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Nietzsche and the Condition of Postmodern Thought: *Post-Nietzschean Postmodernism*

Babette E. Babich

THE POSTMODERN CONNECTION

Whatever the tessellated schema of the postmodern may comprise, it is not principally or even in significant part illuminated by the name of Friedrich Nietzsche. Thus, beyond spontaneous and tacit invocation, neither his philosophy nor his style are much featured in discussion or debate on the postmodern. Even as Fredric Jameson broadly emphasizes the influence of Nietzschean strategies in Jean-Francois Lyotard's "differentiation between story telling and 'scientific' abstraction,"¹ Lyotard himself actually cites Nietzsche only in a restricted, background context.

Cataloguing the postmodern condition of knowledge, Lyotard criticizes the instability of modern scientific master narratives, rejecting the ostensibly absolute provenance of totalizing formulaic or theoretic idealism as well as positivistic realism. In the course of his study, Lyotard valorizes and details the inherently pluralistic (and typologically talmudistic) model of partial narratives or stories. For

against the French critics' (read as Kristeva) recent description of "modernist and avant-garde writing as predominantly feminine."⁸ Only Spanos seems to mention Nietzsche with philosophic sensitivity, but even this concession remains titular.⁹ I discuss Jencks's classification of Nietzsche and Hutcheon's oblique review of Nietzschean influence in detail below.

It is symptomatic of the problem in question that Nietzsche's image appears on the cover of a recent German paperback on the topic of postmodernity. Typically, or because of the irony of the text's cover, the collection mentions Nietzsche only in a few places and then in connection with another topic or author/ity. In Wolfgang Welsch's leading essay, he notes that of the three putative first appearances of the term 'postmodern', the earliest is apparently to be found in Rudolf Pannwitz, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Kultur* (1917), in a context Welsch declaims as "Nietzsche-Auguss um nicht zu sagen Nietzsche-Kitsch"—which is to say, Kitsch-Nietzsche rehashed!¹⁰ For Welsch, Nietzsche's diagnosis of the pathology of modern culture and its correction by way of the generation of the overman is the dyadic stimulus for Pannwitz's hysteric denunciation of the decline (nihilism) of modern Europe and ecstatic proclamation of a postmodern *Lösungsperspektive* via a proto-Nazi "post-modern human" ideal. Beyond Pannwitz, one imagines, one could add the names of Spengler, Jünger, and, of course, Heidegger. Thus a glimpse into its deepest waters unsettles a review of the postmodern reception of Nietzsche.

It seems to me that the ordinary vector connecting Nietzsche and the postmodern works along the axis of contiguity. This association is the prime working of an indeliberate reticence, which psychoanalytically inspired readers are proud to call repression. But the more obvious problem is the deliberate ambiguity of the allusion/elision characterizing Nietzsche's style. One literally does not know whereof one speaks when one names Nietzsche. The writer who asked "Have I been understood?" began his life reflection on his writings with the Schopenhauerian inclination his interpreters have always hastened to absolve, "non legor, non legar"¹¹—"I am not read. I will not be read." Nietzsche is only uneasily installed in the pantheon of tacit and automatic reference: Freud, Marx, Nietzsche. This is not to affirm that of this holy trinity, or any other, only Nietzsche's name would be out of place. The author is always forced out of the text as interlocutor to become the name god of incantatory significance when the challenge of a reading requires so much power at one's thoughtful disposal that one would be compelled to think *up* to what one is reading. Nietzsche demands a melancholically resigned postmodern reader *already*

"drunk with riddles, glad of the twilight, whose soul flutes lure astray to every whirlpool."¹² Searching for the "perfect reader," Nietzsche imagines "a monster of courage and curiosity," a reader "capable and worthy of the same pathos," because, he anguishes, until such a reader is found, "Nobody will understand the art that has been squandered here."¹³ At the end, in the section "Why I Am a Destiny," he repeats, "Have I been understood?"¹⁴ "Have I been understood?"¹⁵ "Have I been understood?"¹⁶

NIETZSCHEAN STYLE: THE CONCINNOUS POSTMODERN

In the following discussion I shall propose Nietzsche's stylistics as an exemplification of the communicational situation and strategy named postmodern. What I regard as the *concinnity* of Nietzsche's style can be understood, then, as a precociously postmodern compositional technique. Concinnity is derived from the Latin *concinnus*. In its colloquial adjectival significance, the word suggests a consummate performance, a 'smooth' accomplishment. The verb *concino*, means "to sing in chorus." In the sense in which I employ the term, concinnity corresponds to its technical, musical function, describing syn-phony, that is, the smooth harmony of disparate or dissonant themes. In writing, a concinnous style has two significant registers, in the first place, what is expressed by the writing as a consequence of the stylistic play and interplay of written texts, and beyond that, given the importance of Nietzsche's reader-specific, evocative style, in the second place, the appropriate(d), creative response of the reader to the text, that is to say, what the reader can work up out of the text.

