CHAPTER 1

Nietzsche at the Mall

Deconstructing the Consumer

hodos anō katō mia kai hōtē.
The way up and the way down are one and the same.
—Heraclitus

The Church of the Consumer

The concept of self, especially the Cartesian *cogito*, has received a great deal of critical attention from postmodern and neostructuralist theorists. The rational ego is posited as the subject of knowledge in modern science and technology, animating the utopian projects of industrial civilization and culminating in great urban conglomerates, in theme parks like Epcot Center, and in the sealed universe of commodities that constitutes the omnipresent mall. The selves that in the modernist tradition have become the subjects of knowledge and scientific power were, in the Christian tradition supplanted by modernism, the eternal souls that provided an invariant substratum for the fluctuating experience of human emotion and sense perception, providing spiritual continuity in the quest for salvation: the stable vehicle bound for the static endpoint (*eschaton*) of history. That *eschaton* provided the template on which the modern idea of technological utopia has been modeled, from Bacon through Disney. The Magic Kingdom is, after all, a rarefied and idyllic image of suburbia with synthetic manifestations of American fantasy, from fake presidents to the eternally childlike persona of Peter Pan, both thinly disguised forms of the

national self-image of incorruptible innocence. It is as if America wanted to go to heaven so badly that it created its own version of it, with prices accessible to almost everyone, improving on Christianity by insuring salvation to anyone for a nominal fee.

The mall, a pervasive expression of the same sensibility, provides an environment where the self, transformed from pilgrim or scientist to consumer, can achieve happiness, the realization of dreams, by the purchase of commodities. Thus the original quest for salvation has been transformed into one for consumption without end through the mechanisms of the science, technology, and capitalist economy created by the modern *cogito*: "I consume, therefore I am." But has the freedom that was originally to be achieved through salvation from sin, and later to be won by the twin revolutions of modernity—the industrial and the political—really been provided by the culture industry of consumer choice? The notion of freedom is based on the concept of the will: it is a characteristic of the will, which is supposedly capable of uncoerced volition. If a consumer chooses to buy a product, is she or he then expressing free will? The advertisers would have us believe it, and many of us have been convinced, at least implicitly accepting the idea that shopping is the good life and inscribing the desiring subject of consumerism into ourselves by our daily practice of mall strolling.

Decentering the Consumer Subject

But if, in our quest for happiness through shopping, we should happen upon one of Nietzsche's works in the bookstore—they are curiously available, even in mass market shops—and begin to peruse, would we be able to consume it, like any other product, and still retain our sense of security as free subjects empowered by the ubiquitous mechanism of the marketplace? For instance, what if we flip to section 488 of *The Will to Power*, where we read, of "'the subject': interpreted from within ourselves, so that the ego counts as a substance, as the cause of all deeds, as a doer." This is clearly the Christian/Cartesian persona, the medieval and modern forms of the classical Platonic *nous*, the internal mirror of the noetic intellect into which shines the sun and the paradoxically immaterial specters of the Forms. But in section 490 of Nietzsche's tome we discover his considered view of the specter:

> The assumption of one single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a multiplicity of subjects,

> whose interaction and struggle is the basis of our thought and our consciousness in general. . . . My *hypothesis*: The subject is a multiplicity.

Would these descriptions, spoken by the ghostly voice of the philosopher rising out of a consumer product in the mall, jibe with the act of consumption that awakened it? Which "voice from the commodity" is more compatible with the machinery of late capitalist modernity? Is the unitary modern subject still viable, can it still speak, within the enveloping semeiotics of advertising, or is the postmodern multiplicity of selves more at home in the mall? Or, denying the binary terrors of this consumer dialectic, is there an alternative?

The neostructuralist deconstruction of self provides one resounding answer to this question: the modern subject is defunct. This concept of self will not withstand the criticism that it exists within a language game requiring its opposition to, differentiation from, the "other." The self-other opposition is a difference which itself must be accounted for: the binary opposition, "self–other," is, in Derridean terms, a structure that provides for the stability of its constituent opposites but cannot account for its own structurality, its own center. If Derrida is right, this structurality is not a static, metaphysical reality but a relationship created by the play of *différance*. So the elementary deconstruction of the idea of self—that it is in necessary opposition to the other and that both opposites fit within a structure whose structurality is generated by a process of playful differentiation—provides a neostructuralist view of self as a form of inscription in a dynamic language game that can only come to rest through the failure to think, or the agreement to stop thinking, that is metaphysics (see Kamuf 1991, 64ff.). This is the insight that prompted Heidegger to write "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." But what about Nietzsche's other alternative? What view of self is implicit in the critique evident in the second quotation from *The Will to Power*? Is it not the deconstructed, heterogeneous "schizophrenic" persona of postmodernity? Is deconstruction, then, a form of empowerment? Does it animate the self it recontextualizes as inscribed within the play of *différance*, or does it simply make it into a passive design in an unfolding pattern?

