitalism; purity and cleanliness;<sup>75</sup> reproductive sexuality.

There is much in both catalogues that is of Nietzschean provenance; yet the Bataillean embrace of all that a sanitized and sanitizing civilization rejects—the *abject*—would have appalled and disgusted the notoriously prim and prudish Nietzsche, who extolled cleanliness and reproductive sexuality; and who in particular abhorred as "witches' brew" "that abominable mixture of lust and cruelty,"<sup>76</sup> which so delighted Bataille's other mentor, the catholic-minded Marquis de Sade.



The intellectual structure that relates both catalogues to one another is the antagonism of homogeneity versus heterogeneity. The second catalogue constitutes the realm of the homogeneous: modernity's alienated/alienating, reifying, life-corroding, affect-suppressing, instinct-sapping, commodity-producing, community-destroying, fragmented/fragmenting, disenchanting, utilitarian, sanitizing/sanitized, and sterilizing/sterilized bourgeois world—the very “world of the civilized and its light” that Bataille says “it is time to abandon.” Heterogeneity, by contrast, epitomizing the elements of the first catalogue, subverts and negates the established realm of homogeneity. It is at the core of Bataille's thought, the equivalent of the postmodern Other and its three D's: Dementia, Desire, Death. It is in acts of transgression, the breaching of norms, that the heterogeneous asserts itself as the agent of Life's energy and effervescence against the regime of reason by subverting its normative life-world, civilization. Civilization has totally homogenized Life by standardization, regulation, normalization, and sanitation—hence Bataille's bidding to abandon it. His Grand Narrative presents transgressive heterogeneity as both negation *and* affirmation, by way of a philosophical litotes—negation of negation—similar to that operative in Nietzsche's strong nihilism. It is the negation of the world of homogeneity, a world sustained by the homogenizing regime of reason that reduces its atomized members to calculating, encapsulated selves deprived of affects, effervescence, and intensity, and living “mere lives” in the servile pursuit of the limitless accumulation of goods. This negation is to remove what stands in the way of what transgressive heterogeneity affirms and espouses, and thus to clear the ground for a return to a pre-modern life-world: a tribal world—pre-reflective, pre-rational, pre-individualist, pre-moral—a life-world of instinctual and affective effervescence, exuberance, excess, intensity, and the sacred. In short, it is the world before the onset of individuation, denounced since Nietzsche by vitalist thinkers as the *fons et origo* of all modern evil.<sup>77</sup>

What is to replace the homogenizing world of the civilized goes by the name of “ecstatic community”—heterogeneity’s life-world. Bataille’s Grand Narrative advertises it as a restoration of communality, as a return to the sacred and to an originary sovereignty: it is the rediscovery of a lost Dionysian world, effecting the reawakening of the repressed instinctual forces and promising lived affective intensity. Its economy is one of expenditure and waste. Its members are to overcome their atomization through limit-experiences that give rise to unbearable sensations lacerating the conscious ego and shattering subjectivity. In collectivist orgies of self-immolation, they are to free themselves from their encapsulated selves.

The ecstatic community was to be ultimately actualized through the Sadean “fiery and bloody revolution”; but one did not have to wait for it passively. Bataille and his circle of disciples experimented with a prefiguration of it. Its think-tank was the Collège de Sociologie,<sup>78</sup> founded and run by Bataille and Roger Caillois; the college’s organ was Bataille’s journal *Acéphale*, “Headless.” To distinguish it from the academic “homogeneous” discipline of sociology, it went by the name of “sacred sociology.” As a “science of the sacred,” it was designed to explore the conditions and requirements for a re-enchantment of the world, a return of the sacred, through sacrifice, ritual, and myth; as well as to unleash, through Dionysian ecstasy, the energy of dark forces repressed by homogeneous civilization. In line with Nietzsche’s “God-is-dead” pronouncement, the College aimed at an atheological religion of myth and ritual.