Nietzsche's concinnity is a playing of and between his own texts, evoking an echoing reception or choral response by playing between and among the reader's own background of anticipation, textual affinities, and reflective/projective recollections. Thus Nietzsche's stylistic concinnity or auto-text-deconstructive style has a varying resonance for the general, atonal as well as for the sensitive or attuned reader.¹⁷ Nietzsche's concinnity recalls Linda Hutcheon's parodic heterogeneity or double voicing, exemplifying in an evocative/provocative textual construction the Jenckian architect's double coding.¹⁸

Coordinate with Umberto Eco's characterization of the postmodern cultural condition via the impossible fairy tale of innocence, Nietzsche's stylistic concinnity effects the inscription/subversion of

the enduring dream of innocence as a cultural ethos, simultaneously undermining its illusory totality. When Eco notes the absence of the authentic innocent or the genuine, his most important implication is neither the philosopher's homelessness nor the novelistic dictum "you can't go home anymore." For Eco has elected to acknowledge the living consequences of the conflicting but still fusing horizons of modern cultural experience and limited worldly resources. These living consequences include, for example, saying "I love you" in an age of advertisement, television, movie, and music video love affairs. Such a conflict is manifest in the American dream conviction that financial success can be won by anyone at all, Irish, Jewish, or even a Korean greengrocer, even while its attainment is predicated upon the surpassing of all competitors and the vulgar contrast between bruised third-world poverty for so many millions and the safe security of an investment bond, representing so many millions. The standard for poverty is arbitrary, but the standard for success is not: the preterite disproportion is required. As Bataille reminds us, in a truculent exaggeration of Heideggerian inauthenticity, we most of us, proximally and for the most part, see not ourselves but others as inauthentic, substandard, and so undeserving.¹⁹ Hence the key to the longevity of late capitalism is not its technologized industry, crystallizing investment value and magnifying labor, but what this same intensification of scale heightens at the very value of the extreme.

Eco's recognition of the loss of originality and meaning in the age of image and repetition is more descriptive than prescriptive, more phenomenological than cavalier. The only way to approach the sober innocence and ideological idealism of the past is by the gently dehiscent way of irony, which invocation both sustains poetic reference and underscores our tacit recognition of its shimmering illusion. For Eco, what we know, now, is that rather than the modern occlusion of the past in the anticipatory service of an eschaton, "the past... must be revisited." This revisitation opposes the monotony of Habermas's protests, and never aspires to the delusions and the nostalgic vision of romantic neoclassicism, for the past is to "be revisited with irony, not with innocence."²⁰ The ironic retrieve does not champion a lost ideal. Stylistically parodic, with sage and melancholy sympathy, the ironic retrieval confirms the illusion of the past as such, recollecting it for old time's sake. The past revisited with jaded parody or dry irony is never its reprise.²¹ The ironic trope is nothing less than what Nietzsche named the artistic truth of illusion in its subsistent unsaying of what it says. But Nietzsche is a master not only of irony but also of consummate parody, as Zarathustra offers the superb proof, as

he goes down and over. Thus it is important to attempt to map Nietzsche's role in the figuring of the relation between the master tropings of modernity and the postmodern concession that the truths of modernity are unavoidably chained in the circles of their communication.

An explicit critic of modern man, modern culture, modern politics, and so forth, Nietzsche may nevertheless be named "modern" by a writer such as Habermas, among others, just because reflexive critique is a defining characteristic of the Enlightenment project of the modern. If the postmodern also involves critique, postmodern critique does not advance understanding beyond prejudice but only acknowledges its inevitable constriction. This is not identical to the projection of the hermeneutic circle of understanding, because one does not actually believe one's prejudices as well as because one knows oneself to be confirmed within their value scheme. Yet, in and after all, Nietzsche's name typically has been linked to the project of modernity, whether as antipode or as its prime exemplification.²² Is it to be claimed that Nietzsche is modern *as well as* postmodern? This claim would be more informative if there were a difference between the postmodern simple and the postmodern modern. But there is no such difference, and in its ineluctable conjunction with the modern, the postmodern may be articulated as the spoiled project or strained confidence of modernity. Like someone who no longer believes in a friend without however being able to break off the friendship, the postmodern depends upon the modern, *without* sharing the illusion of its promise as truth.

As Nietzsche suggests, the ethos of modernity as the projection of progress has long failed to live up to its own promise.²³ This failure is appropriate to and consistent with the effective functioning of a promise as such. Hence from the perspective of the modern as from that of the postmodern, there is no way to escape the failure of the modern project: the difference is simply the tenor of the (weak) optimistic modern or (strong) pessimistic postmodern response.²⁴ Nietzsche's importance for an understanding of the postmodern situation is his reflection on the rule of error and the illusion of truth that is not a (weak) skepticism but an affirmative experimentation with illusion (in art) and thus a (strong) confirmational incorporation of error in life (that is, in the grand style).

NIETZSCHE AND POSTMODERNISM

It is by now redundant even to acknowledge that the postmodern is perniciously chimerical.²⁵ For each different author, and each

generic appropriation, the postmodern subject acquires a different definition. To offer an (arbitrarily) brief statement of the postmodern, it can be said that it means about what it seems to mean, that is, "approximately after modernity." The word "after" is not meant to suggest that the postmodern designates the sudden irruption of the future, as a particular period closing modernity. Likewise, what I name modernity or the modern is not interposed as a diachronic period. Indeed, the modern has been more suggestively defined as a project of antitraditional innovation.