As Foucault argues,

> In fact, among all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order, the knowledge of identities, differences, characters, equivalences, words—in short, in the

> midst of all the episodes of that profound history of the *Same*—only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear. (*The Order of Things*, 386)

If "man" is the product of this evanescent historical structure, of its "arrangements," then Foucault's as well as various neostructural and postmodern views are no doubt correct so that, as Foucault concludes, "if those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble . . . then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn at the edge of the sea" (387).

The crumbling of the structures that generated the Occidental self is broadly evident amidst the mode of information that Mark Poster says makes up late capitalist society, and particularly so in the widely documented loss of identity and "neurosis" that people increasingly experience in advanced industrial civilization. Should postmodern and neostructuralist theory leave its adherents adrift in the Sea of Consumer Products (as the Beatles called it in "Yellow Submarine"), to be swept away and collected as so much psychological landfill, or should it provide a form of empowerment, of creativity, not the loss of self but its reinvention: the persona as self-writing, constructed identity, or more broadly, as culture making: *Kulturmachen?*

Nietzsche's work seems ambivalent in this respect. On the one hand, it seems to deconstruct and dissolve the self. Thus Michel Haar argues regarding Nietzsche's genealogy of logic:

> The destruction of logic by means of its genealogy brings with it as well the ruin of the psychological categories founded upon this logic. All psychological categories (the ego, the individual, the person) derive from the illusion of a substantial identity. . . . Moreover the "self," once brought into relation with the Will to Power, proves to be a simple illusion of perspective insofar as it is posited as an underlying unity, permanent center, source of decision. (1992, 17–18)

On the other hand, it seems to reconstruct and empower it. So Kathleen Higgins counters the postmodern reading of Nietzsche:

> Although both Nietzsche and the postmodernists advocate a fragmented, perspectivist orientation toward our experience,

> Nietzsche's purpose distinguishes him from his alleged intellectual heirs. Nietzsche's primary concern is the possibility of rich and meaningful subjective experience. (1990, 191)

We suggest that the combination of these two tendencies—in Heraclitean terms, the way down and the way up—can be made part of one and the same critique and recreation.

The way down is aptly illustrated when Nietzsche says, in *Twilight of the Idols*,

> The conception of a consciousness ("spirit") as a cause, and later also that of the ego as cause (the "subject"), are only afterbirths: first the causality of the will was firmly accepted as given, as *empirical*.
>
> Meanwhile we have thought better of it. Today we no longer believe a word of all this. The "inner world" is full of phantoms and will-o'-the-wisps: the will is one of them. The will no longer moves anything, hence does not explain anything either; it can also be absent. . . . And as for the *ego*! That has become a fable, a fiction, a play on words: it has altogether ceased to think, feel, or will! (Kaufmann 1976, 494–495)

Likewise, in *The Will to Power*, he proclaims: "There exists neither 'spirit,' nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use" (sec. 480).

This skepticism about the self, taking it on the way down into dissolution, is, however, contrasted by Nietzsche's confidence in personal power, the way up, as he indicates in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

> A new pride my ego taught me, and this I teach men: no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth.
>
> A new will I teach men: to *will* this way which man has walked blindly, and to affirm it, and no longer to sneak away from it like the sick and decaying. (Kaufmann 1976, 144)

Similarly, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he says that the will has a countertendency to diversity and dissolution:

> Perhaps what I have said here of a "fundamental will of the spirit" may not be immediately comprehensible: allow me to explain.—That commanding something which the people call

> "spirit" wants to be master within itself and around itself and to feel itself master: out of multiplicity it has the will to simplicity, a will which binds together and tames, which is imperious and domineering. In this its needs and capacities are the same as those which physiologists posit for everything that lives, grows and multiplies. (sec. 230)

How are we to reconcile these two roads in Nietzsche, to offer both multiplicity and unity, critique and creativity—*Kulturmachen*—while perhaps, at the same time, escaping from and imagining an alternative to that abode of the consumer self: the mall?

