
The Enlightenment Gone Mad (II) The Dismal Discourse of Postmodernism's Grand Narratives

RAINER FRIEDRICH

PANCRATISM: FOUCAULT'S GRAND NARRATIVE

“Humanism is everything in Western civilization that restricts *the desire for power*: it prohibits the desire for power and excludes the possibility of power being seized.”

—Michel Foucault

N OUS DEVONS à Bataille une large part du moment où nous sommes”—with these words Michel Foucault attests to his own and to post-structuralism's intellectual indebtedness to Bataille. Foucault was first and foremost a self-confessed Nietzschean; he was also a Sadean and Artaudian, and a Bataillean to boot. From Bataille, Foucault inherited the themes that preoccupied him throughout his intellectual life and that gave his theorizing of modernity its peculiar air: transgression, limit-experience, madness, violence, cruelty, the denigration of reason and of its agent, subjectivity, with the concomitant extolling of unreason's sovereign enterprise; his focus on corporality and his somatic materialism; his aversion to liberal democracy; and, above all, the centrality of sovereignty and power as the key terms of theorizing modernity. Much of this derives ultimately from Nietzsche and de Sade; yet it was Bataille who decisively shaped the poststructuralist reception of both.

True to the postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives, Foucault rejected the totalizing *grands récits*, condemning “the tyranny of globalizing discourses” and “the inhibiting effect of global, *totalitarian theories*.”¹ He devoted himself to the *petits récits* of specific discourses and of

local, particular critiques. His various concrete *archéologies*, *histoires*, and *généalogies* (of knowledge, the human sciences, the clinic and modern medicine, madness and psychiatry, sexuality) attest to this. Yet his *Discipline and Punish*² is something else. Ostensibly a *petit récit*, as the subtitle *The Birth of the Prison* modestly suggests, it is his most Nietzschean work, sold on Nietzsche's notion of the will to power, whose operation it sets out to discern in modernity's social and political institutions. While it is indeed about the birth of the prison and the penal process, it grows, propelled by the Nietzschean tenor of its discourse, into the *grand narrative* of modernity as it is shaped by the *novel conception of the power-knowledge régime*. It then evolved into the even grander narrative of *pancratism*: the metanarrative of the ubiquity and omnipresence of power that rivals its model, Nietzsche's quasi-metaphysics of the will-to-power. My argument focuses almost exclusively on Foucault's discourse on power, generally taken as his principal and most significant achievement.³

MODERNITY'S POWER-KNOWLEDGE RÉGIME

FOUCAULT'S POINT of departure was Nietzsche's genealogical unmasking of the disinterested quest for knowledge and truth as an unavowed and camouflaged form of the will-to-power. From this Foucault derived the specifically modern form of power as the *power-knowledge régime*. The inextricable intertwining of the will to power and the will to knowledge is modernity's hallmark: in modernity, "power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without a correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (*D&P* 27). Witness the twofold usage of the term *discipline*: the *scientific disciplines* furnish power with the knowledge needed for the *social and political discipline* by which it exercises control and domination over individuals, groups, and whole

populations. This twofold discipline originated in institutions such as the asylum, the hospital, and the prison—the sites where, through the nexus of knowledge and power, the mad, the sick, and the delinquent “became objects of knowledge and at the same time objects of domination.” This has produced a

new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty . . . one of the great inventions of bourgeois society. It has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and of the type of society that is its accompaniment. This *non-sovereign power*, which lies outside the form of sovereignty, is *disciplinary power*.⁴

Sovereignty exists in modernity as the ideology of popular sovereignty. But as “this democratization of sovereignty was fundamentally determined by and grounded in mechanisms of disciplinary coercion” (ibid.), it turns out to be a faux sovereignty—one of Foucault’s frequent Nietzschean-Bataillean barbs at democracy.

The Grand Narrative of Pancratism operates as the subtext in the ostensibly *petit récit* of *Discipline and Punish*. In prisons, hospitals, asylums, and schools, disciplining micro-techniques developed for the organization, control, management, surveillance, constraint, coercion, and domination of ever growing numbers of prisoners, patients, lunatics, and pupils. As the disciplinary institutions, chief among them the prison, grew in size, scope, and importance, their disciplining techniques and practices combined to be integrated into “global macrostrategies of domination”⁵ forming a “carceral network” (*D&P* 304). No longer exercised by a sovereign, a ruling class, an oppressive state, or the military, modern power as power-knowledge is hidden in the institutional systems of modern society. It operates in the forms of the legal, administrative, educational, penal, scientific, medical, and psychiatric systems as well as political and social formations such as parliamentary democracy or the welfare state; in the forms of ideologies such as popular sovereignty,

human rights, rule of law, liberalism, social democracy; and it becomes capillary and diffuse, by disseminating into a plurality of everyday micro-practices, in the form of “micro-power” as exercised by janitors, physicians, teachers, judges, trade union officials, psychiatrists, nurses etc. What gives unity to the “polymorphous disciplinary mechanism”⁶ of power is *normalization*, i.e., judging and classifying all and everything in terms of *normal / abnormal*: thus disciplinary power is also “normalizing power,” which, “borne along by the omnipresence of the mechanisms of discipline, basing itself on all the carceral apparatuses, . . . has become one of the major functions of our society” (*D&P* 304). Beneath Foucault’s denunciation of normalization lurks Bataille’s derogation of homogeneity.

Through its entwinement with knowledge, modern power becomes exceedingly productive and self-amplifying in the process of its exercise. It is quite extraordinary what Foucault attributes to it: “The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect . . . of this domination-observation” (*D&P* 305). The claims made for power’s productivity are at times exorbitant. The individual, Foucault writes elsewhere, is “one of its prime effects. The individual is an *effect of power*, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The *individual which power has constituted* is at the same time its vehicle.”⁷ Even the modern soul is a creation of power/knowledge (interestingly, in the Nietzschean anti-Platonic vein, as the “prison of the body”):

This is the historical reality of this soul which . . . is *born . . . out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint*. This real, non-corporal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the *effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain kind of knowledge*, the machinery by which the power

relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power . . . A ‘soul’ inhabits him (sc. man) and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body” (*D&P* 29–30; emphasis added).

Thus the gaze of Foucaultian genealogy and cratology detects and identifies power and ‘effects of power’ behind every bush: one wonders what is not power or an effect of power.⁸

Being ubiquitous, omnipresent, omnipotent, and all-encompassing, power is inescapable: by stepping out from one set of power relations, one enters another one. No exit. In combating totalizing *logocentrism*, Foucault’s power-discourse arrives at a totalizing *cratocentrism*.

“THE INVISIBLE HAND OF POWER”:
FOUCAULT’S MODERNITY

ONE OF THE most important aspects of modern power is its *masquerade*. “Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.”⁹ It’s more than that: it is “necessary for power to be *self-effacing*, for it not to show itself as power”—“to a certain extent, this is how the *democratic republics have functioned*, where the aim was to render power sufficiently invisible and insidious for it to be impossible to grasp, to grasp what it was doing or where it was.”¹⁰ The “invisible hand of power”¹¹ is treacherously at work everywhere in democratic societies down to their capillaries as micro-power. Permeated by a deceitfully masked and self-effacing power, the society of modernity’s democratic republics emerges from Foucault’s Metanarrative as “disciplinary society” and “carceral society,” its paradigm being the prison: “Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?” (*D&P* 228). Foucault is lavish with the use of the epithet “carceral” in *D&P* (a whole section, entitled “The Carceral,”

is devoted to it): the disciplinary society of modernity has a “carceral texture” (*D&P* 304) and forms a “carceral network” (*D&P* 298, 305); there is a “great carceral continuum” (*D&P* 297, 303), a “subtle, graduated carceral net” (*D&P* 297); and there is talk of the “universality of the carceral” (*D&P* 303). Foucault’s denunciation of modernity’s democratic society culminates in calling it a “carceral archipelago” (*D&P* 298), insinuating, not too subtly, that the totalitarian Gulag is just around the corner. Thus, far from modernity’s self-understanding as the rise of freedom through its creation of the constitutional state that subjects the exercise of power to norms and the rule of law, Foucault’s power discourse reads it as the “rise of unfreedom.”¹² In the train of Nietzsche’s repudiation of modernity and liberal democracy, Foucault defines modernity in terms of the self-effacing, thus invisible and therefore not combatable, disciplinary power, engaged in *subjection*, *subjugation*, and *domination*. It is even said to succeed in fabricating the *illusion of freedom* on the part of the subjected, subjugated, and dominated. To such insidious power Foucault calls for resistance.

“THE DESIRE FOR POWER”:

THE HIDDEN NORMATIVITY OF GOOD VERSUS BAD POWER

FOUCAULT’S CRITICS, like Charles Taylor, Jürgen Habermas, Michael Walzer, and Nancy Fraser, have noted a “normativity-deficit” in his discourse on modern power; Fraser even calls it “normatively confused.”¹³ The criticism is, in short, that Foucault never states the normative framework within which one can dub, as he does, *modern power as domination that has to be resisted*; nor does he state what a successful resistance would set in place of the repudiated disciplinary society and carceral archipelago.

So what are the norms and criteria by which power is to be judged and, if need be, to be resisted?

Those who fault Foucault’s power discourse as normatively deficient or confused usually incur the charge of the

Foucauldians that they are attempting to subject Foucault to a discourse he is trying to subvert. There is something to this charge: for Foucault normativity leads to normalization, a technique of the disciplinary power he detests and combats. When he and his *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* (GIP) attacked the prison system of France, the intention was not “to extend the visiting rights of prisoners to thirty minutes or to procure flush toilets for the cells, but *to question the social and moral distinctions between the innocent and the guilty.*” Procuring flush toilets, he sneered, one leaves to the humanists; the revolutionary “seeks to *obliterate the deep division that lies between innocence and guilt*”: “we wish to attack an institution at the point where it culminates and reveals itself in a simple and basic ideology, in the notions of good and evil, innocence and guilt”; “we attack the relationships of power through the notions and institutions that function as their instruments, armature, and armor.”¹⁴ Thus away with it all: with normativity itself, along with its notions of innocent and guilty! Decriminalize crime! Bizarre as it may sound, but this is what Foucault’s discourse amounts to. One discerns here the influence of de Sade, whose anarchism advocated a society that would have overcome all normativity, starting with the de-criminalization of murder.