After Baudelaire, the emphatically novel modern is the anxious exhilaration of being on the brink of every important, life-advancing answer for every intellectual, practical-social, politico-aesthetic, or even spiritual need. The claim of this answer and its scope are consequent upon the modern and still contemporary scientific ideal. In his antagonism toward the ultimacy of modern answers, Nietzsche derides less the nihilism of the modern world as such than the convicted project of incipient happiness which characterizes the modern temper. This devotion to the contentment/consumption ideal of happiness attends what Nietzsche calls the 'prosaic' (anti-artistic) style of the modern. The progress ethos of the modern with its unblinking confidence in the power of reason was the crowning project of classical philosophy. As Nietzsche remarks at the bold beginning of his career, "Socrates is the prototype of the theoretical optimist who, with his faith that the nature of things can be fathomed, ascribes to knowledge and insight the power of a panacea... To fathom the depths and to separate true knowledge from appearance and error, seemed to Socratic man the noblest, even the only truly human vocation."²⁶ The optimistic temper of modernity is a necessity. Driven by its consequential interest in totalizing knowledge, "science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck."²⁷ Thus, the self-destruction of the modern project of rationality found its abstract but irreversible epistemological denouement in Kant and Schopenhauer. Today, in the natural field, the efforts and discoveries of science tend toward the same end of devalued cognitive transparency.²⁸ But for its part, science is necessarily ambivalent regarding the limits of knowledge/progress. If science embodies the modern project of rational knowledge, it self-destructively affirms its own limitations in the service of its own knowing activity. Yet that same knowing activity counts as progress, that is, as totalizable knowledge, for all practical purposes.²⁹

If the postmodern condition of scientific knowing continues the knowing ethos of the modern, it is enmeshed in the contradiction it names anathema. Following Lyotard's account, the master narrative

is doomed to a nontotalistic subservience because the narrative, however grand, can never be the last word on a matter. It is preeminently for this reason that the postmodern cannot be a register or period term.³⁰ Instead, the postmodern characterizes the reverberatory effect (or wake) of a nonrealized (better: *unrealizable*) rational ideal in the recognition of the factual disappointment of the ideal of economic and spiritual progress through scientific technology and democratic enfranchisement.

In its core, as has been repeatedly observed, the postmodern perspective is fundamentally parasitic, which is also to say that it necessarily recognizes the appeal of modernity's ultimacy as a value. Hence it inscribes the discourse of the ultimate value of modernity while challenging the actual value of these values in the world of real inadequacies and endless complexity. The subversive resistance to the modern emerges as postmodernism renounces the life-leveling goals of modernity while acknowledging the essentially illusory allure of modernity as inevitably, inherently unrenounceable for mass culture.

In the (Lyotardian) literature of the postmodern, further elaborations describe the postmodern condition as a proliferation of part narratives after the dereliction of the gargantua: the ultimate answer, the one truth. For my purposes, I can only summarize/conflate the various accounts offered by Jameson, Jencks, Huyssen, Kroker, and others by defining postmodernity as an antitotalizing, affirmative, melancholic perspective challenging the totalizing, excelsior-ultimacy of modernity.

In the remainder of this chapter I will seek to extrapolate the reasons why Nietzsche is only obliquely acknowledged in the otherwise almost obsessively promiscuous literary, aesthetic, and philosophic debate on the postmodern. This clarification is needed not because such a revelation would serve as an improving rectification, altering the character of the postmodern but rather because such an account may indirectly illuminate that very character. For this reason, the following proposes not a reading of Nietzsche as postmodern but rather a reading of the postmodern *after*, in the light of, or post-Nietzsche.

In recent meditations on the meaning of the modern subject after the Enlightenment or, in a broader articulation, the postmodern formulation of the question of humanism, Nietzsche's importance is clear enough. But that context is not yet the context of postmodernism. No less a canonized-canonizing author than Charles Jencks, in his

book folio *What Is Post-Modernism?* finds Nietzsche to be paradigmatically modern. As Jencks defines the postmodern incorporation of the modernist change in worldview, he typifies the modernist worldview as "brought on by Nietzsche, Einstein, Freud."³¹ Now, the modern is variously reviewed by many authors as a critically ironic view of the past in ways that conduce to an equivocation on the modern and the postmodern. As I have noted above, the convergence of the terms as such is not problematic. What is more, in architectural styles, the modern is hardly likely to suffer a collapse into a distinctly opposing style. The usual building materials and guidebook designations assure that security. But in historiography, in philosophy, in fiction, even in graphic, plastic art, such a transmutation is not only an easy possibility but occasionally impossible to foreclose. Thus, as we have seen, in its literary, philosophic, cultural expression, the postmodern is the modern in its fullest extension. Otherwise said: the postmodern is the failure of the modern. It is the rupture of the project of rationality—but it retains, like the pieces of a shattered mirror, or the reticulation of a cracked surface of acrylic or autoglass, the surface function or the marginal contours of its original integrity.

Thus it is only of interest to reflect that what Jencks does by associating Nietzsche and the saints of modernity is symptomatic of the conceptual condition of the postmodern. As Jencks reviews the characteristic excesses of the incorporative ethos of postmodernism vis-à-vis the modern, while simultaneously refusing that same incorporation, Jencks evokes a substantive style of reflection and repetition. This style is a quintessentially Nietzschean trope which Jencks, of course, cannot identify as such but merely—felicitously—names "double coding," which at this juncture must pass as a ruptured code. Nietzsche's concinnous texts exemplify this "double coding," self-rupturing style.

Both Nietzschean concinnity and what Jencks has called double coding name the same thing. Both testify to the *doomed* reflective attempt to both do/say something and not to do/say that thing.³² This coded coding, this having it both ways or, better, this knowing better but going along anyway, embodies the only style of life-election remaining for the postmodern times Eco names the "age of lost innocence."³³ The ironic tactic of affirming/subverting one's circumstantial sophistication by exposing its inadequacy while yet trading on its inevitable necessity operates in both Nietzsche's style and what Lyotard, Eco, Jameson, Jencks, and others name the (commercially Las Vegas) postmodern.