From a neostructuralist perspective, Nietzsche may be seen as providing a deconstructive semeiotics of Christian culture, a revelation of the systems of language and signs that make up the dominant tradition of Europe. His attack on Christianity amounts, furthermore, to a protest against the literalization of metaphor and to the closed system, the closed-mindedness, that results from the privileging of the Christian "story" over all other possible stories, and the creation of a Western master narrative. The master narrative closes the open play of discourse by denying the radical tentativeness of culture as play; hence Nietzsche's laughter at the unconscious ludicrousness of Christian civilization. As he says about the Christians,

> By letting God judge, they themselves judge; by glorifying God, they glorify themselves; by *demanding* the virtues of which they happen to be capable—even more, which they require in order to stay on top at all—they give themselves the magnificent appearance of a struggle for virtue, of a fight for the domination of virtue. . . . One should read the Gospels as books of seduction by means of morality: these petty people reserve morality for themselves—they know all about morality! With morality it is easiest to lead mankind *by the nose*! (*The Antichrist*, Kaufmann 1976, 621)

The point here is that the pious have hypostatized their idea of the good into a reality—God—into whom they project their own judgments and by whose "authority" they absolutize their ideas of virtue in order to impose them on themselves and others. The texts of Christianity are rhetorical, forms of seduction in Baudrillard's sense, which entice folks into the fold by the idea of morality, the self-image of righteousness. But Christian goodness

is spurious, in Nietzsche's view, one more power play, and a particularly dangerous one because it is constituted by a metaphor turned into an idol: it is not, Nietzsche might say, following Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, that man is an image of God, but rather that God is an image, a metaphor, for man who has been, in turn, fabricated as absolute reality and moral authority: a master author for a master narrative for a master civilization bent on colonizing the world for Christ. Significantly anticipating Derrida, Nietzsche neatly, in effect, deconstructs the artificial oppositions, or more precisely the lopsided oppositions, on which this master narrative is based:

> What really happens here is that the most conscious *conceit of being chosen* plays modesty: once and for all one has placed *oneself*, the "community," the "good and just," on one side, on the side of "truth"—and the rest, "the world," on the other. This was the most disastrous kind of megalomania that has yet existed on earth. (Kaufmann 1976, 622)

God is a magnification of the Christian ego into the absolute, with all the attributes of morality—"community," "good and just"— foisted upon Him, creating an irreconcilable opposition to "the world" (read other peoples and cultures, nature, woman, the devil, evil, the Iraqis) which are, therefore, the proper objects of "salvation" (read conquest and exploitation). But the oppositions are artificial in the first place, and the Christian privileging of one half—the "good" half—is wholly chimerical. This would not be so bad if the Christians, and Eurocentrists generally, understood that the creation and selective privileging of oppositions are no more than a peculiar kind of play, invented by *Homo sapiens*; this realization, however, creates not the Apollonian wise man but the Dionysian reveler, *Homo ludens*. Of course, as Nietzsche's *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* clearly indicates, the Apollonian and Dionysian are themselves correlatives in the game of Western culture, separated at our peril.

The Christian ego is not only posited as God, in Nietzsche's view, but also as the soul, insuring not only that the world is "meant" for Christian colonization, but also that the converted are insured eternal life, independent of the play of time and change. According to Nietzsche, the absolutization of God is *internalized* by the Christians in a kind of meta-idolatry: first a superentity is fabricated and set up as the ontological foundation of all existence; then the Father in heaven is introjected as the soul in the body, or the ghost in the machine, in moral terms as the superego or conscience. Thus man comes to live under the shadow of God

and so accept the limits that this imposes on him: God hands down the law. As Nietzsche argues in *On the Genealogy of Morals*,

> All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward*—this is what I call the *internalization* [*Verinnerlichung*] of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul." The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was *inhibited*. (II, sec. 16)

Thus the self or soul is created through constraint on "instincts," which would otherwise be turned outward. Here we can see Nietzsche's downward and upward paths juxtaposed, for as he takes apart the inner life of the soul via genealogy, he suggests the expansion of "instinct" outward. This latter idea needs clarification, for it can be misinterpreted as an excuse for imperialism, but it can also be seen as the play of creativity unconstrained by the idols of metaphysics and the seductions of empire.

Learning and the Self-Transformation of the Consumer

This creative version of Nietzsche's upward path is evident in his view of learning, which dovetails with Gregory Bateson's theory of Learning III. Consider Nietzsche's view:

> Learning transforms us, it does that which all nourishment does which does not merely "preserve"—as the physiologist knows. But at the bottom of us, "right down deep," there is, to be sure, something unteachable, a granity stratum of spiritual fate, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. In the case of every cardinal problem there speaks an unchangeable "this is I"; about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn but only learn fully—only discover all that is "firm and settled" within him on this subject. One sometimes comes upon certain solutions to problems which inspire strong belief in *us*; perhaps one thenceforth calls them one's "convictions." Later—one sees them only as footsteps to self-knowledge, signposts to the problem which we *are*—more correctly, to the great stupidity which we are, to our spiritual fate, to the *unteachable* "right down deep." (*Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 231)