Yet Foucault’s harsh critique of disciplinary power as giving rise to the “universality of the carceral” strongly suggests that a hidden normativity is at work in his power-discourse. The whole debate has been obscured because it is predicated on his critics’ assumption that Foucault’s is an anti-power discourse. Yet nothing could be more patently erroneous. How could so pronounced a Nietzschean (and Sadean and Bataillean) as Foucault be anti-power?! “Foucault’s imagination of power is largely with rather than against it,” as his disciple Edward Said puts it in a remarkably understated way.¹⁵

As a matter of fact, Foucault was a voluptuary of power. Detestable to Foucault is only that kind of power that wraps itself insidiously in the language of truth, rationality, science, knowledge, jurisprudence, democracy, popular sovereignty,

humanitarianism, and morality; that effaces itself in order to be able to rule with an invisible hand, so that it cannot be combated—detestable is, in short, the power/knowledge régime, the disciplinary power prevalent in the democratic republics. That's the kind of power Foucault urges resistance to. When calling it, as he occasionally does, productive and creative, Foucault is referring primarily to its ability to invent ever more, and more sophisticated, forms of camouflage and vehicles for its hidden hand.

Yet power is for Foucault also creative and productive when, for instance, it gives rise to limit-experiences in sado-masochism, a relationship the core of which is sexually charged power—and to Foucault that's a desirable thing. This hints at the hidden normativity in Foucault's power-discourse. How to disclose it? I propose a new avenue. Let us seek the criterion for judging and evaluating power *within his power discourse*, so that we cannot be accused of forcing extraneous norms on it that would subject him to a discourse he disowns. Foucault does have a criterion by which to evaluate, judge, and condemn the modern power-knowledge régime. It is, quite simply, *power*—unadulterated, undisguised, self-asserting, authentic power that is. In Foucault's Grand Narrative there lurks the unreflected and unstated *normativity of good and bad power: power precious and desired versus power ugly and detested*. For a starter, here is a passage reminiscent of Batailles's affective politics:

Power has an erotic charge. . . . How do you love power? Nobody loves power any more. This kind of affective, erotic attachment, this desire one has for power, for the power that's exercised over you, doesn't exist any more. The monarchy and its rituals were created to stimulate this sort of erotic relationship towards power. The massive Stalinist apparatus, and even that of Hitler, were constructed for the same purpose. But it's all collapsed in ruins and obviously you can't be in love with Brezhnev, Pompidou or Nixon.¹⁶

There is an air of regret in this. The culprit for the “collapse in ruins” is quickly identified:

Humanism is everything in Western civilization that restricts the desire for power: it prohibits the desire for power and excludes the possibility of power being seized. The theory of the subject (in the double sense of the word) is at the heart of humanism and this is why our culture has tenaciously rejected anything that could weaken its hold upon us. But it can be attacked in two ways: either by a “desubjectification” of the will to power . . . or by the destruction of the subject as a pseudosovereign.¹⁷

Like Nietzsche, Foucault admired the age of the sophists—the age prior to Plato’s inauguration of Western metaphysics that forced the will to power to efface itself and masquerade as the disinterested pursuit of truth. Nietzsche had invoked the “culture of the sophists” (“Sophisten-Kultur”) as “the invaluable movement amidst the moral and idealist swindle of the Socratic schools which was then breaking out in all directions.”¹⁸ In that culture, Foucault holds, arguing in the same vein, “effective, ritual discourse” (rhetoric that is), “precious and desirable,” is “linked to the exercise of power,” “charged with power and peril,” and “respond[s] to desire or to that which exercises power.”¹⁹ In short, in the discourse of the sophists, the overt, undisguised, self-assured will to power was operative. Through rhetorical discourse, as the sophist Polos in Plato’s *Gorgias* (466b11–c2) unabashedly holds, one can, like a tyrant, have one’s personal and political enemies in the city-states put to death and thus enhance one’s own power. No self-effacement here! It’s the kind of desirable power that humanism prohibits.

Thus it is overt authentic power that provides Foucault’s Grand Narrative with its criterion for indicting disciplinary power on the charge of establishing the carceral in modernity’s democratic societies. The implication of its crypto-normativity is somewhat disconcerting. It appears that any regime, any society, any social formation where the will to power is exercised freely, assertively, and overtly, without masking itself as some form of non-power, is preferable to liberal or social democracy. Foucault has never stated this directly, but one can tease out the crypto-normativity of his

power-discourse by discerning five distinct vignettes of *authentic*—i.e., *good*—power in Foucault's *oeuvre*.

FIVE VIGNETTES OF AUTHENTIC POWER

The First Vignette: The Display of Sovereign Power in the "supplice." *Discipline and Punish* opens with the juxtaposition of two extremes: a contemporary description, meticulous in all the horrifying details, of the spectacular botched torture-execution (*supplice*) of the would-be regicide Damien in Paris in March 1757; and a drawn-up time-table for the House of Young Prisoners of 1838, equally meticulous in the details of regulating prison-life down to the last minute of the day. It is the prelude to Foucault's genealogy of modernity as the disciplinary and carceral archipelago. Both documents are repugnant; yet to Michel Foucault only the second one was, whereas the first one greatly excited him.

Foucault liked to refer to his texts as *fictions*. There is more to this than the standard postmodern fare asserting that ultimately every text is fiction. In the Foucauldian discourse a strong force of literary and rhetorical stylization operates, to which it subjects its material and evidence: it is through the deployment of his vigorous eloquence that Foucault chiefly makes his point. *Discipline and Punish* is an exemplary case in this regard. It is the most forceful of Foucault's books, whose sweeping rhetoric is most fervidly employed in his own presentations of various *supplices* of the *ancien régime*. To his close disciple, ally, and friend, Gilles Deleuze, they amount to Foucault's "Divine Comedy of punishment," with the details of the torture-executions—the burning and tearing of flesh, the hacking and cutting of sinews and joints, and finally the quartering by horses—"lovingly rendered." These presentations have Deleuze discern in Foucault's book "a joy or jubilation that blends in with the splendor of its style and the politics of its content." Foucault "always managed to illustrate his *theatrical analyses* in a vivid manner": "the red on red of the tortured in-

mates contrasts with the grey on grey of prison.”²⁰ There is ecstatic poetry in describing the magnificence of the *supplice*, and austere prose in presenting the drabness of carceral penalty. The whole chapter of *D&P* on the *supplice*, entitled in the English version “The Spectacle of the Scaffold,” has the air of an exhilarating Nietzschean *Schreckensästhetik*, an esthetics of horror, which is patent in the telling title of the French original: *l'éclat du supplice*, “the *splendor* of the torture-execution.” The *supplice* turns into a veritable Artaudian *theatre of cruelty*, described and celebrated by Foucault as “magnificent theatre,” a “theatre of terror,” and a “liturgy of torture and execution”—call it the ‘Foucauldian sublime’. In extolling the *supplice* as “an art of unbearable sensations,” Foucault applies the language of the Batailleian limit-experience.²¹ The joy and jubilation noted by Deleuze are quite palpable; as is the disgust and contempt in the description and analysis of the reformed humanized penal system.

Yet Foucault was even more fascinated by the ostentatious display of sovereign power that the lurid splendor of the *supplice* furnished—the overt expression of the sovereign’s will to power. For the public torture-execution “is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies, by which power is manifested.” The aim of the public execution “is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, at its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.” Thus “the public execution did not re-establish justice; it reactivated power.”²²

With their humanitarian reforms of the penal régime, the humanists of the Enlightenment, as Foucault notes to his chagrin, soon put an end to the magnificent theatre of terror and the splendid display of sovereign power: public torture disappeared; incarceration became the predominant penal form; and in time, even the executions ceased to be public. Again the Grand Narrative of Pancratism finds humanism

guilty of sinning against power and the desire for it: its reforms of the penal system signaled the end of sovereign power and the beginning of disciplinary power. Foucault's regret at this development is again tangible in the manner in which he applies his eloquence—it is celebratory for the former, contemptuous for the latter. The logic and rhetoric of Foucault's Grand Narrative of pancratism reveals his preference by highlighting the *splendor* of the absolutist *ancien régime's* display of sovereign power, and by stressing the *drabness* of the disciplining power of a liberal society.

The Second Vignette: Revolutionary Popular Power. Not that Foucault's imagination is exclusively siding with the power of the sovereign, when describing the various *supplices*: on the contrary. Authentic power could be exercised and displayed also by the populace—the crowd that attended the executions. Depending on the circumstances and the character of the condemned man, these crowds would occasionally turn the spectacles of the public torture-execution into “momentary saturnalia”: “there was a whole aspect of the carnival, in which rules were inverted, authority mocked and criminals transformed into heroes” (*D&P* 60–61). The attending crowd would at times intervene in various ways: by attacking the executioner and the attending magistrates; by trying to free, occasionally with success, the condemned man, if the punishment was regarded as unjust or class-biased; or by creating disturbances of all kinds, even rioting.

This is *popular power in its embryonic state*. Popular power was the topic of the debates Foucault held with Noam Chomsky on “Human Nature: Justice versus Power,” and with militant fellow-Maoists on “Popular Justice.” Here Foucault elaborated on fully-fledged popular power, espousing in the process an extreme form of political violence. In the debate with Chomsky, Foucault first disposed of the notion of human nature: “Mao Tse-tung spoke of bourgeois human nature and proletarian human nature, and he considers that they are not the same thing”; then put a Maoist

spin on his cratological reduction of justice to a tool of power: “if justice is at stake in a struggle, then it is as an instrument of power . . . Rather than thinking of the social struggle in terms of ‘justice,’ one has to emphasize justice in terms of the social struggle.” Thus “the proletariat doesn’t wage war against the ruling class because it considers such a war to be just.” Far from it: “the proletariat makes war with the ruling class, because, for the first time in history, it wants to take power. And because it will overthrow the power of the ruling class it considers such a war to be just.” A stunned Chomsky couldn’t believe what he was hearing; in reacting to his protest, Foucault did one better, raising with great gusto Chomsky’s hackles with even stronger stuff. Here is Foucault at the height of his Nietzschean Maoism: “When the proletariat takes power, it may be quite possible that the proletariat will exert towards the classes over which it has just triumphed, a violent, dictatorial, and even bloody power.”²³ And for good measure he adds: “I can’t see what objection one could make to this.”