With a protentional reference to the postmodern question of interpretation and humanism, Hans-Georg Gadamer attributes to Nietzsche's legacy "that it is interpretation, with its legitimate cognitive interpretive aim, that first grasps the real which extends beyond every subjective meaning... interpretation is expected to go behind the subjectivity of the act of meaning."³⁴ And it seems to me that David Carroll is right to observe, as Gadamer himself had done in another context, that "Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida have many important predecessors in the critical project (Blanchot, Merleau-Ponty, Adorno, Benjamin, Heidegger, the German Romantics, and Kant, to name only these), but of all their predecessors, Nietzsche is undoubtedly the one who most explicitly laid the groundwork."³⁵ But notwithstanding, Carroll's bid for Nietzsche's foundational preeminence, Linda Hutcheon's exposition of the literary, cultural, critical strategy of the postmodern in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* exemplifies the oblivious appropriation of Nietzschean themes. Like Jencks, again, Hutcheon's tacit, unheeding importation of Nietzsche's perspectives to articulate her own poetics is effected without intent and surely without malice. Furthermore, my identificational analysis of this importation is deliberately proposed as an ad hoc, patently unfair interpretation. It is not proposed as an analysis of the origin of Hutcheon's thought. I can do no more than note that Hutcheon has doubtless read Nietzsche, and her sense for precedents and exemplificational instances in cultural practice and artifact is brilliant. Yet she disregards the intellectual historical sense in which her own poetics is indebted to Nietzsche's originalizing writing and thinking, *and* she does so in fine faith. It is because this structural debt is unconscious that this positional insensitivity crystallizes the interpretive nexus I detail in reviewing the value of the post-Nietzschean (Nietzschean) for the conceptual condition of the postmodern (modern) condition.

To underline, then, as Hutcheon does, that what the postmodern redounds to "is that there all kinds of orders and systems in our world—and that we create them all," repeats Nietzsche's most basic perspective. To continue by emphasizing that "that is their justification and limitation,"³⁶ is further to recapitulate Nietzschean perspectivalism, employing the same value terms and emphases (plurality of orders, creation of values/systems, justification, limitation) while eschewing direct reference. This reticence with regard to referencing quotation is odd, given the fearless paradoxicality or express paradoxicality—to employ Hutcheon's useful expression of the typology of the parodic—of academic discourse on the postmodern as such. The blind foreclosure of Nietzsche in the nomenclature of postmodern stylists is not a consequence of Hutcheon's parody, and if it does recall

the spirit behind what Jameson calls pastiche, the negation of the Nietzschean prefiguration of postmodernism is an almost invisible, or else illiterate, ultimately unconscious pastiche. The significance of this negation must be traced further just because there are so many authors who do the same thing.

That this interpretive insensitivity to Nietzsche is not in fact a culpable failure in Hutcheon's or any other writing on the postmodern needs repeated emphasizing. But I do wish to maintain that the thought of the postmodern is best apprehended *after* Nietzsche, that is, in his fashion and with the reflective benefit of his philosophic stylistic or poetics of the modern and the postmodern.³⁷ As a project for another day, this elusive aspect can be traced, and finding it, we can begin to experiment with style, that is, after Nietzsche, we can better see the significant value and functional employment of postmodern double coding.

Nietzsche's perspectivalism affirms a multiplicity of perspectives, none of which, including the operating perspective of the philosopher of perspectivalism, has any absolute claim. The emphasis upon the *Übermensch* or "posthuman" in Nietzsche succeeds a critical understanding of the human as such, shifting its position to the sliding or precessionally decentered subject of interpretive style. But for a postmodern position, the anti- or posthumanism of Nietzsche's perspectivalism reveals its unimpeachable ambivalence. As even Ihab Hassan, who has catalogued the antihumanism of postmodernity, would affirm, postmodern political reflections are not written against humanity but in the name of the possibility of its very egalitarian, liberal plurivocity. This plurivocity is Nietzsche's own antipode and still modern socius, that is, Democracy. Nietzsche's thought on the use and abuse of history, on the subject of discourse and the discourse of the subject, and, above all, on truth and lie, and so forth, involves a textual inscription/subversion of heterogeneity that can continue to count as postmodern, but its ambivalent regard for that same heterogeneity, manifest in the name of egalitarian Democracy, confounds classification.

Here it is imperative to recall that the watchword and touchstone of Nietzsche's antitotalizing perspectivalism is its resolute provisionality. Accordingly, Nietzsche's multivalently heterogeneous perspectivalism anticipates the inherent ambivalence of the postmodern challenge to hierarchized discourse, specifically to the question of its authorial or traditional authority and the presumption of a final word.

Nietzsche's self-deconstructing, culture-deconstructive, "double-coded" textual style works as proof against the straight inevitability of the 'grand' narrative. The return of the question from reader to

author, speaker to speaker, undercutting authority and thereby undercutting the modern tradition, is a Nietzschean stylistic chiasmus. This double-coded, Nietzschean style works as a multiregister movement interior to the discourse which not only subverts the reader's self-presumption but is its own overt, self-subverting reflection.

POST-NIETZSCHE: POSTMODERN

Postmodernism retains the critical, scientific vision of modernity but, together with this sophisticated self-reflexive awareness, it avows or more precisely *admits* the impossibility of scientific totalizing or absolutist knowledge. It acknowledges its implication in the modernist project through a glancing, subverting, or teasing surface affirmation which thus manifests the transparency of its eschatological movement toward the absolute. The postmodern recoil of incredulous credulity is more than the modernist hyperbolic interrogation because it also challenges the credibility of its doubt (and, accordingly, does not hesitate to undercut the doubting subject).