The idea of learning here is, first and foremost, one of radical self-transformation, where human identity is not static, knowledge not sure, but both subject to continuous reevaluation and change. This tentativeness of identity and knowledge that Nietzsche's idea implies echoes his aforementioned idea of culture as play, in Derridean terms, as the play of *différance*. But the unfolding of identity is limited by the constraint of self, by the "granity stratum of spiritual fate," by the "predetermined" answers to questions, by the "unchangeable" "this is I," as by its "convictions," all amounting to the "unteachable 'right deep down.'" This analysis is similar to Bateson's theory of Learning I, II, and III. Learning I includes simple habit formation as well as Pavlovian and Skinnerian conditioning: a programming of response by repeated pairing of stimuli. Learning II involves a systematic change in Learning I, as when a dog becomes *better* at Learning I, say, at learning to associate meat powder and bell as in the classic Pavlovian experiment, or as when a human subject gets better at memorizing nonsense syllables, after repeated trials. Learning II is "learning how to learn."

Bateson argues, interestingly, that the premises of self are encoded at the level of Learning II: the self is a complex of codes or, in Nietzsche's terms, "predetermined decisions way deep down," which punctuate the stream of experience: codes which, themselves learned and relatively "hard programmed," come to determine the future learning patterns of an individual. In most of us these codes become, as Nietzsche says, "unteachable," so that character and personality solidify; "we know who we are" and act "characteristically," determined by the programs of Learning II or by the constraints of self. But Bateson, like Nietzsche, does not leave the matter here. For both, the self is constructed, fabricated, a learned structure that functions to limit further learning. Both are therefore critical of this limitation and provide a theory of escape. For Bateson, this is Learning III: a change in the premises of Learning II, in Derrida's terms a deconstruction of its codes and constraints, and hence, in Nietzschean terms, a transformation of the person and a new freedom. As Bateson says in "The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication,"

> Certainly [Learning III] must lead to a greater flexibility in the premises acquired by the process of Learning II—a *freedom* from their bondage. . . .
>
> I once heard a Zen master state categorically: "To become accustomed to anything is a terrible thing."

> But any freedom from the bondage of habit must also denote a profound redefinition of the self. If I stop at the level of Learning II, "I" am the aggregate of those characteristics which I call my "character." "I" am my habits of acting in context and shaping and perceiving the contexts in which I act. Selfhood is a product or aggregate of Learning II. To the degree that a man achieves Learning III, and learns to perceive and act in terms of the contexts of contexts, his "self" will take on a sort of irrelevance. The concept of "self" will no longer function as a nodal argument in the punctuation of experience. (*Steps*, 304)

Thus Learning III, in Bateson's terms, is analogous to learning as self-transformation in Nietzsche's, and both imply that the construction of cultural codes, of which the ciphers of self, like the idea of deity, are a prime example, are constraints on the open play of creativity, in Derridean terms of *différance*. Thus culture making becomes a creative, upward path, only tentatively constrained by the strictures of self, of metaphysics, of morals, and of various other kinds of civilized "order." The tentativeness of self-making becomes part of the play of culture making, the primary Nietzschean "rule" of which is, "Don't forget that this is a game," "Don't start worshiping the king," just move your chess piece or carve a new one or make up a new form of play.

The upward path in Nietzsche, like Bateson's road to higher learning, involves a generative idea of identity. Identity is to be shaped in terms of values that in turn must be shaped by the creative will to power. This active dimension of the self, counter to the passive acquiescence of the slave, is the command of the master. This latter idea might cause, and has caused, postmodern and feminist theorists to wince because of its frank assertion of power and dominance as opposed to passivity and submission. But it is possible to interpret what Nietzsche says in this regard so as not to uphold the patriarchic dominance of master narratives and phallocentric discourse but rather to open the way to polymorphous self-making. It is also possible to develop the Nietzschean idea of mastery without invoking the master–slave dialectic, delineated by Hegel and Marx as well as by Sartre.