In the same vein, Foucault gave short shrift to the Maoists’ proposed revolutionary tribunals for dealing with the defeated class enemy—not because these would amount to kangaroo courts (which they would), but because of their institutional form.²⁴ As a model of popular justice he cited the September Massacres of 1792, when a revolutionary mob stormed the prisons of Paris and slaughtered the incarcerated members of the aristocracy and the clergy. *Popular justice manifests itself as popular power*—raw, pure, and simple, with all the sanguinary violence and cruelty that go with it. The revolutionary people must exercise their newly-gained power without institutional props—directly, spontaneously, vigorously, violently, turning it into a Sadean-Nietzschean-Bataillean festival of cruelty: “a certain number of ancient rites which were features of ‘pre-judicial’ justice, have been preserved in the practices of popular justice”—one of them being the practice of parading the severed heads of the class enemy on stakes, as was indeed done during the September

Massacres.²⁵ This revolutionary exercise of the will to power is the plebeian answer to the sovereign's ostentatious display of power through the torture-executions under the *ancien régime*. Here authentic power takes the form of revolutionary lynch mob violence.²⁶

The Third Vignette: The Condemned Man as Hero. Foucault found yet another thrill in the *supplice*: it served the display not only of the sovereign's power and occasionally of embryonic popular power, but also, potentially, of that of the condemned man: if he was one of the great criminals, one of the daring and indomitable rogues, he would, having "nothing more to lose, curse the judges, the laws, the government and religion": "under the protection of imminent death," as Foucault put it paradoxically, he "could say everything and the crowd cheered" (*D&P* 60). Then the condemned man's glorying in his transgression of the law and his challenge to the sovereign's power would manifest *his* power: subjected to the "art of unbearable sensations" without giving in, he would turn the *supplice* into his great hour.

The story of a young murderer in the nineteenth century, Pierre Rivière, convicted in 1835, provides a case of the condemned man as a *tragic* hero:²⁷ having asserted his power through a Sadean *acte gratuit* by slaughtering his mother and his siblings at a time when the new penal regime was already in force, he was declared a delinquent in need of treatment, not punishment; so his death sentence was commuted to incarceration, and he became the object of the disciplinary and normalizing professions. He got his day in court, but was deprived of his hour on the scaffold, Foucault notes with deep regret: tragically, his glorious crime was not, as he had planned, crowned by a glorious death.

What fascinated Foucault and made him fall "under the spell of the parricide with the reddish-brown eyes," was not only that an impoverished peasant succeeded in arrogating power to himself through an enormous crime, but that he also wrote a memoir discoursing on his murder. "The mur-

der and the narrative of the murder were consubstantial,” Foucault writes, and then speaks of their beauty and of a “sort of reverence . . . and terror for a text which was to carry four corpses along with it.”

The Fourth Vignette: Fascist Power. In contrast to his constant denigration of democratic societies, Foucault comes up with some very startling things to say about totalitarian regimes when discussing the films *Lacombe Lucien* by Louis Malle and *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani:

Nazism never gave people any material advantages, it never handed out *anything but power*. You still have to ask why it was, if this regime was nothing but a bloody dictatorship, that on May 3rd, 1945, there were still Germans who fought to the last drop of blood; whether these people didn't have some form of emotional attachment to power. —You have to bear in mind the way power was delegated, distributed within the very heart of the population; you have to bear in mind this vast transfer of power that Nazism carried out in a society like Germany. . . . A crucial characteristic of Nazism [is] . . . its deep penetration inside the masses and the fact that a part of the power was actually delegated to a specific fringe of the masses. This is where the word ‘dictatorship’ becomes true in general, and relatively false. When you think of the power an individual could possess under a Nazi regime as soon as he was simply S.S. or signed up in the Party! You could actually kill your neighbor, steal his wife, his house. . . . In this kind of regime the most repulsive (but in a sense the *most intoxicating*) part of power was given to a considerable number of people. The S.S. was that which was given the power to kill, to rape.²⁸

As an analysis this might be arguable. But the implied evaluative comparison in terms of self-effacing disciplinary power and overt authentic power renders it profoundly disconcerting: Bataille influence is unmistakable in this evaluation. It is particularly disconcerting in light of a Russian film of 1965, *The Ordinary Fascism* by Michael Romm, which exhibits photographs found on fallen German soldiers that showed them amusing themselves with the brutal slaughter

of civilians (decapitation with an axe, etc.). Note well that these were ordinary soldiers of the Wehrmacht, enjoying the *intoxicating power* that Nazism had delegated to them.

The Fifth Vignette: The Political Spirituality of the Iranian Revolution. In 1978, Foucault acted as a special correspondent of Italian and French journals in Teheran, reporting on the Iranian Revolution.²⁹ Here he quickly assumed, with ever-growing enthusiasm, the role of the panegyrist. This came as a surprise, if not as a shock, to friends and foes alike. But it shouldn't have: it was all vintage Foucault.

Foucault discerned in the Iranian revolution a "political spirituality" informing and invigorating popular power; and by extolling "political spirituality," he continued his denigration of Western democracy for lacking it due to its secular culture. He vigorously argued for an "Islamic government," for fear that otherwise the revolution might end up, as some forces within the revolutionary movement under the influence of Western ideas were intending, with a liberal-democratic system and its legalism. *Quelle horreur!* The Iranian revolution is the "insurrection of men with bare hands who want to lift the fearful weight, the weight of the entire world that bears down on each of us . . . It is perhaps the first great insurrection against global systems, the form of revolt that is the most modern and the most insane." *Insane*, to be sure, is laudatory with the author of *Madness and Civilization*, because it is directed against Western reason; as is, for once, the term *modern*, here used to characterize the Islamic government as "something very old and also very far into the future, a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet, but also of advancing toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience." (Thus "modern" should really read "postmodern.") This renders, by comparison, Western modernity a dead weight and modernization an "archaism"; and that's why he admired in Shi'ite Islam a "religion of combat and sacrifice."

Postmodern death-cult, in turn, had Foucault grow fascinated with the mourning rituals for the dead martyrs: these became powerful demonstrations, from which, under the attack by police and military, new martyrs would arise. He identified a “collective will,” “perfectly unified” whose “focal point” is Ayatollah Khomeini—a collective will fired by a universal love for the “old saint” which “everyone individually feels for him.”

All this reads like the description of a Bataillean ecstatic community. Its elements and components are all there: the *sacred*; *death* and sacrifice; *collective self-immolation* of masses of subjects; *myth* and *ritual*, especially death rituals; *insanity* extolled as rejection of rationality; the *perfectly unified collective will*; *affective politics* expressed in the masses’ universal love for the Ayatollah, the *sovereign* “almost mythical leader.” Transgression and heterogeneity abound. As in Bataille, it is a totalitarian regime that exemplifies the ecstatic community; it, too, is extolled by being played off against liberal democracy. Foucault’s celebration of the Islamic revolution coincided, right under his eyes, with its giving rise to a totalitarian theocracy, announcing itself through summary executions of homosexuals, the persecution of Jews, and the oppression of women. It was like a return of the *ancien régime* with its public executions (hangings from cranes) and torture-executions (stonings).

Different though they are, these vignettes of power have a common denominator: they are associated with Foucault’s aversion to societies of liberal or social democracy and their régimes of self-effacing power with its invisible hand. Such aversion seems to be the ineluctable heritage from Nietzsche and Bataille. Needless to say, yet stated all the same, Foucault, as the creative thinker and writer that he was, could live and work only in societies that he was in the habit of denouncing, with his notorious flamboyance, as carceral archipelagos. Foucauldians view all this as a fascinating paradox, but it is simply a lived incoherence.

FROM ICONOCLASM TO MESSIANISM:
THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF DECONSTRUCTION

“What remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, . . . an idea of justice—which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights. . . . And deconstruction is mad about this kind of justice. Mad about this desire for justice.”

—Jacques Derrida

DECONSTRUCTION REVEALS itself as a totalizing metanarrative in several modes. Through its “axial proposition . . . that there is *nothing* outside the text,”³⁰ it presents itself as a *pantextualism* (*à la* “all the world’s a text, and all the men and women merely readers”). Thus, what ordinarily passes for extra-textual reality, say, historical events such as wars and revolutions, are declared by Paul de Man to be “texts masquerade[ing] in the guise of wars and revolutions,” while “death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament.”³¹ Asserting that writing is prior to speaking as the condition of its possibility, it sets itself up against logocentrism as a *grammatocentrism*—as totalizing as it accuses logocentrism of being. Designed to subvert the claim of *any* text and discourse to an adequate ground—to a *logos* that enables it to produce a stable, determinate, decidable, and coherent meaning or truth—deconstruction operates as a totalizing *negative hermeneutics*. As a negative hermeneutics, patent in poststructuralism’s wholesale assault on Western rationality, its grand narrative is in its origins largely iconoclastic.

ICONOCLASTIC DECONSTRUCTION

ITS CHIEF NARRATOR, Jacques Derrida has been dubbed by a Swiss journal *Herr der Brüche*, “Lord of Ruptures.” The sobriquet is apt, as iconoclastic Deconstruction’s aim is indeed

the exposure of ruptures and their subversive force in texts and discourses. To savor its Grand Narrative one has to go along, counter-intuitively, with a certain topsy-turviness in its main tenets. The *priority of writing over speaking* is one of them; *reality equaling textuality*, another. A third one derives from deconstruction's idiosyncratic reading of Saussurian linguistics,³² according to which the material elements of language (phonemes, signifiers) and of its conceptual meanings (the signifieds) are constituted through opposition to, and difference from, other phonetic and semantic elements. The deconstructionist reading has the linguistic sign (= signifier + signified) attain its identity from differential relations as the condition of its possibility: hence its bizarre and mind-boggling tenet of the *priority of difference over identity*.