The lived prefiguration of the ecstatic community was Bataille’s neo-pagan sect sharing the name *Acéphale* with his journal. The sect’s logo was the invented mythic figure of the Headless Man, holding a sacrificial knife and a flaming sacred heart, “reuniting in the same eruption Birth and Death,” with a death’s head in place of the genitals, emblematic of the union of *eros* and *thanatos*. Headlessness, *acéphalie*, signified the liberation from the tyranny of reason: “Human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the

universe. . . . Man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison.”<sup>79</sup> The sect’s apt totem was the praying mantis, the insect that during mating decapitates the male who then, once his headlessness has freed him from the anxiety-ridden brain, copulates with heightened intensity<sup>80</sup>—to the envy of intellect-hating intellectuals in their eternal quest for the effervescence of life.

*Acéphale* was a secret society, so little is known of its practices. The little that is known is more than quaint. Its members met at “sacred places” marked by trees that had been struck by lightning, as the intersection of chthonian and celestial forces. *Acéphale* practiced animal sacrifice; in 1939, the sect had far advanced in preparations for a planned human sacrifice, with a willing victim already selected!<sup>81</sup> The human sacrifice never took place, as the outbreak of World War II put an end to *Acéphale* and the Collège de Sociologie; for, as Roger Caillois commented on it: “The dark forces we had dreamed of unleashing had been freed on their own, and their consequences were not those we had expected.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, the dark forces they tried to unleash turned out to be the very forces that drove fascism.

The rites of *Acéphale* may be dismissed as the puerile antics of anti-intellectual intellectuals, overdosing on primitivism and ritualism, the opiates of the over-civilized and over-individuated. Fearing that sensuality passes them by due to their overdeveloped (as they deem) intellect, they try to rid themselves of it. This feeds right into postmodernism’s war on logocentrism; here madness and schizophrenia play the role of the cult of headlessness as the great liberator from oppressive reason and intellect. But seriously preparing a human sacrifice, and coming close to performing it, is something else. In the homogeneous world of prewar France and its guillotine (France’s chief executioner, *le Monsieur de Paris*, was of particular interest to the Collège de Sociologie),<sup>83</sup> it would have ranked as plain murder. *Acéphale*’s members could have ended up literally headless. Given the death-cult of the sect and its obsession with acephaly, they

might not have viewed this as an altogether undesirable experience. One cannot help being reminded of a subject-annihilating collectivity in more recent history: the ecstatic community of Jonestown, founded and ruled by a sacred sovereign, the Reverend Jim Jones, in the jungle of Guyana, far away from homogenizing civilization.<sup>84</sup> Here the reawakened sacred took the form of a fundamentalist religion fused with Leninism. In 1978, ordered by their sovereign, its members freed themselves of their enclosed selves in an orgy of self-immolation. The 918 corpses rotting in the torrid jungle heat testified to thanatocratic heterogeneity, negating in a drastic way the norms of the sanitized and disenchanting life-world of homogenizing reason.<sup>85</sup>

Death cult and ritual point to what Bataille regarded as another prefiguration of the ecstatic community: “great fascist societies.”<sup>86</sup> In his famous 1933 essay, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,”<sup>87</sup> Bataille develops his chief categories of *heterogeneous social existence* versus *social homogeneity*, and elucidates them by applying them to fascism and democracy respectively:

Fascist leaders are incontestably part of the heterogeneous existence. Opposed to democratic politicians, who represent in different countries the platitude inherent to homogeneous society, Mussolini and Hitler immediately stand out as something other. . . . It is impossible to ignore the *force* that situates them above men, parties, and even laws: a *force* that disrupts the regular course of things, the peaceful but fastidious homogeneity powerless to maintain itself (the fact that laws are broken is only the most obvious sign of the transcendent, *heterogeneous* nature of fascist action).

Democracy is identified with homogeneity; while fascism, endowed with the aura of heterogeneity and otherness, is commended for disrupting democracy’s homogeneous world! But this is not all. Bataille proceeds to a veritable panegyric to “*heterogeneous* fascist action”: it “belongs to the entire set of higher forms. It makes an appeal to sentiments traditionally defined as *exalted* and *noble* and tends

to constitute authority as an unconditional principle, situated above any utilitarian judgment.”<sup>88</sup>