The idea of commanding and mastery in Nietzsche may be understood by analogy with that of Zen discipline and mastery, itself compared to Learning III by Bateson above. As Shunryu Suzuki says, "the purpose of studying Buddhism is to study ourselves and to forget ourselves. When we forget ourselves, we actually are the true activity of the big existence, or

reality itself" (1985, 79). Here "reality" must be understood antimetaphysically as "true activity." In this regard, to "command" and to "master" are not to impose rules from above or to assert power over, but rather to break free from rules and ascend to a perspective where structures, including the self, are fabricated. Thus, in spite of Nietzsche's railing against the asceticism and herd mentality of Buddhism that supposedly imperils Europe by, as he says in his preface to *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "the will turning *against* life, the tender and ultimate signs of the ultimate illness" (sec. 5; cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 202), to the creative Nietzschean as to the Zen Buddhist, mastery consists not in asserting domination over the slave but in transcending the double-bind of the master–slave dialectic. This is the will to mastery that Nietzsche contrasts to the preference of the spirit for the dissembling, trivializing power obtained from the masks of everyday identity, the "will to appearance":

> in this the spirit enjoys the multiplicity and cunning of its masks, it enjoys too the sense of being safe that this brings—for it is precisely through its protean arts that it is best concealed and protected!

The will to mastery is quite different, however, counteracting the will to appearance. As Nietzsche continues,

> *This* will to appearance, to simplification, to the mask, to the cloak, in short to the superficial—for every surface is a cloak—is *counteracted* by that sublime inclination in the man of knowledge which takes a profound many-sided and thorough view of things and *will* take such a view: as a kind of cruelty of the intellectual conscience and taste which every brave thinker will recognize in himself, provided he has hardened and sharpened for long enough his own view of himself, as he should have, and is accustomed to stern discipline and stern language. (*Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 230)

This path to a profound mastery appreciative of multiplicity and achieved through stern discipline and language not only connotes Zen practice but also suggests that, like Learning III, the identity to be created by the Nietzschean master is not a superficial phenomenon, not the mask of prefabricated identity readily available in the myriad consumer images on display in the mall, but rather the power of image making, of self-formation. This identity requires not the acquiescence of the consumer slave but

rather the intellectual conscience, bravery, and even cruelty of self-scrutiny and reevaluation characteristic of the creative master. It also leads, because of the tentativeness and multiplicity of the roles it invokes, to the metalogic of play.

The Will to Power and the Will to Play

Nietzschean, like Derridean, play invokes the unfolding power of *différance*, of what Bateson calls the "difference which makes a difference" (381), the generative identity of the rule-maker unconstrained by any strictures except those created by herself or himself, including of course the gender codes of selfhood implicit in the aforementioned pronouns, for the game. As Nietzsche says, in his typically contemptuous way,

> Wisdom: that seems to the rabble to be a kind of flight, an artifice and means for getting oneself out of a dangerous game; but the genuine philosopher—as he seems to *us*, my friends?—lives "unphilosophically" and "unwisely," above all *imprudently*, and bears the burden and duty of a hundred attempts and temptations of life—he risks *himself* constantly, he plays *the* dangerous game. (*Beyond Good and Evil*, sec. 205)

What is the "dangerous game"? If our reading is correct, it is the play of *différance*, which emerges at the level of Learning III and makes irrelevant the premises of the spectral self created by the will to appearance or by Madison Avenue, creating the extraordinary risk and responsibility of self-making, the impetus of the will to power. To give up prefabricated identity is to play the dangerous game of having to make one's own, of going "mad." As we have argued elsewhere (White and Hellerich 1992, 1993), the therapeutic disciplines of the social sciences, like psychology and education, are in the business of regulating and enforcing norms of identity consistent with the bureaucratic structure of modern states and corporations. To challenge those identities and what Nietzsche calls the "slave sciences" that help maintain them, is to set out on a hard climb, the upward path, which as Nietzsche says requires discipline. This is where Nietzschean postmodernity differs from that of Fredric Jameson, at least if we understand his "cultural logic of late capitalism" pessimistically as defining the limits of postmodern coding. For the pastiche of codes that make up postmodern artifacts and representations, including the schizophrenic post-self, are on this reading the result of the commercialization of

culture by what the Frankfurt School called the culture industry, and the pervasive dominance of advertising, even identification of advertising, as the logic of culture. But that makes those in the postmodern condition no more than schizophrenic consumer slaves, in Nietzsche's terms, hardly an ideal hoarde of twenty-first-century culture heroes, or even anti-heroes.

New Forms of Empowerment

If postmodern consumers are slaves, then those who make the rules for consumption, the capitalists, are the masters; together they produce the master–slave dialectic of late capitalism. Consuming more will not make the slaves masters, and becoming capitalists will not free them from the dialectic, for their power is constrained by the need for slaves to feed profits. In late capitalism, as Marx foresaw, both capitalist and consumer, like capitalist and worker in earlier phases, are prisoners of the logic of capital in its game of masters and slaves: the game of power as *power over* the other. The Nietzschean and, we think, the postmodern game is to get out of the dialectic altogether: power as *power to create* (*Kulturmachen*). As Nietzsche says, contrasting his ideal with thinkers in the tradition of Kant and Hegel,