Now, the linguistic sign, arising as it does out of such a differential matrix, is said to connote all the differences from which it sprang as the basis of its identity. This makes the determination of meaning problematic: so much so that meaning is declared *indeterminate*, or rather its determination *deferred indefinitely*. Thus it is not just difference that is operative in the production of linguistic signs and their meanings, but *difference cum deferral*. Both terms are fused in Derrida's neologism *différance*, exploiting the double meaning of French *différer* ('to differ'/'to defer'). *Différance*, then, denotes both the production of meaning from *difference* and the simultaneous *deferral of its determination*. Hence the Grand Narrative's postulate of the *fundamental indeterminacy* and *undecidability of meaning* in all linguistic entities: every linguistic entity, by virtue of its being embedded in a polysemic network of differential/ 'differential' relations, has an overabundance—a surplus, an overload—of signification whose various elements are at odds with one another, thus preventing *univocal meaning from being determined and decided*. As a result, the determination of meaning is postponed to the Greek Calends. (Obviously, the meaning of deconstructionist tenets is exempted from funda-

mental indeterminacy and undecidability; for they are treated as determinate self-evident truths and eternal verities: a deconstructionist ceases behaving as a deconstructionist, as much as Nietzsche ceases acting as a perspectivist and skeptic, when they are advancing their own philosophical enterprises.)

Différance, then, is deconstruction's principal and originary (and yes, Derrida's protestations notwithstanding, *foundational* and *unifying*)³³ force, inscribed in the very tissue of language—quaking, quivering, and reverberating in each and every one of its textual and discursive productions. Universally operative in all texts and all discourses, *différance* both *generates* effects of meaning and truth and, by holding their determination in interminable abeyance by the play of differences, *undermines* them at the same time. In this way, the movement of *différance* is said to impart to language and discourse a Dionysian turbulence and disorder, and, what is the same, inscribe in them deconstruction as an inherent force (of which more below). As Roland Barthes remarked in an *obiter dictum*: poststructuralism seeks to show not the order but the *disorder* of a text. Or, as the *Herr der Brüche* would have it, not the coherence of a text but its ruptures.

Nevertheless, the texts and discourses of the Western intellectual tradition are generally assumed to make the rightful claim that there is at their center a grounding and controlling *logos* in one form or another, giving rise to an intelligible textual order; and that they arguably do express and constitute a degree of semantic stability in the form of decidable and determinate meanings and truths. The Grand Narrative of deconstruction concedes this, but it hastens to add that this is all a phantasmagoria fabricated through a ruse of logocentrism: ever since Plato, we are told, Western logocentrism has been, and still is, attempting, with apparent success, to arrest or, if you will, freeze the movement of *différance*. By forcing a freeze on its Dionysian turbulence, it is extracting from, or forcing on, texts determinate meaning and decidable univocal truth, eclipsing in the act the differ-

ential tissue that is the origin of all signification. In the process Western logocentrism, so the grand narratives goes, either coercively assimilates and homogenizes, or, failing that, excludes, marginalizes, and represses all that which does not fit the conceptual order and determinate meaning it is said to have arbitrarily extracted from, or forced on, texts and discourses. In short, by freezing the movement of *différance* (and suppressing the inherent self-deconstruction) in texts, logocentrism does violence to all that is *other* than itself. It stands accused of wholesale repression of *alterity*. But *différance* does not take it lying down. This core force of language strikes back by mobilizing the army of deconstructors to unfreeze *différance*, by re-activating the inherent deconstruction of texts and discourses: it has the repressed Other return in the form of paradoxes, aporias, incoherences, illogicalities, and contradictions that subvert the seemingly stable meaning of the texts and turn their apparent logocentric order into Dionysian chaos. The “deconstruction of all the significations that have their source in that of the *logos*,” and “particularly the signification of truth,”³⁴ is to restore the reign of *différance*. *Différance* exacts merciless vengeance from logocentrically ordered texts for having tried to escape it. In the end these texts, hitherto merely indeterminate and undecidable as to their meaning, are determinately and decidedly reduced to clusters of paradoxes, self-contradictions, and aporias—and predictably so, as this is deconstruction’s routine. With every deconstructive operation, Logocentrism takes a whacking—but hey, didn’t it ask for it?

As deconstruction is said to be *inscribed in all texts and all discourses*, the procedure of Derridean–de Manian deconstruction is simply to lay bare the inherent self-deconstruction in texts and discourses against the imposed logocentric order, meaning, and claimed truth.³⁵ As Derrida puts it for the areas of law, politics, and history, for instance, “the very movement of deconstruction [is always already] at work in law and history of law, in political history and history itself,

before it even presents itself as the discourse that the academy or modern culture labels ‘deconstructionism.’”³⁶ Here is, in a nutshell, this inherent deconstructive process, pithily articulated by North America’s paramount deconstructor of literary texts, J. Hillis Miller:

The deconstructive critic seeks to find, by [the] process of retracing, the element in the system studied that is alogical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or the loose stone which will pull down the whole building. The deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text *has already annihilated the ground*, knowingly or unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that *it has already dismantled itself*. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air.³⁷

The strikingly raw negativity is patent in the verbs that describe the deconstructive operation: “unravel,” “pull down,” “annihilate,” “dismantle”. There are the occasional affirmative claims: that deconstruction is bearing witness to the repressed Other and aids its re-assertion, restoring in the process the vibrant life of a Dionysian turbulence and liberating anarchy to language that logocentrism is said to stifle. But the forms in which deconstruction has the Other assert itself belie this claim: paradox and aporia, by their very nature, effect in texts and discourses not turbulent life, but the opposite—paralysis, death.

Equally striking in Miller’s concise description is the inadvertent disclosure that deconstruction’s conclusions are always already built into its premises—thus its routine procedure amounts to one huge *petitio principii*. Feed any text, any discourse into the preprogrammed interpretative machine called deconstruction, and you know in advance that it will inevitably come out at the other end, with depressing regularity and predictability,³⁸ as an ensemble of undecidable aporias and paradoxes—as a text or discourse turned against itself, with hidden ruptures laid bare, its structure collapsed, its meaning imploded. Miller’s decon-

structive reading of Wordsworth's poem *A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal*³⁹ is a paradigmatic case in point. By smuggling into it all sorts of thematic and referential contraband, the deconstructive critic turns the poem into a cluster of contradictory significations. The overall experience is to be, in Miller's description, that of "an aporia or boggling of the mind." It is an arbitrary procedure that is to make sure that the outcome is always what the totalizing grand narrative of deconstruction has postulated and known all along: namely, that *all* texts will turn out to be self-lacerating, aporetic, self-contradictory, full of fissures and internal ruptures—in short, self-deconstructive.

This negative hermeneutics is innocuous as long as it is confined to study and classroom, and concerns literary and philosophical texts: these are robust enough to recover, once the shock of being subjected to a deconstructive mauling has worn off. But as a totalizing (and "potentially totalitarian")⁴⁰ Grand Narrative, deconstruction has set its sights on the *whole* of the metaphysical foundations of Western thought and *all* its discourses. In domains such as ethics, politics, and the law, deconstructive subversion is anything but innocuous: there its acid proves downright toxic. When applied to political, ethical, and juridical discourses, it creates a normative void. Then deconstruction's latent nihilism comes to the fore. In fact, *deconstruction in legal studies* goes proudly by the names of "legal nihilism" and "legal irrationalism," celebrating the "disappearance of the Rights of Man with Man's own disappearance,"⁴¹ while trashing the law and its rule without offering anything in its place.

"HYPER-POLITICIZING DECONSTRUCTION"

TO COUNTER THE charge frequently brought against deconstruction that it is antipolitical and interested in ethics and politics only as objects of its deconstructive acid, thus paralyzing the moral and political will—in short, to counter the charge of sheer negativity and nihilism—Derrida decided to

reposition deconstruction towards a constructive purpose. And so the Grand Narrative of deconstruction changed register. There arose talk of an ethical turn, also of a political turn—the word *turn* implying that formerly said charges were well founded. Deconstruction’s ethical-political turn was twofold: one was the appropriation of the guardianship over the memory of the Shoah (on which more below). The other was the enunciation of an ethically-grounded politics of deconstruction.

Derrida had always insisted that deconstruction, contrary to all appearances, was not anti- or apolitical—it’s quite the opposite, he asserted with his usual bravado: deconstruction is “hyper-politicizing,” though “in following paths and codes which are clearly not traditional.”⁴² He also asserted: “Deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say also *in the tradition* of a certain Marxism, in a certain *spirit of Marxism*.”⁴³ It hasn’t been possible hitherto to enunciate the politics of deconstruction, Derrida explained, because “the available codes for taking such a political stance are not at all adequate to the *radicality of deconstruction*,”⁴⁴ hopelessly metaphysical and logocentric as these codes are. But once a non-metaphysical, non-logocentric code would be available—after the necessary dismantling of the logocentric discourses of politics and political philosophy—then, the Grand Narrative suggests, a politics of deconstruction could be articulated in terms of its inherent hyper-politicizing radicality. But how in the world would deconstruction, hard-wired as it is to find in all texts and discourses (and everywhere else) rupture, aporia, paradox, incoherence, disorder, slippage, indeterminacy, undecidability, self-laceration—how would deconstruction ever succeed in developing a code adequate to its vaunted political radicalness? Shouldn’t one conceive of its politics *in terms of disorder* in which deconstruction luxuriates when it creates it in texts and discourses? Shouldn’t one therefore expect a transfer of textual chaos to the political domain, resulting in some sort of anar-

chism informed by Legal Nihilism's declaration of the death of law and its rule? Alternatively, and more ominously, shouldn't the political radicalness of deconstruction be gleaned from Derrida's occasional apocalyptic *invocation of the monstrous*, when foreshadowing a future for deconstructionist free-play? Deconstruction intends, the Lord of Ruptures had once announced, "a violent production of meaning" that "emerges at a given moment as a *monster, a monstrous mutation without tradition or normative precedent*";⁴⁵ one that "tries to pass beyond man and humanism," as he proclaimed in his quasi-manifesto "Structure, Sign and Play" of 1970: deconstruction has set its sight on a future, "as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and *terrifying form of monstrosity*."⁴⁶ Terrifying indeed: it gives one the creeps.