Of the various things that fascinate Bataille in fascist action and politics, two stand out: sovereignty and affectivity. Bataille’s admiration for both *Duce* and *Führer*, and for “the force that situates them above men, parties, and even laws,” is of a piece with his Nietzschean preference of sovereign mastery in his reading of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic. Sovereignty is the “imperative form of heterogeneous existence”; its simplest form is “dominating one’s fellows,” which “implies the heterogeneity of the master, in so far as he is the master: to the extent that he refers to his nature, to his personal quality, as the justification of his authority, he designates his nature as *something other*, without being able to account for it rationally”;<sup>89</sup> just like Nietzsche’s notion of sovereign mastery, it derives much of its power from dispensing with a rational account of itself. In either case, sovereignty is a self-asserting life-force. With the exalted designation of “fascism as the sovereign form of sovereignty,”<sup>90</sup> Bataille elevates fascism to the epitome of sovereignty, the sovereignty of sovereignties, as it were, an intensified and most effervescent form. With fascism’s reestablishment of sovereignty in political and social action goes the reawakening of affectivity in politics:

The force of a leader is analogous to that exerted in hypnosis. The affective flow that unites him with his followers—which takes the form of a moral identification of the latter with the one they follow (and reciprocally)—is a function of the common consciousness of increasingly *violent* and excessive energies that accumulate in the person of the leader and through him become widely available.<sup>91</sup>

Fascism’s “timely recourse to reawakened affective forces” (159) gives rise to “affective politics”—so lacking in the sterile homogeneity of democratic societies and their politics.

What to make of this panegyric to fascism by a professed Marxist and organizer of *Contre-Attaque*, a coalition of antifascist intellectuals? To characterize Bataille’s stance on fascism as “equivocal,” as Denis Hollier does, is not wrong,<sup>92</sup>

but it is to say too little. There is a strong fascination with German and Italian fascism at work that surfaced even in Bataille's manifestoes and speeches for *Contre-Attaque*. The attack in them was chiefly on parliamentary democracy and the ruling left-wing Popular Front. Its tone tried to out-fascist the fascists:

The time has come for all of us to behave like masters and to physically destroy the slaves of capitalism. . . . We intend to make use of the *weapons created by fascism*, which has known how to make use of the fundamental human aspirations for *affective exaltation and fanaticism* . . . we prefer . . . *come what may*, the anti-diplomatic brutality of Hitler, which is more peaceful than the slobbering excitation of diplomats and politicians."<sup>93</sup>

Wolin calls this Left-fascism: adopting fascist means for left-wing ends.<sup>94</sup> Yet it hardly differs from the real thing. Breton and his fellow-surrealists, who had initially joined *Contre-Attaque* despite the bad blood that existed between them and Bataille,<sup>95</sup> soon parted company with it, accusing Bataille of *surfascisme*. Doubtlessly, at that point, Bataille's discourse displayed a strong affinity to fascism. After World War II, he conceded as much: he and his circle had succumbed to what he called a "paradoxical fascist tendency."<sup>96</sup> Yet there is nothing paradoxical about it. The essay that begins as a critical dissection of fascism in the spirit of Marxism ends up as a panegyric to fascism—how could that have come about? Quite simply: the essay's argument changes register at just the point at which Bataille introduces his "homogeneity/heterogeneity" dichotomy. Profoundly informed, as it is, with Nietzschean categories of force, primal drive, effervescence, Dionysian exuberance and excess, violence, and mastery/sovereignty, it fundamentally assumes a Nietzschean tenor, morphing the intended critique of fascism into its panegyric. Bataille's discourse is in thrall to Nietzsche's cratological vitalism, which forces its dynamic on his understanding of fascism the same way it does on his reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

This change of register from Marxism to Nietzscheanism anticipates a general trend on the French Left since the '60s that saw the displacement of the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic by Nietzschean vitalism and irrationalism. The latter took hold of French thought in the 1930s and 1940s and resurfaced in the 1960s through the influence Bataille exerted on the formation of the post-structuralist discourse. This accounts for the post-structuralist preoccupation with the themes of death, violence, cruelty, sacrifice, Dionysian excess, and sovereign mastery—also the predominant themes of the Young-Conservative Revolutionaries and their fascist allies. The common denominator is Nietzscheanism.