> *Genuine philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators.* . . . With a creative hand they reach for the future, and all that is and has been becomes a means for them, an instrument, a hammer. Their "knowing" is creating, their creating is legislation, their will to truth is—*will to power.* (*Beyond Good and Evil*, Kaufmann trans., sec. 211)

The social philosophy of Nietzschean postmodernity is emerging as a Neo-Marxism embracing both a critique of capitalism and an incredulity at the master narrative of collective liberation through state socialism. Pluralism, decentralization, feminism, environmentalism, local empowerment, in the Nietzschean sense, of diverse peoples and cultures are the semeiotic formations of the new movement. As Grossberg and Nelson argue in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, a volume embodying the new diversity of discourses in this domain,

> As *Marxism* has been challenged and rewritten, both by its dialogue with other bodies of theory and by its effort to acknowledge the diverse political realities of the postwar world;

> as Marxism has attempted to find more sophisticated models of the relations between culture and power, more reflective understanding of its own position within these relations, and more politically insightful and relevant tools for the analysis of contemporary structures of power—so has it become a much more varied discourse. (11)

In this context, the ideas of self and self-formation are crucial to the understanding of what empowerment might mean and what it might achieve. Empowerment of the creative self requires a critique of the dialectic, which makes a master or a slave out of the spectral self: the consuming logic of images in the mall. The logic is so pervasive and so dominant that it is not unlike that of the stained glass in the medieval church, except consumer icons have replaced religious ones.

Herbert Marcuse's critique of late capitalism provides a useful beginning point from which a deconstructive critique may proceed. Marcuse utilized Freudian theory to highlight the subtle forms of repression emerging in the advanced industrial West during the 1950s and 1960s, when consumerism was burgeoning into what Jameson, Lyotard, Baudrillard, and others would recognize as the postmodern cultural formation. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse develops his most telling analysis of the way in which the capitalist economy was reducing the complexity and autonomy of collective and individual power by the mechanisms of the market, transforming workers and citizens, both potential revolutionaries, into consumers. A key to his analysis is the concept of "repressive desublimation," which inverts the traditional Freudian analysis, where civilization is said to be formed by the sublimation of desires and the structuring, in capitalism the exploitative repression, of *eros* into alienated labor for someone else's profit. This dimension of Marcuse's work was an expansion of his earlier *Eros and Civilization*, in which he supplemented the traditional Marxian interpretation of capitalism in terms of economic exploitation with the Freudian one in terms of psychological forms of control. What was new in late capitalism, particularly consumerism, Marcuse argued, was that the work ethic analyzed so well by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which required that the desire for pleasure be sublimated in order for worker or capitalist to succeed, was now being overturned.

The logic of consumerism was precisely the repressive structuring of pleasure for the purpose of control. Consumers were encouraged to desublimate and indulge their desires for a myriad of products, which were made

all the more alluring by the glossy images of advertising. Thus where capitalism once required hard work and sacrifice, it now requires leisure and self-indulgence. The flagrant contradiction between these two tendencies is no doubt at the basis of the contradictions and irony pervasive in developed consumer economies, especially in the United States, where people are simultaneously told to work hard and to enjoy themselves, to diet and to eat, to save and to spend, until they are understandably confused and lined up for therapy. This contradictory rubric is at the basis of Jameson's pastiched "cultural logic" of late capitalism, mentioned above, or what Jameson, Baudrillard, and others have referred to as postmodern "schizophrenia," and what Charles Jencks, speaking of architecture and the arts, calls postmodern "double coding."

As these theorists, especially Jencks, suggest, this logic, while it has a great many destructive features—consider the mass control of the consumer population by the "soft" methods of the market that have invaded every sphere, from health care to politics—also opens some creative possibilities. For the masters of the consumer kingdom, the patron saints of the consumer church (Lee Iacoca, Jim and Tammy Baker, Donald Trump, Bill Gates) are not necessarily in control of the Pandora's box of pleasures they have opened. What may be taking place—what we hope is taking place—is a splintering of the very mechanisms of control that gave us the structures of consumerism in the first place—and the opening up of a creative option for politics and culture. We may still accept the sacraments of the consumer church, but we may no longer believe in the religion. This disbelief is part of what Lyotard has called the postmodern incredulity about master narratives—progress, enlightenment, salvation, and, we would add, consumption. With economy and ecology crumbling, increasingly we are willing to admit that there is trouble in consumer paradise.