"MAD ABOUT JUSTICE": MESSIANIC DECONSTRUCTION

YET IN THE end the Lord of Ruptures decided *not for the monstrous but for the ineffable*.⁴⁷ To the bewildered surprise of followers and critics alike, he decreed: "Deconstruction is justice."⁴⁸ He presented the politics and ethics of deconstruction as the "infinite idea of justice" and the concomitant idea of a "democracy to come."⁴⁹ But had not both justice and democracy been deconstructed long ago, belonging, as they do, to logocentric codes, and thus rendered unusable? How, then, could they buttress deconstruction's claim to political radicality? Answer: Derrida did not have in mind the justice and democracy of ordinary parlance, infested as they are with logocentrism. What he did have in mind were concepts of justice and democracy, kept strictly separate from our logocentric notions of justice and democracy that are associated with law, right, and human rights. Deconstruction's notions are messianic:

Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice—which *we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights*—and an idea of democracy—which *we distinguish from its current concept* and from its determined predicates today.⁵⁰

A “messianic without messianism”—vintage Derrida! Here is the decisive passage elaborating on *deconstruction as justice*:

We can already see . . . that the deconstruction of all presumption of a determinant certitude of a present justice itself operates on the basis of an infinite “idea of justice,” infinite because it is irreducible, irreducible because owed to the other, owed to the other, before any contract, because it has come, the other’s coming as the singularity that is always other. This “idea of justice” seems to be irreducible in its affirmative character, in its demand of gift without exchange, without circulation, without recognition or gratitude, without economic circularity, without calculation and without rules, without reason and without rationality. And so we can recognize in it, indeed accuse, identify a madness. And perhaps another sort of mystique. And deconstruction is mad about this kind of justice. Mad about this desire for justice.

Note the Bataille echoes. Derrida goes on:

This kind of justice, which isn’t law, is the very movement of deconstruction at work in law and history of law, in political history and history itself, before it even presents itself as the discourse that the academy or modern culture labels “deconstructionism.”⁵¹

“Justice as the *possibility of deconstruction*; the structure of law (*droit*), the foundation of the self-authorization of law (*droit*), as the *possibility of the exercise of deconstruction*.” Derrida adds archly: “I’m sure this isn’t altogether clear.”⁵² Which indeed it isn’t. The Lord of Ruptures speaks in post-structuralist tongues, and with a mystical-messianic accent at that.

Let us try to translate it into ordinary parlance. The keyword here is *singularity*, irreducible singularity, that is, and

its claimed right to the integrity of its uniqueness. As the ethical base of its politics, deconstruction claims that its notion of justice is able to open itself to the “otherness of the Other” and to “*singularity* that is always Other.” Logocentrism, bound up as it is with generality and universality, is not able to do that: it cannot accommodate the *Other qua singularity* without robbing it of its uniqueness. For it would perforce turn singularity into particularity; that would subsume it under, and assimilate it to, the general and universal, and thus destroy it as singularity. That’s why Derrida “will consistently try to distinguish law (*droit*) from justice” (i.e., deconstructible law from indeconstructible justice): deconstruction’s infinite idea of justice “isn’t law,” it is “outside or beyond law.”⁵³ Law (*droit, loi*), then, is and remains for ever a logocentric ass: it is singularity-destroying; and its rule can give rise at best to legality but never to justice. It’s the stink of generality that is attached to the logocentric notion of justice, based as it is on law and its rule, and in need of being *enforced* through various institutions (hence “*force* of law” in Derrida’s title, instead of “*rule* of law”).

Deconstruction’s equation with the infinite idea of justice as messianic promise furnishes its negative labor retroactively with an affirmative *telos*. It consists in preparing the advent of messianic justice and its democracy *à-venir* by deconstructing the impediments to it—namely the logocentric notion of justice and democracy along with the discourses of legality, legitimacy, and legitimation. One could perhaps read all this as Derrida’s oblique retroactive repudiation of legal nihilism.

DERRIDEAN DECISIONISM

THE NEGATIVE LABOR of deconstruction, then, is designed to clear the ground for *indeconstructible* “justice as the experience of absolute alterity.” It is their postulated *indeconstructibility* that deconstruction and its “infinite idea of justice” have in common and that actually makes them one

(“deconstruction is justice”). Yet this postulate arbitrarily exempts both from universal deconstructibility that deconstructive doctrine decrees. More importantly, *why* “deconstruction is justice,” Derrida does not and *cannot* say, given that deconstruction is the discourse of the undecidable (undecidable, that is, on rational grounds): with all rationality and normativity deconstructed, he can only arbitrarily posit it by way of a kind of *decision*—a decision that “becomes instantly independent of argumentative substantiation and receives an autonomous value”; and that, “looked at normatively, . . . emanates from nothingness.”⁵⁴ These last two citations are not the words of Derrida but those of Carl Schmitt, chief theorist of *Decisionism*: a doctrine of political existentialism, as we recall,⁵⁵ replacing *ratio* by *voluntas* and being thus unencumbered by any logical, ethical, and legal norms. It centers on the pure sovereign *decision*: “The decision frees itself from all normative ties and becomes in the true sense absolute.” Schmitt’s words aptly describe Derrida’s decision: in fact, decisionism is inscribed in deconstruction inasmuch as it is the discourse of the undecidable that only allows, nay requires, the *arbitrary decision*.⁵⁶ Decisionism, in turn, can be described as a form of politico-legal deconstruction *avant la lettre*, the sort of “legal nihilism” and “legal irrationalism,” which the deconstructors in legal studies take pride in. One discerns in it the anti-universalist bent of deconstruction: decisionism valorizes and prioritizes the sovereign decision *ex nihilo* over normativity; the exception over the rule; the state of exception (*Ausnahmezustand*) over constitutional normalcy. It is in the state of exception that the sovereign decision is most pronounced; witness Schmitt’s lapidary definition of sovereignty that forms the opening paragraph of *Political Theology*: “Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception.” The deconstructive nature of decisionism comes clearly out in Schmitt’s paean to the exception: “The exception is more interesting than the rule . . . In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid

with repetition.” Most pronounced is Schmitt’s deconstructive tenor when he proclaims: “the norm is destroyed in the exception”; while the decision on the state of exception “confounds the unity and the order of the rationalist scheme” (aka deconstruction’s *bête noire*: logocentrism).

However, Derrida’s decisionism differs from Young-Conservative decisionism in one very welcome respect. The Young-Conservative decisions had always opted for power, force, violence, dictatorship, and had sided with totalitarianism. What counts in decisionism is *making a decision* regardless of why, and for what, the decision is made: decisionism’s pure decision, decision as such, indeterminate as to any content, meaning, direction or purpose, could be for anything. Thus, theoretically, it would not exclude a decision for constitutional order, normativity, rule of law, justice, freedom, or democracy. But such choices went decidedly against the grain of decisionism’s intellectual framers and its Young-Conservative espousers. With Derrida, however, the decision is *for justice* and *democracy*, albeit—embedded as they are in the mystical and messianic—his justice-to-come and his democracy-to-come belong to the realm of the *ineffable*. Necessarily so, for otherwise they would become language, thereby subject to *différance* and to deconstruction; and would thus lose their blessed status as indeconstructibles.

Conceived as a messianism, deconstruction remains true to its principle of interminable deferral: the fulfillment of the messianic promise of an infinite justice and democracy-to-come is, like linguistic meaning and truth, forever deferred, postponed *ad Kalendas Graecas*. Instead of fulfilling his promise of a concrete politics of deconstruction, Derrida has made deconstruction promise a justice and democracy, which, marked as the “experience of the impossible,” remain perpetually *à-venir*, as is the way of the messianic: “Justice remains, is yet, to come, *à venir*, it has an, it is *à-venir*, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come. It will always have it, this *à-venir*, and always has . . . Justice

as the experience of absolute alterity is unrepresentable, but it is the chance of the event and the condition of history.”⁵⁷ Likewise democracy:

For democracy remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future, but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come: even when there is democracy, it never exists, it is never present, it remains the theme of a non-presentable concept.⁵⁸

There is no escape from speaking in tongues. What, then, does the hyper-politicizing radicality of deconstruction amount to? Answer: to deconstruction affiliated with Marxism and its inherent messianism. But it is a voided Marxism—“Marxism without Marxism,” as Eagleton puts it⁵⁹—and an equally voided Messianism—“Messianism without religion,” “a messianic without Messianism,” as Derrida himself puts it. True to type, deconstruction’s messianic politics has *indeterminacy* written all over it. Derrida’s messianic justice and democracy, mired in paradox and aporia, do not make for a viable politics—it is not of this world anyway. To transcend the negativity of deconstruction Derrida has made the decisionist leap into messianism, while its tenet of indeterminacy has remained intact. That renders it, as Terry Eagleton comments, a “curiously empty, formalistic messianism”: there is “a perpetual excited openness to the Messiah who had better not let us down by doing anything as determinate as coming.”⁶⁰ He won’t, as an Israeli 2001 hit tune has it: “the Messiah is not coming—and He’s not even going to call.”⁶¹ Instead of an ethico-political turn, the metanarrative of deconstruction has taken a religious-mystical turn.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND THE SHOAH

THE HYPER-POLITICIZING that the deconstructive Grand Narrative offers may not amount to much of an ethics and an ethically grounded politics. But poststructuralism deems

itself to be holding an ethico-political trump-card at a site where one would least expect it: the Shoah. In Paul de Man's version of deconstructive textualism, Auschwitz would be, like wars and revolutions, a text masquerading in the guise of a genocide. But to say that Auschwitz was a masquerading text, or to say even more provocatively, that death in the gas chamber was a "displaced name for a linguistic predicament"⁶² wouldn't fly. It would be frivolous and offensive in the extreme. Consequently, where the Shoah is concerned, poststructuralism acts quite out of character: gone are the notorious insouciance and irony, with playfulness yielding to a grave solemn air and a reverent tone of voice. Deconstructors go out of their way to concede that the Shoah was a historical *fact* "outside the text" and that there is a *truth* about it without the queasy quotation marks. In the case of the Shoah, textualist doctrine seems to be suspended.