This return of the question is supervalently Nietzschean. And it is to Nietzsche that we turn to find the style of critical reflection articulated via a multiregister movement interior to the discourse which is not only self-reflexive but self-subverting. When Nietzsche, writing on 'The Prejudices of the Philosophers' in his (topologically and indeed topically postmodern) book *Beyond Good and Evil*, declares that the physical scientist's understanding of the law of nature is nothing but a (bad) interpretation, he cannot help concluding with a malicious concession: "Granted this too is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to raise this objection?—well, so much the better."³⁸ Prepostmodern and with no talk of double coding, Nietzsche's style nevertheless illustrates the way it is done in the given context of explicit challenge (to the physicists) and complicit subscription (to the scientific standard). Thus we have an object textual illustration of the double turn or ambivalence of a discourse characterized by parody and the sustained question of factitious and so inherently plurivocal truth. It is imperative to note that such a text must be one that autonomously undercuts its *own* authority. While thus articulating itself in the style of totalizing discourse, the Nietzschean or postmodern text refuses itself as totalizing or absolute.

Hence it is possible to view the entire body of Nietzschean writings, or at least the individual texts themselves, as effectively self-subverting efforts working through a constant play on the reader's expectations and the philosopher's resistances.³⁹ In *Beyond Good and Evil*,

Nietzsche writes, "Supposing truth to be a woman—what?"⁴⁰ and so coins his own metaphor for the metaphorical goal of a classical search. But Nietzsche then moves to his own "truths," replacing a question mark with an exclamation point and writes, "But she does not *want* truth: what is truth to a woman!"⁴¹ With this emphatic turn, Nietzsche reclaims the metaphor for the kitchen, the parlor, the world of culture, games, and nineteenth-century sex. In this way he can abuse "the scholar, the average man of science," by desecrating "something of the old maid about him."⁴² And at his breathless, intoxicated conclusion, Nietzsche invokes Dionysus, naming him a philosopher, to declare that gods philosophize and that the god "once said 'Under certain circumstances, I love mankind'—alluding to Ariadne, who was present—"⁴³ How is this statement to be read? Nietzsche scholars are themselves recalcitrantly, clumsily importunate dogmatists—what then!—and accordingly, they desex Ariadne. Dionysus, who, like Phoebus, touches Nietzsche's trembling ears, alludes to Ariadne. But who is to play Ariadne? Is it Lou—who loved only Nietzsche's ears and his hands? But is Lou then Dionysus? Or is Nietzsche Dionysus, as he declared, almost as he declared himself to be Ariadne? To be both things to himself, since he could not manage things any other way? Such a foray into the domain of Nietzschean stylistics goes too far afield. I mention it here only by way of showing that throughout the text in question, as throughout all of Nietzsche's texts, women, truth, and even philosophers are concinnously double played, or, at the very least, double voiced.

To leave off the reading I promised not to commence, it can be concluded that the postmodern, Nietzschean style of philosophy declaims the impossibility of the (master) narrative while already recognizing that language, the illusory rule of grammar and the phantasy consequences of syntax, provides its own inscription of a univocal, hypostatizing, and so 'master' narration. Denying (or underscoring) the totalizing character of one's own discourse does not redound to a logical regress but much rather to the inadequacy of the logical. In a language that qualifies domains and universes such that it is possible to say "There is no truth" or "There is at least one truth" and so on, there is no way of pronouncing the end of totalizing discourse except by means of self-totalizing discourse: hyperbole, parody, the aphorism, the sustained or catachrestic contradiction. That Nietzsche's notoriously protean text employs all of these forms to extraordinary effect suggests the intelligibility or viability of paradoxicality.

A deliberate or stylized self-opposition throws the whole project-possibility of totalizing discourse into disrepute. As Nietzsche's reflection suggests for our most comprehensive understanding, the implication(s) of an author's position, of the speaker's discourse for

what is traditionally represented or spoken, may not but at the same time always must include the speaker, who, since Plato's thetic and illustrative exposition, has been meant to assume a neutral, objective, and only thus absolute stance. And what if the speaker's authority is questioned? Even in Plato's original context, this absolute stance is surreptitiously confirmed as ultimately vulnerable. Without a receptive reader/interlocutor, the author/speaker's bid for objectivity is doomed.

The dilemma of the speaker's self-evidence illustrates communicative perdition. This condemnation is engendered by the structure of passivity, of desire after Nietzsche, "a thought comes when 'it' wishes, and not when 'I' wish."⁴⁴ It is both possible and impossible for the speaker to betray himself to his interlocutor because as, Heidegger says, *Die Sprache spricht*, "Language speaks,"⁴⁵ which is then to say with Lacan, "that the subject is spoken rather than speaking."⁴⁶ Even at this provisional juncture, the structuring of language demands much more elucidation. In the concluding space of this essay, I can offer no more than a sliding reflection on the task to be begun.