Interlude: Nietzsche Goes to Hell (and so do we)

In the textual world of the *Comedia: Inferno*, Virgil leads Dante through the hordes of the damned, all engaged in activities that epitomize their forms of entrapment and self-torture, revealing the semeiotics of sin to the pilgrim and his guide. So let Nietzsche be our guide as we purchase his commoditized tomes and enter the stream of consumers in the mall. "Buying and selling have become common, like the art of reading and writing," our guide proclaims with mild disdain. "Everybody has practiced it even if he is no tradesman, and gets more practice every day—just as formerly, when

men were more savage, everybody was a hunter and practiced that art day after day" (*Gay Science*, 31). "So we go foraging for products as a way of life," we wonder, "even as your metaphor indicates, writing by our consuming practices the language constituting our lives?" "One can imagine social conditions in which there is no buying and selling and in which this art gradually ceases to be necessary," our guide says (31), intimating, we assume, the Other Place, which we've heard of but never seen. For now we're in the realm of the carnal, and indeed we observe a neon sign blinking in time with neo-disco pop rhythms, just ahead, reading, in Nietzsche's translation, "Prostitution of the Spirit" (31).

"*Ecce!*" Nietzsche remarks with a glare. "After all this do I still need to say that they too will be free, *very* free spirits, these philosophers of the future?" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 44), by invidious comparison with whom we get the uneasy feeling that he is referring to *us* in *our* rubric of consumption. "In all the countries of Europe and likewise in America there exists at present something that misuses this name, a very narrow, enclosed, chained up species of spirits who desire practically the opposite of that which informs our aims and instincts. . . . They belong, in short and regrettably, among the *levellers*, these falsely named 'free spirits'—eloquent and tirelessly scribbling slaves of the democratic taste and its 'modern ideas,' men without solitude one and all . . . unfree and ludicrously superficial" (44). After this, we are a little ashamed to try something on, despite the friendly pose of the salesperson beckoning us, like a siren, to simulate the perfect electric images of the body-apparelled emanating from the video monitors above. We are so taken with the images of delight dancing with digital ecstasy on the screens, like writhing forms in pain on Prozac, that we are nearly overcome with awe, and so apparently is another salesperson with our guide's mustache, which he describes as "awesome."

Escaping from that gap in the mall's glittering, woeful stream, we reenter the consumer traffic, the souls rushing as in a stampede toward what at first seems to be an apparition; but, our guide explains, "What with all their might they would like to strive after is the universal green pasture happiness of the herd, with security, safety, comfort and an easier life for all" (54). We are taken by our host's prophetic powers, too, when his very words are soon echoed by another person selling, this time, the images of suburbia from a real-estate booth, high above us up a glittering escalator, emblazoned by the skylight. As we ascend amidst the herd our guide bids us to listen, and explains that the celestial music we hear is actually the sound of Musak augmented by the strains of an electric fountain with plaster

boulders and "real" plants. He also explains that suburbia is where the souls go who, having escaped the tortuous delights of the mall, seek a place of rest and so are given the simulations of "home" that best fit their (our?) televised imaginations and budgets. So Nietzsche asks, "Is it any wonder we 'free spirits' are not precisely the most communicative [televised?] of spirits? that we do not want to betray in every respect *from what* a spirit can free itself and *to what* [and in what model auto] it is then perhaps driven?" (44). But we are not yet to receive our estate, and our guide motions us again downward, toward further wonders of the consumer cavern.

As we descend into the lower level, we notice that the souls move in an aura of purely artificial light, the blaze of the sun absent here, and that the mall stretches out before us as an avenue of glittering surfaces, the ice of electronic Cocytus, under the gloss of which entities swim in every conceivable form of simulated self-betterment, mannequins like pieces of straw bent this way and that behind the glass. Our host explains that this is the realm of Love Gone Awry, where the nobler inclinations of the spirit entombed are subjected to the frigorific contortions of style. Refracting language through a prism of applications like his Florentine counterpart, Nietzsche says, "Avarice and love: what different feelings these two terms evoke! Nevertheless it could be the same instinct that has two names" (*Gay Science*, 14). The *Amor* of Dante's *Paradiso* is also the Love entrapped in his *Inferno*, we assume he means to suggest, so that love and avarice have a common thread. Thus Nietzsche says, "A full and powerful soul not only copes with painful, even terrible losses, deprivations, robberies, insults; it emerges from such hells with greater fullness and powerfulness; and, most essential of all, with a new increase in the blissfulness of love. I believe that he who has divined something of the most basic conditions for this growth in love will understand what Dante meant when he wrote over the gate of his *Inferno*: 'I, too, was created by eternal love'" (*The Will to Power*, 1030). We are on the verge of forgetting that our journey is one of exploration, a kind of archaeological expedition to the mall, and approach the encased images, ready to consume with plastic drawn, when Nietzsche warns us: "Our pleasure in ourselves tries to maintain itself by again and again changing something new *into ourselves*; that is what possession means" (*Gay Science*, 14).