Poststructuralism has, or thinks it has, sewn up the holocaust as its very own theme, claiming to represent the most profound response to it. It has usurped it as its exclusive domain; and has in the process appointed itself the custodian of its memory; the overseer of the proper labor of mourning; the possessor of its truth. In *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*, Robert Eaglestone takes up all these claims and enhances them by asserting "that postmodernism in the West begins with thinking about the Holocaust, that postmodernism—understood as poststructuralism . . . is a response to the Holocaust"; and then reiterates poststructuralism's extraordinary claim that it "marks the *most profound* attempt to do this." He is fully aware that

this point of view will raise hackles with those who understand postmodernism as being centrally concerned with, on the one hand, playfulness, pastiche, irony, a superficiality beyond caring about truth and falsity, and so on, and on the other hand, academic obscurantism and elitism, removed from wider, more worldly concerns. It will raise worse than hackles with those who see postmodernism as an excessive valorization of irrationalism or

overburdened with the legacy of Martin Heidegger and his strong philosophical connections to Nazism. Indeed, sometimes in good faith and sometimes not, the Holocaust has been invoked as a “test case” for postmodern ideas.⁶³

Those whose hackles are raised are in for a surprise: “these understandings of the postmodern,” Eaglestone assures them, “fail to take into account both its central and consistent commitment to ethics and its *rigorous, rational* side: that is, postmodernism does *not reject rationality*, but is aware of the limits and the processes of rationality.”⁶⁴ So the pronounced and constantly advertised misology of postmodernism is in truth and in fact only some sort of unexceptionable Kantian critique of reason! But how does the glib deconstruction of ethics and morality; its perpetual denigration of reason and rationality as logocentric totalitarianism, disguised power, terror, and torture; its total contestation of Western civilization as incurably infested with logocentrism—how does all this jibe with postmodernism’s alleged “central and consistent commitment to ethics and its rigorous, rational side”? Well, it doesn’t. In view of postmodernism’s notorious deconstructive dismantling of ethics, truth, and rationality, Eaglestone’s sanitizing apologetics sounds like a frivolous joke whose point it is hard to discern.

One of those uses of the Holocaust as a “‘test case’ for postmodern ideas” is poststructuralism’s forging of the Shoah into the main weapon of its anti-Enlightenment strategy and its war on logocentrism. Nazism’s extermination of the European Jewry represents the epitome of irrationalism. In essence, Nazism is the extremist translation of the anti-Enlightenment discourse into political practice. Arising, as it did, from its notorious irrationalist blood-and-soil ideology with its inherent racialism as well as from fascism’s affective politics of blind hatred and fear of demonized Jews, Nazism’s anti-Semitism culminated in genocide. At the same time, Nazism’s misology was fused with a radical anti-humanism and anti-subjectivism. The Nazis did not merely kill the hated and feared Jews: prior to depriving them of their lives, they

deprived them of their subjectivity and their humanity, by replacing their names with numbers tattooed into their flesh—the most drastic deconstruction of the self imaginable. As postmodernism incessantly tries to dismantle the modern self by unmasking it as a “self,” namely as a mere linguistic or social construction, the question arises: what was it that the Nazis deprived their victims of, when at Auschwitz they reduced them to tattooed numbers—a self or a “self”?

Poststructuralists have been at pains to paint Nazism as an Enlightenment phenomenon, as a logocentrism and a humanism; and have passed off Auschwitz as the ultimate crime of Enlightenment humanism and reason. Poststructuralism understands itself as a guard that will do its utmost to prevent Enlightenment reason from repeating its crime. The poststructuralist slogan “Nazism is a humanism”⁶⁵ is a patent absurdity. The talk of the alleged rationality of Nazism is hardly less preposterous. Its rationality is said to lie in the efficiency of its logistics, with which it organized the genocide. If one wants to call this rationality, it is at most instrumental reason: a subaltern form of rationality that can be deployed for rational as well as irrational ends. There can be method in the madness; and sane means can serve mad objects: “All my means are sane,” says Melville’s Captain Ahab, “my motive and my object mad.” But not even in the modest terms of instrumental reason did Nazism behave rationally: its mad motive and object, the extermination of the European Jewry, made it divert from the war effort necessary resources for which the *Wehrmacht* was desperately clamoring in order to secure victory; and without a victorious *Wehrmacht* the genocidal project could not be completed. So much for Nazism as the progeny of Enlightenment reason!

Yet this is not all. As anti-Enlightenment thinkers, postmodernists are attracted to the prominent anti-Enlightenment authors of the twentieth century: Heidegger, Schmitt, Caillois, Artaud, Jünger, Bataille, Blanchard, Céline, de Man et al. are all thinkers, shaped in their thought by Nietzsche and tainted by their flirtations, in some cases by sustained li-

aitions and even lasting marriages, with Fascism and Nazism.⁶⁶ In various ways and in different degrees, these authors have provided philosophical, ideological, legal, or political aid to the perpetrators of the crime of Auschwitz. They all are also, to a man, saints in the postmodern calendar. It takes a lot of nerve to hold the Enlightenment, along with its past thinkers and its present defenders, responsible for the worst crime of the twentieth century and at the same time extol, and draw on the thought of, the Enlightenment's modern enemies who were ideologically complicit with the perpetrators of this crime. In the light of this, it is the height of effrontery that poststructuralists complacently set themselves up as the most profound thinkers on the Shoah and, preposterously blaming this crime on Enlightenment reason, pose as the only authentic guardians against its repetition. With a slogan such as "Nazism is a humanism," postmodernists surely know how to dish it out. But can they also take it, when the tables are turned? In view of its death-cult, its anti-humanism, and its hostility to reason as well as to the rational subject, it would be more apt to view Nazism as a *postmodernism*—a postmodernism *avant la lettre*. All that's missing, since Nazism was of a deadly seriousness, is the irony, the insouciance, and the playfulness of the current postmodernists.

"OF AN APOCALYPTIC TONE RECENTLY ADOPTED IN PHILOSOPHY"
ABOLITION FANTASIES IN POSTMODERN METANARRATIVES

IN THESE GRAND narratives of Postmodernism one can discern a shared pattern and tenor. At some point in the past something went wrong and Western civilization arose, hopelessly infested with logocentrism. It is a sort of fall from grace. The Grand Narratives of Postmodernism describe this in various ways: as Socrates' fusion of rationality and morality, resulting in the destruction of Dionysiac life and the rise of the rule of metaphysics, logocentrism, and *Widernatur*; as the "invention of man" and humanism's negation of power; as the suppres-

sion, marginalization, and elimination of the Other of reason; as the corruption of the will to power, the degeneration of instinct, and the loss of natural rank amidst the rise of slave-morality; as the waning of sovereignty with homogeneity superseding heterogeneity. They all seem to agree that the malaise became acute in modernity with Cartesianism, the rise of subject-centered reason, culminating in Hegel's system in which substance was conceived as subject. Their shared tenor is strangely religious. It's the same old story: the attack on reason always makes room for religion and faith, whether it is Nietzsche's pagan Dionysianism, Bataille's quest for the atheological sacred, Foucault's espousal of Islam's political spirituality, or Derrida's mystical messianism.

A more interesting and ominous feature is the apocalyptic tone that is pervasive in all postmodern grand narratives. Here the discourse of postmodernity is at its most dismal. In the Grand Narrative of Nietzsche, the apocalyptic tenor is most pronounced in its political component, *Grosse Politik*. The powerful Nietzschean current in Postmodernism has imparted this apocalyptic tenor to its grand narratives. It is most palpable in the interminable death-sentencing we noted at the outset, the declarations of the end of all that constitutes Western civilization, amounting to its total contestation.⁶⁷ Derrida's essay on the prevailing apocalyptic tone, already cited in this context, focuses on the general postmodern tendency of "going-one-better in eschatological eloquence" in proclaiming the end of almost anything.⁶⁸ In the notorious ludic manner Derrida has found so congenial, his essay comes down to the standard paradoxes in which poststructuralism so delights and of which it never tires of tiring us: "an apocalypse without apocalypse, an apocalypse without message and destination, without revelation," culminating in "a closure without end, an end without end."⁶⁹ As we have seen, Derridean deconstruction, before it took the messianic turn, had had its own apocalyptic visions, invoking a future in terms of the "formless, mute, infant, and terrifying *form of monstrosity*."⁷⁰ The tone of amused irony notwithstanding, Derrida's

essay does call attention to postmodern apocalyptic abolition fantasies, patently an inheritance from Nietzsche.

A case in point is Derrida's earlier celebration of Artaud's *théâtre de la cruauté* for the radical boldness of its destructive enterprise:

Artaud undertakes neither a renewal, nor a critique, nor a new interrogation of classical theatre; he intends the effective, active, non-theoretical destruction of Western civilization and its religions, the entirety of the philosophy which provides traditional theatre with its groundwork and décor beneath even its more apparently innovative forms.⁷¹

The apocalyptic theme takes an outright violent form in the abolitionist fantasies of Michel Foucault. In that ferocious, feverish, and largely enigmatic Conclusion to *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault invokes the "sovereign enterprise of unreason," taking his starting point from the most famous of Goya's *Caprichos*, "The Sleep of Reason Giving Birth to Monsters." Goya's art, Foucault avers, portrays "the night of classical unreason"; in it

madness has become man's *possibility of abolishing both man and the world* . . . this madness, so foreign to the experience of its contemporaries, does it not transmit—to those who receive it, to Nietzsche and Artaud—those barely audible voices of classical unreason, in which it was always a question of nothingness and night, but amplifying them now to shrieks and frenzy? But giving them for the first time an expression, a *droit de cité*, and a hold on western culture that makes possible *all contestations* as well a *total contestation*? But restoring their primitive savagery?