POSTMODERN TRUTH: DUPLICITY AND THE SIMULACRA

"All Cretans are liars!" said (or lied?) the Cretan. The question is the truth of the truth, which is also to say, the truth of untruth. If the Cretan is to tell the truth, he thereby takes a holiday from his heritage for our sake. He sides with his interlocutor's prejudices for the space of a wink or a word, and arch irony or a relaxed sophistication are the only means to put the "truth" about Cretans across. This truce at the source, like the soft vulnerability of the possum "dead" on the road, open to antagonistic inspection, only works if, amused by the innocence of its attempted disingenuousness, we see his ruse and are moved to leave him to it rather than deliberately killing or only blindly missing him. The low-ranking wolf employs the same semiotic to the same effect, exposing his throat in combat with a wolf of a higher rank. And a deliberate affectation of innocence can gain an employer's indulgence where an attempt to offer the convolutions of personal justification will not do. Thus while the actual event may have transpired in fact, and once upon a time, a friendly, drunken, or sagely melancholic (postmodern!) Cretan may have shared a secret confidence with an Athenian or, more credibly, a Boeotian companion, this banal event only undermines itself at the same time that it threatens the inevitability of the mole's efficacy. The Cretan can tell the truth about his lying, but we will believe him only if his revelation accords

with our previously measured calculations in his regard. The logical contradiction is not what kills the truth of the Cretan self-revelation. What kills truth at the start is the psychological suspicion of the motive within and above both Trojan contradiction and Cretan consistency.

Accordingly, even the best-intentioned, ingenuously self-expressive Cretan could not help but damage the totalizing implications of the secret information shared, both then and now. The revelation, like all universal designations, has its ordinary progression in which the value of the individual is effaced. All Cretans lie. One knows that all Cretans lie. All one knows is that Cretans lie. Enough of that *all* and at the end of the day, one cannot be far from the suspicion "why isn't this guy—isn't this guy still—lying to me?"

As if prefigured, the same words and reduplicative hermeneutic sound in the chagrin of disappointed calculations manifest in Freud's expression of expository suspicion: "Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. 'Where are you going?' asked one. 'To Cracow,' was the answer. 'What a liar you are!' broke out the other. 'If you say you're going to Cracow, you want me to believe you're going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you're going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me'"⁴⁷ For Lacan, parodying this problematizing dynamic of the interlocutor's expectation and the speaker's concomitant authorial frustration for his own thetic purposes: "I can lure my adversary by means of a movement contrary to my actual plan of battle, and this movement will have its decisive effect only in so far as I produce it in reality and for my adversary." Lacan is rehearsing the theoretical dialectic of communicative prediction and control, suspicion, and covert operation from the side of the subject to the object as it is played on the battlefield, the modern market, or in the schoolyard. "But," as Lacan continues to explain, the dialectic is indeed two-sided on both sides: my own side and that of my adversary, hence "in the propositions with which I open peace negotiations with him, what my negotiations propose to him is situated in a third locus which is neither my speech nor my interlocutor."⁴⁸ The problem is the problem of the signifying structure of language. That problem is not an issue for semiotic analysis as much as it remains a problem for philosophers just because, as Freud himself keenly saw, the issue is nothing less than the (Nietzschean) truth of truth. Freud writes, "the more serious substance of the joke is the problem of what determines the truth. The joke, once again, is pointing to a problem and is making use of the uncertainty of one of our commonest concepts."⁴⁹ For Freud, what distinguishes the pointing aggression of these jokes is that they attack

"not a person or an institution but the certainty of our knowledge itself, one of our speculative possessions."⁶⁰

Still innocent of the hermeneutics of postmodern suspicion, Freud's modestly modern claim is that the challenge to our knowledge of the truth does not challenge an institution. But it is as telling as anything else to note that, for a postmodern scientific culture, the speculative conviction of truth *does* have the epistemic status of an institution as a kind of fetish or phantastic ideal that Freud could hardly have conceived and that postmodern Marxist thinkers have only now begun to articulate vis-à-vis the question of Otherness, particularly in feminist and third-world contexts. It is a postFreudian, postMarxist, that is, *postmodern* and *Nietzschean*, strategy to declaim the impossibility of truth and simultaneously to recognize that, in its inscription, theorizing writing itself lays claim to the same institution. Beyond the truth of the subject, there is the subject of truth. But that too is a subject that has lost its original innocence. Nietzsche teases that he keeps "in readiness at least a couple of jabs in the ribs for the blind rage with which philosophers resist being deceived. Why *not?*"⁶¹

The vision of totality is tantalizing, and it would remain so if there were any yet untarnished contenders in the heaven of distant values. But we look hard to find any still inspiring possibilities as time passes and as our memories grow historiographically, scientifically sharper. Once tried, once ab-used, the name of absolute truth loses its appeal for the conviction of the phallogocentric perspective.

As Nietzsche has taunted us, taught us, there is, ultimately, no one truth but this truth that there is no one truth. And even this truth of nonsingular truth may not designate truth after all because it is one perspective and nothing more. All truths are *particularized* viewpoints, useful within particular contexts but utterly unnecessary and possibly even useless outside them.

The question to be answered is not, of course, the question of the real or authentic *meaning* of the postmodern, of postmodern*ity*, or of postmodern*ism*. The postmodern is a quintessentially topical construct, ranging over the contextual surfaces of its applications in as multifarious a variety as those applications themselves. If anything conjoins this variety, and so entitles it to the homogeneity of a single rubric, it is the negativity imposed by postmodern/ity/ism. In the field of philosophy, the epistemic posture of knowledge, the status of truth, the standing of being—in the discipline of the love of wisdom, the discourse of the master knower, the knower of mastery, of discourse, of truth and lie—the postmodern condition is the condition of the end and the end of the end. It is the end at all events and turns, the end of

the answer, the end of the understanding of the question as propadeutic to an unknown answer because the question that leads to an answer only leads to an answer in a duplicity or imitation of a seeking. And an authentic search need never be attempted, because what is sought has already been found, as Pascal, already arch, already posed in the vault of modernity, has reminded the belated, blinking readers of the question of the question. But to ask the question one needs more than a faith in answers; one needs more than belief. In place of the faith of our fathers, the faith of religion and the faith of science—in the place, that is to say, of the *answer*—one needs the rare ability to think, and the daring that is the exact prerequisite for its very exercise which is its only consummation.