Gone are today the embarrassing panegyrics to fascism. Yet there is an echo of this in Bataille's weirdest heirs among the post-structuralists: the party of abjection. With his sacralizing of bodily wastes, including the rotting corpse—the body turned to waste—Bataille had inspired the quaintest of postmodern cults: the cult of the abject. In addition to Death, Desire, and Dementia, the Abject forms a further dimension of the post-structuralist Other, designed to liberate us from the cage of our encapsulated sanitized subjectivity. Derrida joined in by endowing vomit with heterological dignity and the conceptual status of the Other as a force deconstructing the beautiful and the moral: in the spirit of Bataille, he called it an "elixir, even in the very quintessence of bad taste."<sup>97</sup> Yet Bataille's chief heir in the matter of abjection is not Derrida, but Julia Kristeva; it is she who echoes said "paradoxical tendency" when, in theorizing the Bataillean legacy, she includes the anti-Semitic and fascist writings of Louis-Ferdinand Céline in the canon of liberating abjection for their "avowed delirium"<sup>98</sup> (a highly valorized ingredient in postmodern Dionysianism). The formative impact of Bataille on post-structuralism can hardly be overstated.

## NOTES

I wish to thank Dennis Young and Nicholas Poburko for their critical advice which improved my text considerably.

1. Linda Hutcheon, "Whose Postmodernism?" A Lecture delivered at a Conference in Quebec City, 1989; published as a section of chapter 1 of L. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London 1989).

2. J.-F. Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" Appendix to J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*, G. Bennington and B. Massumi, trans. *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10 (Minneapolis 1984), 79.

3. J. Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," *Semeia* 23 (1982), 80. Derrida's title plays on Kant's 1796 essay, "Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie." For Derrida's own indulgence in the "apocalyptic tone," see Part II of this essay.

4. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, F. Lawrence, trans. (Cambridge, MA 1987). Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton and Oxford 2004).

5. M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York 1965), 223.

6. It was Manfred Frank (*Die Unhintergebarkeit von Individualität* [Frankfurt 1986], 11) who had first pointed out this intellectual loan from Ludwig Klages' voluminous 900-page synthesis of German irrationalist vitalism, entitled *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* [*The Intellect as the Antagonist of the Soul*] (1929–31; Bonn 1972). *Logozentrismus* is throughout denounced as "shallow" and "mechanistic" and life-corroding (passim, but see especially 130; 374–75; 510–11, 813–14); its opposite, *Biozentrismus*, is celebrated as "deep," "organic," and "chthonic."

7. Quoted in J. Habermas, "Work and *Weltanschauung*: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989), 436.

8. W. H. Sokel, "The 'Postmodernism' of Ernst Jünger in his Proto-Fascist Stage," *New German Critique* 59 (1993), 33–40; the following quotation is on 33. The article is much given to disparaging Habermas' concept of modernity as boring, against which it plays off Jünger's concept of postmodernism *avant la lettre* as most exciting.

9. E. Jünger, "Die totale Mobilmachung," in G. F. Jünger, ed., *Krieg und Krieger* (1930). English version: "Total Mobilization," in R. Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (New York 1991; Cambridge, MA and London 1993). E. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Typus und Gestalt* (Berlin 1932). Walter Benjamin reviewed "Totale Mobilmachung" under the fitting title "Kriegstheorien des deutschen Faschismus"; English version, "War Theories of German Fascism," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979), 120–28.

10. Not to be confused with *neo-conservative*, as it was by Habermas' critics, when they ridiculed him for calling Foucault a *Young-Conservative*. See note 11 for literature on young-conservatism.



11. The pioneering critical study of *Dezisionismus* is Christian Graf von Krockow, *Die Entscheidung: Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart 1958). On young-conservatism and decisionism, see also Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge 1984). On Schmitt's decisionism see R. Wolin, "Carl Schmitt, Political Existentialism, and the Total State," *Theory and Society* 19 (1990), 389–416.

12. Jan Kott, "After Grotowski: The End of the Impossible Theatre," *Theater Quarterly* X.38 (1980), 32.

13. J. Derrida, "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," *Critical Inquiry* 15.4 (1989), 647. In the same issue, Shoshana Felman managed to top this by turning de Man into a victim of the Nazis, equating his situation with that of Primo Levi, a prisoner at Auschwitz ("Paul de Man's Silence," 704–44). For a trenchant critical analysis of such preposterous equations, see Heather MacDonald, "The Holocaust as Text: Deconstruction's Final Solution to the de Man Problem," *Salmagundi* 92 (1991) p 160–173.

14. V. Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia 1989). See also R. Wolin, "French Heidegger Wars," in R. Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA 1993), 272–300.