For de Sade as for Goya, Foucault goes on,

unreason continues to watch by night; but in this vigil it joins with fresh powers. The non-being it once was now becomes *the power to annihilate*. Through Sade and Goya, the Western world received the possibility of *transcending its reason in violence*, and of recovering tragic experience beyond the promise of the dialectic.⁷²

Needless to say, this anti-Enlightenment exegesis is forcing a tendentious Foucauldian spin on Goya's *Capricho*. Goya was of the Enlightenment party: reason's sleep sets free the monsters, which a wakeful reason would hold at bay.

Postmodern destructive abolition fantasy culminates in a truly monstrous Grand Narrative dubbed "anthropofugal philosophy," concocted by a German follower of Nietzsche and Foucault. Foucault's "possibility of abolishing both man and the world" gives rise to advocating an anthropofugal project that invokes Nietzsche, Klages, Cioran, and Foucault as its intellectual authorities: it espouses an entirely nontheoretical antihumanism—as nontheoretical as Artaud's advocacy of the destruction of Western civilization that Derrida's account found so exciting. Yet it goes one better: it advocates the instant annihilation not only of mankind but of the organic world as well, on the grounds that the available arsenal of nuclear weaponry provides the unique opportunity, not to be missed, for returning the planet to the "*beauty and freedom of the inorganic*."⁷³ This is so over the top that one is inclined to view it in the satirical tradition of Swift's *Modest Proposal*; yet the author is not a British satirist but a deep German thinker with nothing so frivolous as satire on his mind.

FINALE. THE TOPSY-TURVY WORLD OF THE DISMAL DISCOURSE

"THE WORD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN" is the title of John R. Searle's *New York Review of Books* essay on deconstruction, adorned by David Levine's delightful cartoon of Jacques Derrida standing on his head.⁷⁴ Searle's witty title is regularly misquoted as "The World Turned Upside Down." But this doesn't matter a great deal: the misquotation, though ruining Searle's fine witticism, amounts to the same. It is a *marotte* of postmodernism's dismal discourse to pun by way of typographical gimmicks, which, given postmodernism's exorbitant metaphysics of language, attain the sta-

tus of ontological assertions. The master gimmick is “wor(l)d,” expressing in a nutshell the basic tenet of postmodernism’s linguistic ontology: that what is held to be reality is in fact and in truth text; that “it is the world of words that creates the world of things” (Jacques Lacan); that “le fait n’a jamais qu’ une existence linguistique” (Roland Barthes)⁷⁵—in short, that *the world is word*. “The Wor(l)d Turned Upside Down” offers the full picture of postmodernism’s vertiginous confusion.

No doubt, postmodernism’s wor(l)d is pronouncedly topsy-turvy: here the written word is prior to the spoken word, as writing is prior to speech; the signifier creates the signified; cause follows effect; the marginal is the true center; truth is a form of fiction; the real a linguistic illusion, as there is “nothing outside the text”; the literal a form of the figurative; philosophy a subdivision of literature; logic a form of rhetoric; sanity a kind of neurosis; madness a liberation from the tyranny of reason; and postmodernism is the nascent state of modernism. In this world Nazi-collaborators turn out to be in fact antifascists, while the critics of Nazi-collaboration are convicted of applying “Nazism’s exterminating gesture”; Nazism figures as a humanism; theorists of liberal democracy are the true totalitarians, while the theorist of plebiscitary dictatorship and the total *Führerstaat* serves as the philosophical guide to true democracy. “Nazism is humanism” and “liberalism is totalitarianism” seem to be coming right out of the paradox-mill of the Ministry of Truth in Orwell’s 1984.

In his satirical novel *Small World*, David Lodge has his formidable character Morris Zapp characterize deconstruction as “the last intellectual thrill left—like sawing through the branch which you’re sitting on.” Jonathan Culler, the most lucid and eloquent doxographer of poststructuralism, welcomes Zapp’s trope as an “instance of Nietzsche’s injunction in *The Gay Science* to ‘live dangerously’” and as “an apt description” of deconstruction’s procedure and of the antifoundationalism of its practitioners: “if they fall

there is no ‘ground’ to hit.”⁷⁶ “Sawing through the branch which you’re sitting on” is a popular metaphor for plain stupidity. In postmodernism’s dismal discourse, it serves as a metaphor for poststructuralism’s sophistication and existential daring. Topsy-turvy indeed! This suggests that the time has come for postmodernism to fade into an embarrassing memory in the life of the humanities. Failure to do so could only confirm the suspicion of many natural scientists that something is rotten in the republic of letters.

NOTES

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

1. M. Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York 1980), 83, 80 (Foucault’s italics).

2. M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, A. Sheridan, tr. (New York 1979), 27. Henceforth quoted in text as bracketed *D&P* with page numbers.

3. On Foucault’s complex relationship to the Enlightenment, see J. Schmidt & T. E. Wartenberg, “Foucault’s Enlightenment: Critique, Revolution, and the Fashioning of the Self,” in M. Kelly, ed., *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge, MA & London 1994), 283–314.

4. M. Foucault, “Two Lectures” (note 1), 105 (emphasis added).

5. *The Foucault Reader*, P. Rabinow, ed., (New York 1984), 299.

6. M. Foucault, “Two Lectures” (note 1), 106.

7. M. Foucault, “Two Lectures” (note 1), 98 (emphasis added).

8. Nancy Fraser, “Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions,” in N. Fraser, *Unruly Practices* (Cambridge 1989), 32: “Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge regime covered a highly heterogeneous collection of phenomena. . . . The problem is that Foucault calls too many different sorts of things power and leaves it at that.”

9. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, R. Hurley, tr. (New York 1990), 86.

10. M. Foucault, “Film and Popular Power,” in *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966–1984*, J. Johnston, tr.; S. Lotringer, ed. (New York 1989), 98–99 (emphasis added).

11. Foucault, “Revolutionary Action: ‘Until Now,’” in M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. D. F.

Bouchard, ed., M. F. Bouchard and S. Simon, tr. (Ithaca, NY 1977), 229.

12. Clifford Geertz, "Stir Crazy," *NYRoB* (26 January 1978), 6.

13. C. Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in C. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge 1985), 152–53. J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA 1987). M. Walzer, "The Lonely Politics of Michel Foucault," in M. Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1988), 191. N. Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions" (see above, note 8).

14. M. Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: 'Until Now'" (note 11), all quotations on 227–28 (emphases added).

15. E. W. Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," in D. C. Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford and New York 1986), 152.

16. See M. Foucault, "Film and Popular Memory," in *Foucault Live* (note 10), 97–98 (emphasis added).

17. M. Foucault, "Revolutionary Action: 'Until Now'" (note 11), 221–22 (emphasis added).

18. F. Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, K. Schlechta, ed., (Munich 1954), II.1029.

19. M. Foucault, "The Discourse on Language"—a curious rendering of the title "L'ordre du discours," Foucault's inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France*, offered as an Appendix to M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, A. M. Sheridan Smith, tr. (New York 1972). The quotations in this paragraph are, in this sequence, from 218, 232, 219.

20. G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, S. Hand, tr. (Minneapolis 1988), 23–24.

21. Quotations in this paragraph from *D&P* (note 2), 49, 51, 11.

22. All quotations in this paragraph from *D&P* 47–49.

23. N. Chomsky/M. Foucault, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in F. Elders, ed., *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind* (London 1974). The quotations are from 174, 180, 182.

24. M. Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists," in M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (note 1), 1–36.

25. "On Popular Justice" (note 24), 6.

26. This is not different from the anarchic mob violence of the SA, the Storm Troopers, the populist wing of the Nazi-movement, during the first months after its seizure of power in 1933, murdering numerous politicians, writers, and Jews in their notorious torture cellars.

27. M. Foucault, ed., *I, Pierre Rivière, Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, and My Brother . . . A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century*, F. Jellinek, tr. (Lincoln, IL and London 1975); quotations in the following are from x, xiii, 200.

28. M. Foucault, "Film and Popular Memory" (note 10), quotations from 101, 100, 99–100 (emphasis added).

29. Most of Foucault's dispatches and articles were for the *Corriere della*

Sera; some for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Le Monde*. They are all reprinted in the Appendix to J. Afary and K.B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago and London 2005), 179ff. I quote from the following pieces: “The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times” (194–95); “Tehran: Faith Against the Shah” (198–203); “What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?” (203–9); “A Revolt With Bare Hands” (210–13); “The Challenge to the Opposition” (213–15); “The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt” (220–23); “Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit” (250–60).

30. J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, G. C. Spivak, tr. (Baltimore and London 1975) 163; also 158. In the original *De la grammatologie* (Paris 1967), one finds “il n’y a rien hors du texte” on 233 (=163 in Spivak’s translation) and “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” on 227 (=158, *ibid.*).—Derrida created some confusion about this ‘axial proposition’ of deconstruction in a letter to Gerald Graff: “The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan . . . of deconstruction (‘there is nothing outside text’ [*il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context.” And then he added: “in this form, which says exactly the same thing, the formula would doubtless have been less shocking” (in J. Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, [Evanston, IL 1988], 136). But in this revisionist form, it’s not shocking at all, because it is just commonplace and true in a trivial sense: who would not agree that everything is in some sort of context?! It’s a smokescreen: of course, the general tenor of deconstruction and post-structuralism is *pantextualist*: “I found it necessary,” Derrida writes elsewhere, “to recast the concept of text by generalizing it almost without limit, . . . without any limit that is. That’s why *there is nothing ‘beyond the text’*” (“But, beyond,” *Critical Inquiry* 13.1 [1986], 167; emphasis added). Also see Jacques Lacan’s panlinguistic outlook: “It is the world of words that creates the world of things” (J. Lacan, *Ecrits*, A. Sheridan, tr. [London 1977], 65).