For the philosopher, the seeker of wisdom, the devoted friend of truth, truth should never have been conceived as an ultimate answer. But as Nietzsche muses, the danger of this conception is unabated and “the innocence of thinkers has something touching and inspiring of reverence in it which permits them even today to go up to consciousness and ask it to give them *honest* answers.”⁵² After Freud, and after Lacan’s retrieve of what Freud discovered as the insistent horror of the unnamed (*es/ça*) that speaks in our place, we begin to recognize that the cognitive ideal of truth has been installed in the place of the (unconscious) object of desire. For again as Heidegger has it, “Language speaks.”⁵³ But this again, is to say what Lacan says on the matter, “the subject is spoken, rather than speaking.”⁵⁴ Lacan introduces this Heideggerian expression of human Dasein as ‘spoken rather than speaking’ by affirming that “there is no speech without a reply.”⁵⁵ Human beings are the locus of the discourse of the other, of what Freud called a memory and Lacan names the unconscious. This unconscious functions by inscribing its similes in the body, in its symptoms, in the words that the subject speaks when it speaks where it does not think to think.⁵⁶ When truth comes to stand in the empty place of a lacking, the insurrection of a failure to be on the plane of the simulacrum, the register of the imaginary impinges with perfect resonance upon the domain of the symbolic.

After the mechanic of the Marxian, Freudian, Nietzschean power genealogy has unhinged the innocent convictions of knowledge, the postmodern in philosophy is the condition of knowledge. The names Marx, Freud, and even Nietzsche are only a ruminative species of Lacan’s suggestive “points de capiton”: they are useful for their suggestive power, because of the metaphorical connections that can substitute for them, and because as names for talmudists, they conduce beyond themselves, and are metonyms for the question

concerning human being and truth. The postmodern condition of knowledge can then be thought throughout its manifestations in the consecrating legitimations regarded variously as common sense (the lesser Cartesian conviction, I know this, that I am), philosophic wisdom (the Kantian vision of restraint, whatever I know is only by way of what I can know), political liberalism (just one more effort, one more negotiation, one more rehabilitative definition of mutuality, and the end of communicative discourse will be in sight), and scientific truth (the approximation of the closure between facts to be known and the productive manipulation that proves knowledge in the offerings of consumable technologies). Thus a reflection on the relevance of Nietzsche to the postmodern condition of thought is a reflection on the relevance of the question of the question, the ability to question, and to think. This reflection can begin in a time after the prize of thought, the illusion of the accession to the ultimate object, has been dismantled. The broken shards of the illusion, the shattered mirror of representation, offer a metonymic conduction which lines the thinker up, but not as before, either on the right, on the side of primacy, fulfillment, or truth, or on the left, on the side of failure, incompleteness, or illusion, and leads, as a tentative question that asks where it does not know what it will find, to the inevitable shifting of the signifier, and the ambiguity of the Real that impossibly circumscribes the human condition.

25. See Stern, 181, n. 1, Roger Hollinrake, *Nietzsche, Wagner, and the Philosophy of Pessimism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 7; Joan Stambaugh, "Thoughts on the Innocence of Becoming," *Nietzsche Studien* 14 (1985), 164-78; and Löwith, 191-92 (Löwith also discusses "On the Three Metamorphoses" in chapter 3 of his *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*). Heidegger's and Fink's distinctive interpretations of Nietzsche's playing and innocent child are also interesting and worthy of attention. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Vol. 2: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 77-78, Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Vol. 4: Nihilism*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 235-37, and Eugen Fink, *Nietzsches Philosophie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 187ff.

26. *KGW* VII:2, 101. The translation is my own.

27. Stambaugh, 174.

28. For a useful discussion of the role of the "supersubject" in idealist philosophy and romantic literature, see Abrams, 90-92, 197-324.

29. According to Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche, the will to ascribe established value to oneself (in the case of the lion, the established value of possessing God's power and authority) is typical of slavish or reactive dispositions. This reading is consistent with my earlier interpretation of the lion as reactive and finds textual support in *BGE*, no., 261; *KGW*, VI:2, 222-24. See Deleuze, 9-10, 81-82.

30. See *BGE*, no. 17; *KGW*, VI:2, 24-25. For a further sampling of Nietzsche's criticisms both of the doer-deed dichotomy and the assumption that the self is an ego-substance, see *GM*, 44-46; *KGW*, VI:2, 292-95, and Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (1954; rpt. New York: Viking, 1977), 482-83 (I will henceforth cite this translation and edition as *TT*); *KGW* VI:3, 71-72.

31. *TT* 501; *KGW* VI:3, 90-91.

32. See *GM*, 36-39, 57-58; *KGW* VI:2, 284-88, 307-8. Also see Deleuze, 113-14, and Alphonso Lingus, "The Will to Power," in *The New Nietzsche*, ed. David Allison (New York: Delta, 1977), 54, 58.