15. J. Derrida, "Philosopher's Hell: An Interview," in R. Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy* (Cambridge, MA 1991), 164–73. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics* (Oxford 1990).

16. Lacoue-Labarthe (note 15), 81.

17. A. Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text*, 46–47; "Science Wars" (Spring–Summer 1996), 217–52; reprinted in A. Sokal and J. Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York 1998).

18. As to what natural scientists think of postmodern views on science (namely nothing), see R. Friedrich, "Theorese and Science Envy in the Humanities: A New Take on the Two Cultures Divide," *Arion* 11.1 (2003), 43–45, and notes 17 and 18 for the literature.

19. *Lotta Poetica* 1.1 (1987), 82. The interview is published in French and English.

20. *The Postmodern Condition* (note 2), xxiv (emphasis added). Sections 9 and 10 are on metanarratives.

21. *The Postmodern Condition* (note 2), 60 (emphasis added).

22. J.-F. Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, I. H. Grant, trans. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993), 108–14. Note the feverish style in this perverse reasoning: "look at the English proletariat, at what capital, that is to say *their labor*, has done to their body . . . there is *jouissance* in it, the English unemployed . . . —hang on tight and spit on me—*enjoyed* the hysterical, masochistic, whatever exhaustion it was of *hanging on* in the mines, in the foundries, in the factories, in hell, they enjoyed it, enjoyed the mad destruction of their organic body which was indeed imposed on them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity . . . enjoyed the dissolution of their families and villages, and

enjoyed the new monstrous *anonymity* of the suburbs and the pubs in the morning and evening” (111); “such *jouissance*, I am thinking of that of the proletariat, is not at all exclusive of the hardest and intense *revolts*. *Jouissance is unbearable*” (113; all emphases in text).

23. Lyotard’s desire-discourse is virulent in films such as Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter*, which extends what is said by Lyotard about the victims of early capitalism to the victims of the Nazi death camps.

24. J.-F. Lyotard, “A Postmodern Fable,” in J.-F. Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, G. Van Den Abbeele, trans. (Minneapolis and London, 1997; originally published as *Moralités postmodernes* in 1993). The quotations in the text are found in this sequence on 92, 90, 93, 92, 98, 91, 99.

25. Lyotard writes (note 24): “The pursuit of greater complexity asks not for the perfecting of the Human, but its mutation or its defeat for the benefit of a better performing system. Humans are very mistaken in their presuming to be the motors of development and in confusing development with the progress of consciousness and civilization. They are its products, vehicles, and witnesses. Even the criticisms they may make of development, its inequality, its inconsistency, its fatality, its inhumanity, even these criticisms are expressions of development and contribute to it. Revolutions, wars, crises, deliberations, inventions, and discoveries are not the ‘work of man’ but *effects and conditions of complexifying*” (“A Postmodern Fable,” 99–100, emphasis added).

26. See Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London and New York 1998), 34–35: “What else would escape to the stars be than emancipation from the bounds of a dying earth?”

27. “Cogito and the History of Madness,” in J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, A. Bass, trans. (Chicago 1978), 36. This is Derrida’s critique of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*.

28. See M. Heidegger, *The Question of Being* (New York 1958), 81–83.

29. J. Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” *Writing and Difference* (note 27), 280–81 (emphasis added).

30. See Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (note 4), 185–87.

31. W. Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida* I.3, lines 121–23 (from Ulysses’ speech on degree).

32. See *Twilight of the Idols* (= *TI*), “Aphorisms and Arrows” §26: “I am suspicious of all systematic thinkers and avoid them. The will to the system is a lack of integrity and honesty.”

Nietzsche’s writings are quoted by section-numbers (§); page-numbers are otherwise unmarked. W I, W II, W III, with page numbers, refer to F. Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, K. Schlechta, ed. (Munich 1954).

33. In terms of the traditional three-phase division of Nietzsche’s thinking, this metanarrative is chiefly constructed from themes and motifs of the third (or late) phase, after he had left behind his “enlightenment phase” (*Human, All-Too Human* [1876], *Dawn* [1881]), which he later viewed as a passing, though necessary, period of crisis. I have not taken into account at all his Eternal Return doctrine, which is quite incompatible with his Will-to-Power philosophy.