We ponder the result of becoming those mannequins under glass, and are about to sheathe our credit cards when there appears on our right, in an aura of incandescence and perfume, a pane that offers plastic

women dressed in as little silk as possible—the perfect consumable items! The idea seems to be that the lingerie has some Secret power to transform real women into icons, thus making them much more amenable to male taste. But once again our guide warns, much to our disappointment,

> Sexual love betrays itself most clearly as a lust for possession: the lover desires unconditional and sole possession of the person for whom he longs; he desires equally unconditional power over the soul and over the body of the beloved; he alone wants to be loved and desires to live and rule in the other soul as supreme and supremely desirable. If one considers that this means nothing less than *excluding* the whole world from a precious good, from happiness and enjoyment; if one considers that the lover aims at the impoverishment and deprivation of all competitors and would like to become the dragon guarding his golden hoard as the most inconsiderate and selfish of all "conquerors" and exploiters; if one considers, finally, that to the lover himself the whole rest of the world appears indifferent, pale, and worthless, and he is prepared to make any sacrifice to disturb any order, to subordinate all other interests—then one comes to feel genuine amazement that this wild avarice and injustice of sexual love has been glorified and deified so much in all ages—indeed, that this love has furnished the concept of love as the opposite of egoism while it actually may be the most ingenuous expression of egoism. (14)

As our benevolent shepherd prods us past the store, he points to a sign with stark white letters on a black background, oddly enough standing out amidst the glittering icons all around, saying "Limited": "At this point linguistic usage has evidently been formed by those who did not possess but desired. Probably, there have always been too many of these," our guide explains (14), apparently meaning that the name indicates the underlying dynamic of consumerism: desire unlimited in a semeiotic formation that paradoxically spells out "Exclusive" in pastiche with images of unlimited conformity through consumption: "*From Paradise*: 'Good and evil are the prejudices of God'—said the snake" (*Gay Science*, 259). We are, at this point, feeling uneasily like Nietzsche's "free spirits," and are ready to escape to the suburbs.

Beyond Good and Evil: *fröhliches Kulturmachen*

"We Gotta Get Out of This Place"
—The Animals

The church of consumers may be deconstructed by the Nietzschean critique—the restrictive premises of late capitalism, of bureaucratization, of channeled and conditioned desire revealed—and in their place the possibility of a new game opened. The deconstruction is achieved by Nietzsche's simultaneous criticism, on our reading, of the oppositions of the master–slave dialectic and his provision of an upward path that transcends it. This is a transcendence not of "the world" but rather of the polarities of a game, the restrictive logic of dominator and dominated, and hence into the freedom to be a true player—a maker of games, instead of a piece (whether king or pawn)—in a prefabricated game. It is the opening up of the domain of play as the metalogic of Learning III, of the possibility of identity unconstrained by the spectral self, which Nietzsche offers as a "philosophical" alternative for the individual psyche. Beyond the entrapment of the child in the introjected imagery of the culture in the mirror phase, as Lacan theorizes it, Nietzsche offers the image of the child as the open possibility of creativity, through the looking glass into the realm of play:

> The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world. (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Kaufmann trans., 139)

We should understand this affirmative spirit that wills itself not as the traditional ego of the West, of which Nietzsche was so critical, but rather as the play of *différance* in the psyche, creating the personae of selfhood via the multilevel paradoxes of play. The latter, and the host of creative options they open by making communication ever incomplete, are generated by the peculiar self-referentiality of the message, "This is play," which Bateson translates as "These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions *for which they stand* would denote," so that, for example, the playful nip denotes but does not mean the same thing as the bite ("A Theory of Play and Fantasy," *Steps*, 180). It this opening up of communication via paradox to the expanding indeterminacy of play that,

Bateson suggests modestly, "may have been an important step in the evolution of communication" (181). The opening up of communication to indeterminacy is also an opening up to creativity, as Nietzsche and affirmative postmodernists suggest. It is a way out of the stylized rules of the static game of control, imposed by the powers that be, and a way into culture making by powers that become. For as Bateson concludes, more profoundly, regarding play,

> we believe that the paradoxes of abstraction must make their appearance in all communication more complex than that of mood signals, and that without these paradoxes the evolution of communication would be at an end. Life would then be an endless interchange of stylized messages, a game with rigid rules, unrelieved by change or humor. (193)

So perhaps we can put down our copy of Nietzsche that we have been contemplating to see that the mall, no matter how powerful and encompassing, may itself be transformed, its consumer gods dethroned, by the deconstructive power of laughter.