Chapter 13: Nietzsche and the Condition of Postmodern Thought

1. Fredric Jameson, "Foreword" to *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, by Jean-Francois Lyotard, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xii.

2. Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition*, 19.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Ibid. Lyotard cites C. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: PLON, 1962); The English translation of this work is *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

5. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 39. On Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism and the postmodern, see Mark Marren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988).

6. See Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

7. Ihab Hassan, "POSTmodernISM," *New Literary History* 3:1 (1971), 5-30. But Nietzsche is mentioned obliquely in his *The Right Promethean Fire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

8. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass-Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 48ff.

9. William V. Spanos, *Repetitions: The Post-Modern Occasion in Literature and Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

10. Wolfgang Welsch, "Postmoderne: Genealogie und Bedeutung eines umstrittenen Begriffs," in "Postmoderne" oder, *Der Kampf um die Zukunft*, ed. Peter Kemper (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988), 9-36.

11. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Eccō Homo*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), "Why I Write Such Good Books," sec. 1, p. 259.

12. Ibid., sec. 3, p. 264. Citation: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 3, "On the Vision and the Riddle," sec. 1.

13. Ibid., sec. 4, p. 265.

14. Ibid., sec. 7. p. 332.

15. Ibid., sec. 8. p. 333.

16. Ibid., sec. 9. p. 335.

17. Nietzsche's stylistics is a deconstructive strategy in advance of Derridean deconstruction. See Babich, "On Nietzsche's Concinnity: An Analysis of Style," *Nietzsche-Studien* 19 (1990), 59-80.

18. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Post-Modernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), and Charles Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?* 2d rev. ed. (London: Academy Editions/St. Martin's Press, 1987).

19. Georges Bataille, "Labyrinth," in *Inner Experience*, trans. L. Boldt (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), 81.

20. Umberto Eco, *The Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, trans. W. Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 67.

21. Such a reprise is suggested by the Mediterranean or classical revival characteristic of so many American public and private-public buildings built at the end of the nineteenth-century and early in the twentieth.

22. For one example, see Robert B. Pippin's nuanced but prepostmodern "Nietzsche and the Origin of the Idea of Modernity," *Inquiry* 26 (1988) 154-80.

23. As Nietzsche expresses it, modern culture is the rational spiritualization/extirpation of the instincts. But because we remain self-unknowing, unconsciously conscious animals, the modern is to be understood as a state of "physiological self-contradiction." (*Twilight of the Idols*, "What the Germans—read: Moderns—Lack," sec. 41.) In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he speaks of this as the "collective degeneration of man," sec. 203.

24. "Today, on the contrary, we find ourselves entangled in error, necessitated to error" (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale [Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968], "Reason in Philosophy," 5, p. 37.)

25. As most recent reviews of postmodernism repeat the logophile's retrieve of *modo*, *modernus*, that is, the etymology of the term 'modern', I will not recover this ground.

26. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), sec. 15, p. 97.

27. *Ibid.*

28. The scientists D. Bohme, I. Prigogine, E. Chargaff, and E. Morin, the sociologists of science B. Latour and K. Knorr-Cetina, the philosophers of science P. Heelan, I. Hacking, M. Galison, S. Toulmin, and others would confirm Lyotard's claims, if it is true that the implications of the literature surrounding the topic of the postmodern would also inspire waffling reservations.

29. The Nietzschean projects of both reconstructive, psychological *genealogy* and deconstructive, physiological *eschatology* are critical descriptions which require reflective distance on the temporal object of study for their only application. Thus the (Nietzschean) *named* genealogy (but not the temporal genealogy as such) and the (non-Nietzschean) *named* (Weberian) *eschatology* are postmodern constructs.

30. The term postmodern has, of course, a technical aesthetic significance for architects, art historians, and art critics.

31. Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?* 9.

32. In lived terms, like Nietzsche's textual self-deconstructive style or concinnity, postmodern double coding in art and literature seeks to "choose" to live a particular historical sophistication and learned limitations within that particular situation like a (clever and even decadent) "child."

52. *NGE*, sec. 34, pp. 46-47.

53. In an inverse anticipation, Heidegger muses, "We cannot say 'Language speaks.' For this would be to say: 'It is language that first brings man about, brings him into existence.' Understood in this way, man would be bespoken by language" (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, "Language," 192).

54. Lacan, *Ecrits*, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language," 69.

55. *Ibid.*, 40.

56. Cf. Lacan, *Ecrits*, 166.

Chapter 14: Nietzsche, Postmodernism, and Resentment

Parts of this essay were presented in a symposium of the North American Nietzsche Society held in December 1986.

1. David Hoy, "Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?" unpublished manuscript (University of California, Santa Cruz, 1968).

2. I will follow the practice of referring to those who exhibit postmodern tendencies as postmodern and to those who only talk about them as postmodernists. I do not pretend that this is a hard and fast distinction: many theorists are also practitioners and vice versa. But as so often in academic disputes, thought and action become confused. Nietzsche in particular seems to be more of a postmodernist than a postmodern, and his place in this discussion has much more to do with what he wrote and the way he wrote it than with the way he seems to have actually thought and lived, which were distinctively modern.

3. Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: A Life in Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

4. "Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" was never published by Nietzsche, although it was apparently written in the very early 1870s. See D. Breazeale, trans. and ed., *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979).

5. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). This classification is dramatically at odds with some more recent interpretations, for example, Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), who divides Nietzsche into an early modern phase and a later postmodernist phase. (I am arguing just the opposite, that the earlier Nietzsche struck postmodernist