34. “The ‘apparent’ world is the only world; the ‘true world’ is added to it as a lie (*hinzugelogen*)” (*TI*, “Reason in Philosophy” §2–end).

35. Nietzsche had an inkling of performative self-refutation: “Supposing that this [sc., the statement that in the world “laws are *absolutely* lacking”] also is *only interpretation*—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better” (*Beyond Good and Evil* [= *BGE*] §22, emphasis added). Nietzsche’s flippancy cannot hide the fact that it is rather so much the worse.

36. See *Zarathustra* I “On the Despisers of the Body”; *Ecce Homo* (= *EH*), “Why I Am Destiny,” §8.

37. See *Will to Power* (= *WP*), §126: “Hegemony of *physiology* over theology, moralism, economics, politics.” See further *WP* §§254, 255, 258, 291, 462; 492, 392, 710. On this, see Richard Brown, “Nihilism: ‘Thus Speaks Physiology,’” in Tom Darby et al., eds., *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism* (Ottawa 1989), 133–44.

38. Also known as *Lebensphilosophie*, “philosophy of life” (a term not used by Nietzsche). For a critical account, see the classic study by H. Rickert, *Die Philosophie des Lebens* (Tübingen<sup>2</sup> 1922).

39. On passive and active nihilism, see *WP* §§22, 23, 55, 1050.

40. See *WP* §298.

41. *Birth of Tragedy* (= *BoT*) §2. See also *WP*.

42. *Antichrist* §17.

43. *Antichrist* §58–end.

44. *EH*, “Birth of Tragedy,” §4; *WP* §19; *WP* §18.

45. *WP* §874; 464; *Antichrist* §57.

46. *TI*, “Skirmishes,” §38; *Genealogy of Morals* (= *GM*) II.12; *WP* §125.

47. Quotations in this paragraph are, in this order, from *BGE* §203; 211; *WP* §464; *BGE* §203 (emphasis always added).

48. *Antichrist* §7; *WP* §734; *TI*, “Morality as Antinature” §1–6.

49. *W* II, 524[5]; 464[2]; *WP* §684.

50. *WP* §462; *WP* §299; *Late Notebooks* 9/27.

51. *EH*, “Birth of Tragedy” §4. This passage from *EH* Nietzsche’s apologists wish he had never written, because it makes their business of sanitizing Nietzsche so difficult. Their main strategy is to declare all of Nietzsche’s numerous advocacies of slavery and mass extirpation of the weak and deformed as profound metaphors. The Nietzsche who proudly claimed he was dangerous “dynamite” (*EH*, “Destiny” §1) would spit at such sanitizing and, of course, his sanitizers.

52. See *Antichrist* §6: “I tore down the curtain that concealed mankind’s *corruption* . . . corruption in the sense of decadence . . . I call an animal, a species, an individual corrupt, when it loses its instincts, when it selects and *prefers* that which is detrimental to it. . . . Life for me is nothing more nor less than the instinct of growth, of permanence, of accumulating forces, of power: where the will to power is lacking, degeneration sets in. My contention is that

all the highest values of mankind lack this will—that the values of decline and of *nihilism* are exercising the sovereign power under the cover of the holiest names” (emphases in text).

53. Quotations on *Grosse Politik* in this paragraph (in this sequence) from WP §960; BGE §208; WP §978; WP §960. In order to minimize the significance of *Grosse Politik*, Nietzsche-sanitizers insist on an anti-political *Nietzsche*, relying chiefly on an *obiter dictum* in *Ecce Homo* (EH, “Why I am so wise,” §3) where Nietzsche describes himself as “the last anti-political German”. This is quite in line with his advocacy of Great Politics: he is anti-political with regard to the *petty* politics of his time (BGE §208), one facet of the decadence that the Transvaluation of Values and its *Grosse Politik* are designed to overcome. *Grosse Politik* is, as Wolin points out, a *leitmotif* in Nietzsche’s late work.

54. *Antichrist* §57.

55. Nietzsche was pleased as Punch by Georg Brandes’ characterization of his thought as “aristocratic radicalism”: Letter to G.Brandes, 2.12.1887 (W III, 1272).

56. WP §382; likewise WP §855: “What determines rank, sets off rank, is only quanta of power, and nothing else.” “Order of rank as order of power” (WP §856); “what determines your rank is the quantum of power you are: the rest is cowardice” (WP §858). See also WP §674, §634.

