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The Metaphysics of Textuality: Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* and Nietzsche's *Use and Abuse of History*

> Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent.
>
> —Karl Marx

> Like the artist, theoretical man takes infinite pleasure in all that exists and is thus saved from the practical ethics of pessimism, with its lynx eyes that shine only in the dark. But while the artist, having unveiled the truth garment by garment, remains with his gaze fixed on what is still hidden, theoretical man takes delight in the case garments and finds his highest satisfaction in the unveiling process itself, which proves to him his own power.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche

> The question of style—it is always the question of a pointed object. . . . Style will jut out, then, like the spur on an old sailing vessel. . . . With its spur, style can also protect against whatever terrifying, blinding, or mortal threat might present itself or be obstinately encountered: i.e., the presence, and, hence, the content of things themselves, of meaning, of truth. . . .
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> —Jacques Derrida

Throughout the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies both Paul de Man[1] and Jacques Derrida unveiled the pervasive presence of Hegelian metaphysics within the history of philosophy and Modern critical practice. For both theorists, this metaphysics was a closed economy of signification.[2] Derrida, as he himself points out in *Positions*[3], is attempting simultaneously to carry out a general economy

and a general strategy of deconstruction which would always and everywhere be directed against the Hegelian dialectic.

Derrida's and de Man's anti-Hegelianism has had a profound and apparently lasting influence on an entire generation of literary critical intellectuals. I would like, in this paper, to consider some of the effects of this influence and to suggest some of what is lost to criticism as a result of following in the footsteps of these great masters. Let me say at the beginning that I will make no effort to "refute" the basic claims which others derive from these critics and which they make authoritative: such claims as those about the relationship between textuality and allegory or the so-called deconstructive inversion of hierarchies. My point is that I have found no convincing demonstration that these terms or "non-concepts" are, indeed, as unavailable to *all* critical discussion as the ephebes of Derrida and de Man often claim. On the contrary, I want to make a small case for what is ruled-out of the proper domain of critical thinking by those who give their strongly committed allegiances to the most extreme forms of deconstructive skepticism. Another way to put this would be to say that I will make no attempt to contest with Paul de Man's preternaturally sensitive readings of the characteristics of textuality in those texts by Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Proust which he could make so interesting for us. Rather than enter those lists and fail or be marked by the paralysis of discipleship, I want to engage in a somewhat different critical discourse secure in the irrelevance of the deconstructive critique to its value—despite its own traditional and, indeed, apparently "metaphysical" nature.

The shape of this essay is somewhat convoluted. I intend to derive and outline what I take to be a more powerful and attractive mode of oppositional practice from two central works of the radical intellectual tradition: *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.[4] Yet before going on to Marx and Nietzsche, I would like to outline part of Derrida's anti-Hegelian stance, particularly as this emerged in the late sixties and the early seventies, that is, at the moment when Derrida became attractive and influential among a number of soon-to-be-powerful literary critics. But even before opening that parenthesis on Derrida—which is necessary to my general argument—I must take a somewhat different look at another aspect of Derrida and de Man's work and influence.

Both de Man and Derrida repeatedly announced, from the late sixties onward, that critical thinking about language had, for far too long, been secondary to other intellectual projects and concerns: phenomenology, structuralism, and humanistic literary history are cogent examples. In fact, we can see now as many did even then, that

they were absolutely correct. The late sixties and the early seventies give abundant evidence of the failure of both New Criticism and liberal bourgeois humanism to ground the intellectual and social importance of the critical academy.[5] One can find the evidence of this failure not only in the heap of unimportant scribble conjured by those pursuing the seductive spectre of academic success, but much more importantly, in the despair of the young in literary study, a despair which turned them away from critical studies to sociology, law, social work and other then fashionably "relevant" or rewarding disciplines and careers. This same despair is found among the "me generation" of the seventies and the insecure youth of the Reagan revolution in the eighties as they turn to journalism, business school, advertising, and engineering: caught in the illusion they can securely ground their future's happiness and freedom in the sacrifice of their present to a practice they see as at most second-best.

A certain set of questions come easily to mind: could it be said that American literary education was felt by the majority of students, and often by the "best and brightest," to be unimportant, culturally irrelevant, and not just a dead-end kind of professional training? Could this mean that literature itself is closed finally in a casket locked beyond all exhumation?[6] Might it not even mean that the nature of the intellectual study of literature in the American academy is at fault? It seems obvious, one might assert, that too many, perhaps even a great majority of American teacher/scholars dance to tunes piped on horns blown in previous ages. Might we not ask, though, if literary study has lost its value and importance to the social order because it has stopped being critical, it has stopped practicing negation and opposition to what is given and so has failed to provide the only thing critical practice can offer which can be found no where else: the ability to see, to study, and to call into question all the inadequate institutions, discourses, and practices of our culture and political order? Might one not also argue that Americanized deconstruction did not in any way revise this circumstance, but rather became merely the institutionalized response to the loss of social power, of cultural relevance, a response which, in effect, sustained the given order of the literary institution when it was in crisis?[7]