31. Paul de Man, “Literary History and Literary Modernity”, in P. de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis, MN 1983), 165; and *idem*, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York 1984), 81. A similar tenor can be discerned in the widely quoted aphorism of Roland Barthes in his poststructuralist phase: “Le fait n’a jamais qu’une existence linguistique.” Here is its context: “The fact can only have a linguistic existence, as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly *as if* this existence were merely the ‘copy,’ purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extrastructural domain of the ‘real’” (R. Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” *Comparative Criticism: A Year Book*, vol. 3 [1981], 17; emphasis added). Note the *as if* and the inverted commas around “real”: during the 1960’s reality obviously began to disappear, sucked into the pantextualist ontology decreed by the poststructuralists. Heidegger’s aphorism “language is the house of Being” was shortened to “language is Being” and then inverted to “being is language.”

32. Or misreading, even distorting, as some hold, see Raymond Tallis, *Not Saussure: A Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory* (London 1988), *passim*, esp. 65–70; and M. C. Clark and E. Csapo, “Deconstruction, Ideology, and Goldhill’s *Oresteia*,” *PHOENIX* 45.2 (1991), 95–125.

33. This has been demonstrated by Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London and New York 2007). Chapter 1 (esp. 30–34; 52–54) shows how absolute difference in Derrida “collapses into absolute identity.”

34. *Of Grammatology* (note 30), 10.

35. As to the inherent self-deconstruction of all texts: J. Hillis Miller speaks of “the deconstruction which the text performs on itself and which the critic repeats” (“Stevens’ Rock and Criticism as Cure II,” *Georgia Review*, 30.2 [1976], 333); P. de Man: “The deconstruction is not something we have added to the text but it constituted the text in the first place” (*Allegories of Reading* (New Haven 1979), 17; likewise Derrida: “Deconstruction is not even an *act* or an *operation* . . . Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await the deliberation, consciousness or organization of a subject . . . It [sc., the text] deconstructs itself.” (“Letter to a Japanese Friend,” in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, P. Kamuf, ed., [New York 1991], 270–71).

36. J. Derrida, “The Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” in D. Cornell et al., eds., *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York 1992), 25.

37. J. Hillis Miller, “Stevens’ Rock and Criticism as Cure, II” (note 35), 341 (emphasis added).

38. See e.g., J. Hillis Miller, “Deconstructing the Deconstructers,” *Diacritics* 5.2 (Summer 1975), 30: every deconstructive reading “performed on any literary, philosophical, or critical text moves through the figurative complexities of a given text and reaches, in the particular way the given text allows it, the ‘same’ moment of an aporia . . . The reading comes back again and again, with different texts, to the ‘same’ impasse.” On this, see also Paul de Man below in note 40.

39. J. Hillis Miller, “On Edge: The Crossways of Contemporary Criticism,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 32.4 (January 1979), 13–42. That it was designed as a paradigm of deconstructive reading is patent from its innumerable re-publications.

40. As Paul de Man put it in a moment of self-critical awareness (“The Resistance to Theory,” in Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* [Minneapolis 1980], 19): “Technically correct rhetorical readings [sc., deconstructive ones—RF] may be boring, monotonous, predictable and unpleasant, but they are *irrefutable*. They are also totalizing (and potentially totalitarian) . . . They are theory and not theory at the same time, the *universal theory of the impossibility of theory*” (emphasis added). The last sentence epitomizes the *axial aporia* of deconstruction’s grand narrative that should have caused it long ago to implode. The concluding paragraph, from which these quotations are taken, presents deconstruction, at any rate its de Manian version, as a vertiginous vortex of aporetic discoursing.

41. A. Carty, ed., “Introduction” to *Post-Modern Law, Enlightenment, Revolution and the Death of Man* (Edinburgh 1990), 5. See page 6: “post-modernism mark[ing] the reintroduction of ontology into law, not as a solution to the question of the foundation of law, but as the firm assertion that the law has no foundation.” The law figures as an “overarching coer-

cive order” (20). For a critique of legal nihilism, see Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and the Law* (Oxford 1984), 5.

42. J. Derrida, “Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism,” in Critchley et al., eds., *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (New York 1996), 85.

43. J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, P. Kamuf, tr. (New York and London 1994), 92 (Derrida’s italics). Derrida speaks here of the “Marxist memory and tradition of deconstruction” (92).

44. “Deconstruction and the Other,” in R. Kearney, ed., *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester 1984), 119.

45. J. Derrida, “Deconstruction and the Other,” (note 44), 123 (emphasis added).

46. J. Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago 1978), 292–93 (emphasis added). The future as monstrosity is a recurrent theme with the Lord of Ruptures: “the future can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity” (*Of Grammatology* [note 30], 5); and again, “a future whose monstrosity, by definition, is nameless,” in J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, G. Collins, tr. (London and New York 1997), 273.

47. T. McCarthy, “The Politics of the Ineffable: Derrida’s Deconstructionism,” *The Philosophical Forum* XXI.1–2 (1989–1990), 146–68.

48. “Force of Law” (note 36), 15.

49. “Force of Law” (note 36), 25.

50. *Specters of Marx* (note 43), 59 (emphasis added).

51. “Force of Law” (note 36), 25 (emphasis added).

52. “Force of Law” (note 36), 15 (emphasis added).

53. “Force of Law” (note 36), 15, 25, 14.

54. C. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, G. Schwab, tr. (Cambridge, MA 1985). All citations in this paragraph are from *Political Theology* in this sequence: 31, 32, 12, 5, 15, 14.

55. See “The Enlightenment Gone Mad (I),” *Arion* 19.3 (Winter 2012), 35–6, with note 11.

56. Further on the affinity of deconstruction and decisionism, see R. Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton and Oxford 2004), 238–41. It is not surprising that Derrida has, as postmodernists have in general, kind and admiring words for Carl Schmitt, “that great conservative Catholic jurist” (“Force of Law” [note 36], 30). For Chantal Mouffe (*On the Political* [London and New York 2005]), Schmitt, the theorist of the totalitarian *Führerstaat*, is the leading light for postmodern concepts of the political and of authentic democracy (while liberal theorists such as Rawls and Habermas are dismissed as the true authoritarians or even totalitarians). Schmitt’s concept of democracy is essentially that of a plebiscitary dictatorship based

on national homogeneity: “Democracy requires, therefore, first homogeneity and second—if the need arises—elimination or eradication of heterogeneity,” i.e., eradication of difference (C. Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, E. Kennedy, tr. [Cambridge, MA and London 1985], 9).

57. “Force of Law” (note 36), 27.

58. J. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (note 46), 306.

59. T. Eagleton, “Marxism Without Marxism,” in M. Sprinker, ed., *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx* (London and New York 1999), 83–87.

60. Eagleton, “Marxism Without Marxism” (note 59), 87.

61. Quoted in C. Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Toronto 2007), 277.

62. See above, page 84, with note 31.

63. R. Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford 2004), 2–3 (emphasis added).

64. Eaglestone (note 63), 3 (emphasis added).

65. See “The Enlightenment Gone Mad (I)” (note 55), 37, with notes 15 and 16 (Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics* [Oxford 1990], 81).

66. At unguarded moments some postmodernist writers engage in their own flirtation with fascism. For instance, Frederic Jameson confesses his “secret admiration” for Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis, finding it “morally and aesthetically preferable to apolitical liberalism” (*Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* [Durham 1991], 257). The inventor of metahistory, Hayden White (“The Politics of Historical Interpretation,” in H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Interpretation* [Baltimore and London 1990], 74–75) even expresses his preference for a perspective in historical interpretation associated with fascist ideology: “In the politics of contemporary discussions of historical interpretation, *the kind of perspective on history that I have been implicitly praising is conventionally associated with the ideologies of fascist regimes*. Something of Schiller’s notion of the historical sublime or Nietzsche’s version of it is certainly present in the thought of such philosophers as Heidegger and Gentile and in the intuitions of Hitler and Mussolini. But having granted as much, we must guard against a sentimentalism that would lead us to write off such a conception of history simply because it has been associated with fascist ideologies. One must face the fact that when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds to be found in the historical record itself for preferring one way of construing its meaning over another” (emphasis added). The postmodern metahistorian leaves no doubt as to which way he prefers.

67. See “The Enlightenment Gone Mad (I)” (note 55), 31–32.

68. See “The Enlightenment Gone Mad (I)” (note 55), 32.

69. J. Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone,” 80, 95.

70. J. Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” 293 (emphasis added). See above, page 91, with note 46.

71. J. Derrida, "La parole soufflée," in J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (note 46), 188 (emphasis added). There is a little known darker side to Artaud's enterprise: Nietzsche's extermination fantasies found their way, undiluted, into the imagination of Artaud, when he demanded that "seven to eight million human beings should be exterminated. What is that to the three or four thousand million who inhabit the earth. Most human beings spend their life doing nothing, exploiting the life of others, taking hold of their consciousness" (see Jacques Prevel, *En compagnie d'Antonin Artaud* [Paris 1974], 168, quoted in M. Esslin, *Artaud* [London 1976], 10-11). Artaud imagined vast conspiracies of Jews and Jesuits who were after him and from whom the fascist *Action Française* rescued him; he dedicated his book *Nouvelles révélations de l'être* (1943) to Adolf Hitler (A. Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes* VII 430).

72. M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, R. Howard, tr. (New York and Toronto 1967), 225-26; 228 (emphasis added). The phrase "sovereign enterprise of unreason" is found on 223.

73. U. Horstmann, *Das Untier: Konturen einer Philosophie der Menschenflucht* (Frankfurt 1985), 176 (emphasis added; my translation).

74. John R. Searle, "The Word Turned Upside Down," *NYRoB*, 27 October 1983, 74-79.

75. See above notes 30 and 31.

76. J. Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca 1982), 149 and 149 n.10.