57. Nietzsche description of the slave’s function and place in culture (*Der griechische Staat*, W III.280).

58. *Der griechische Staat*, W III.278–79 (emphasis added); “It’s more certain that we shall perish from lacking [sc., the institution of] slavery,” *ibid.* See also *Gay Science* (= GS) §377; BGE §242. On slavery and democracy, WP §954; BGE §242. With the “new philosophers,” “a noble mode of thought is dominant such as believes in slavery as the precondition of every higher culture” (WP §464). See also *TI*, “Skirmishes” §40, “The Question of the Working Man”; and *Antichrist* §57 on “Sozialisten-Gesindel” which undermines the working-man’s instinct: his feeling of contentedness, etc. BGE §257, 258. *TI*, “Skirmishes” §40: “Arbeiterfrage”: “If they will have slaves, then it is madness to educate them (the workers) to be masters.”

59. See WP §964 on shaping “the man of the future through breeding and, on the other hand, the annihilation of millions of failures.”

60. “The great majority of men have no right to existence, but are a misfortune to higher men. I do not yet grant the failures the right. There are also *peoples that are failures*” (*Late Notebooks*; emphasis added). See also, “The weak and the failures, they shall perish: first principle of our love of man. And they shall be given every possible assistance” (*Antichrist* 2). “Mankind in the mass sacrificed to the prosperity of a single stronger species of man—that would be an advance” (GM II.12).

61. E.g., WP §§246; 247; 464; 755; especially 957; 964; 978; 982; 988; 998.

62. E. Nolte, *Nietzsche und der Nietzscheanismus* (Frankfurt am Main 1990), 194–95 (emphasis added).

63. *WP* §455; §534. See also: “That a judgement is false is not for us an objection to it. The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps species-rearing” (*BGE* §4).

64. M. Heidegger: “Nietzsche’s metaphysics . . . may now be more clearly delineated as a metaphysics of the absolute subjectivity of will to power” (M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche IV*, D. F. Krell, ed. [New York 1982], 147).

65. “My philosophy is an *inverted Platonism*,” Nietzsche is cited from a fragment in the 1870/71 period by Heidegger (see L. Ferry and A. Renaut, *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans* [Chicago 1998], 69, n.70).

66. *TI*, “Skirmishes” §41 and 48; *WP* §765.

67. See *WP* §129 and *BGE* §242.

68. G. Bataille, “The Use Value of D. A. F. de Sade,” in G. Bataille, *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, A. Stoekl, ed., *Theory and History of Literature* 24 (Minneapolis 1985), 102.

69. Note 68, 101.

70. In the *Phenomenology*, this dialectic forms an early stage, and occupies a rather subordinate place, in the universal process of Spirit, gradually coming into its own as Absolute Spirit.

71. A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, J. H. Nicolls, Jr., trans; A. Bloom, ed. (New York 1969), 46–47; 49.

72. V. Descombes, *The Barometer of Modern Reason* (New York and Oxford 1993), 66–67.

73. G. Bataille, “Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice,” *Deucalion* 5 (1955), 40; he goes on, playing off sacred poetic speech and sacrifice against discursive thought: “Only sacred, poetic speech . . . kept the power of manifesting full sovereignty. Sacrifice is a sovereign, autonomous way of being only to the extent to which it is not informed by significative discourse” (quoted in J. Derrida’s essay on Bataille, “From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve,” *Writing and Difference* [note 27], 261).

74. G. Bataille, “The Sacred Conspiracy,” in G. Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 179 (= *Acéphale* 1 [June 1936], 2).

75. John Wesley’s bourgeois notion, “cleanliness is indeed next to godliness,” Bataille would reject as unintelligible and indeed risible. The sacred that is so central to his discourse is closely associated with all kinds of excrement. Bataille asserts the “elementary *subjective* identity between types of excrement (sperm, menstrual blood, urine, fecal matter) and everything that can be seen as sacred, divine, or marvelous” (see note 68, 94); and in a footnote, he assures the more timid among his readers, “the cadaver is no more repugnant than shit, and the specter that projects its horror is *sacred* even in the eyes of modern theologians” (see note 68, 102, italics in text and footnote). One wonders who these modern theologians might be.

76. *BoT* §2, referring to the Dionysianism outside Greece.

77. The *locus classicus* is Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, Section 10.

78. The extant lectures held at the College and other texts relevant to its foundation and history are collected by Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of*

*Sociology* (1937–39) (Minneapolis 1988).

79. G. Bataille, “The Sacred Conspiracy,” note 74, 180–81.

80. See Roger Caillois, “The Praying Mantis,” in R. Caillois, *The Necessity of the Mind*, Denis Hollier, ed. (Venice, CA 1990), 81–82.

81. Roger Caillois, who, though being the co-founder of the College, never participated in the rites of the *Acéphale*-sect, wrote about the sect’s planned human sacrifice in his book, *L’Esprit des sects*: “At the rapture of the moment, nothing less than a sacrifice seems able to bind energies . . . the solemn execution of one of their members seemed sufficient to the new conspirators to consecrate their cause and guarantee their faithfulness forever. By making their efforts invincible, it was to put the universe in their hands.—Who would believe it? It was easier to find a voluntary victim than a voluntary sacrificer. In the end it was all unresolved” (excerpted in Hollier, *The College of Sociology* [note 78], 381–82).

82. R. Caillois in a 1971 interview (quoted by Wolin, *Seduction of Unreason* [note 4], 178): “The war showed us the inanity of the attempt of the College of Sociology. The dark forces we had dreamed of unleashing had been freed on their own, and their consequences were not those we had expected.”

83. R. Caillois, “The Sociology of the Executioner,” in D. Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology* (note 78), 234–47. This lecture prepares and adumbrates Caillois’ concept of a “Community of the Strong,” whose dominant figures are the executioner and the leader.

84. Jan Kott (“After Grotowski: The End of the Impossible Theatre,” 32) related the Jonestown collective to the world that Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty envisioned. On Artaud’s enterprise, see Derrida, “La Parole Soufflée,” *Writing and Difference* (note 27).

85. Bataille’s ecstatic community returned in post-structuralist discourse as the *Inoperative Community* (*communauté désœuvrée*), an appropriation of Bataille’s concept in terms in Heidegger’s conception of existence (*Da-sein*) as *Sein-zum-Tode*, Being-unto-death: the *communauté désœuvrée* is constituted by its members’ clear consciousness of separation through the awareness of the inevitability of death. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, Connor et al., trans. (Minneapolis 1991). On its abstruseness, see Martin Jay, “The Limits of Limit-Experience,” in M. Jay, *Cultural Semantics: Keywords of Our Time* (Amherst 1998), 75–77. Mercifully, this death-obsessed community is inoperative.

86. G. Bataille, “Le Fascisme français,” quoted by Wolin, *Seduction of Unreason* (note 4), 182, from G. Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes* (hereafter cited as “Bataille, OC”), II.212.

87. G. Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” in G. Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 137–60.

88. “Psychological Structure of Fascism,” (note 87), 143; 145 (Bataille’s italics in both quotations).

89. “Psychological Structure of Fascism,” (note 87), 145 (Bataille’s italics).

90. “Psychological Structure of Fascism,” (note 87), 153.

91. "Psychological Structure of Fascism," (note 87), 143 (Bataille's italics).

92. Occasionally the anti-fascist in Bataille asserts himself when he berates the fascists for their vulgar misuse of Nietzsche in his "Nietzsche and the Fascists," in *Visions of Excess*, 182–96.

93. Quoted in Wolin, *Seduction of Unreason* (note 4), 180–81, from Bataille, OC I.398.

94. Wolin, *Seduction of Unreason* (note 4), 180.

95. Bataille called the surrealists "emmerdeurs idéalistes," while Breton referred to him in the *Second Surrealist Manifesto* as an "excremental philosopher."

96. Bataille, OC VII.461 (quoted in Wolin, *Seduction of Unreason*, 183).

97. J. Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11 (1981), 25.

98. J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, L. S. Rudiez, trans. (New York 1982), 180. For the shocking extremism of Céline's anti-Semitism, see (most recently) W. Mason, "Uncovering Céline," *NYRB* 57.1 (2010), quoting long passages from the "Anti-Semitic Pamphlets." For other echoes of the fascist tendency (in Fredric Jameson, Hayden White), see Part II of this article, forthcoming.