De Man and Derrida were, and to some extent, still are phenomena. Not only did what they say effectively alter the way many of us who listened thought about and studied literature, but they were also (and perhaps this is even more important) sources of excitement and energy for an academic literary establishment seen as haggish, passive, repetitious and historically very inappropriate. De Man and Derrida were seducers; whether they were sirens or Socrates is a question that should

perhaps be answered. Edward Said, for example, seems to be himself unsure: in his discussions of Derrida he takes him far more seriously than those who either follow him professionally or repudiate him blindly. Said would seem to take Derrida and other "systematic" critics[8] with about the same degree of seriousness as an Athenian court might take Socrates. It would be inappropriate to picture Said as Odysseus tied to a mast listening to the Sirens. Yet, it seems to me, an important question whether the criticism of textuality is Sirenic or Socratic. No doubt both de Man and Derrida in their consummate displays of irony, in their propulsion of mind along previously blocked paths of thought are like Socrates. But they are also like Nietzsche's image of woman—the seductive figure of distant promise whose dangerous powers of seduction exist both at a distance and in close proximity.[9] Admiring from afar or closing to grapple with truth—both bring exhaustion and death—can I say then I won't enter the lists with de Man, and can that mean anything in our profession but succumbing from a distance? In *Positions* Derrida analyzes this same problem in in this way:

> If we have to keep our distance from the feminine operations of *actio in distans*—which doesn't amount to simply not approaching it, except at the risk of death *itself*—it is because "woman" is *not* just an identifiably determinate appearance that is imported at a distance from somewhere else, an appearance to draw back from or to approach. Perhaps, as non-identity, non-appearance, simulacrum, she is the *abyss* of distance, the distancing of distance, the thrust of spacing, distance itself—distance *as such*, if one could say that, which is no longer possible .... There is no essence of woman because woman separates and separates herself off from herself. From the endless, bottomless depths, she submerges all essentiality, identity, all propriety, and every property. Blinded in such a way, philosophical [one can say critical, as well] discourse founders, and is left to dash headlong to its ruin. There is no truth about woman, just because this abysmal separation from the truth, this nontruth, is *the* truth." Woman is one name for this nontruth of truth. (*P*, p. 179).

The proof of de Man's and Derrida's seduction of the youth of academe is that they are themselves names for the truth of nontruth, and, of course, for the nontruth of truth—if one could any longer speak even in that way.

Beginning in 1967, de Man insists that there is a crisis in criticism:

> Well established rules and conventions that governed the discipline of criticism and made it a cornerstone of the intellectual establishment have been so badly tampered with that the entire edifice threatens to collapse.[10]

As de Man repeated this claim throughout the early 1970's, after sixty-eight, after Tet, after Nixon, to many of us it seemed as if the entire edifice of Western life were about to collapse—and some of us wished to hurry it along. De Man's nearly apocalyptic statement sat well with those who were living through a horrible imperialist war and painful civil war in the streets and on the campuses. Paradoxically, de Man's call attracted those who hoped to turn the university away from its associations with a racist and imperialist state. But de Man's work is nothing if not reasoned and mocking; even in '67 and '70 he was prepared to admit that to many academic critics there appeared to be no crisis at all. Of course, as all those concerned with contemporary criticism now know, de Man argues that all criticism is generically "crisis;" it is always insightful only because blind; always undergoing hermeneutic and methodological upheaval. Yet he daringly intimates that speaking of crisis in American literary criticism might be "out of tone." Americans are eclectic, less concerned with polemics, and satisfied that all previous "crises," so-called, have only been stages along the progressing and progressive way.[11] But de Man quickly adopts a rather harsher tone toward this characteristic American cultural optimism:

> This kind of pragmatic common sense is admirable, up to the point where it lures the mind into self-satisfied complacency and puts it irrevocably to sleep. It can always be shown, on all levels of experience, that what other people experience as a crisis is perhaps not even a change; such observations depend to a very large extent on the standpoint of the observer . . . . No set of arguments, no enumeration of symptoms will ever prove that the present effervescence surrounding literary criticism is in fact a crisis that, for better or worse, is reshaping the critical consciousness of a generation. (*BI*, pp. 5-6)

The crisis of which de Man speaks seems to be safely located in the past for most academicians. Perhaps we can see this in the appearance and reappearance of such essays as Walter Benn Michaels and Robert Knapp's "Against Theory."

There are, of course, many reasons why the crisis in criticism seems to have faded from the consciousness of the profession—especially its upper reaches—even as the financial crunch and the Reagan-led assault on educational funding grows worse. I want to restrict my comments here to matters largely internal to the profession. Of course, I realize that the literary institutions are not independent of the larger world, but I want to isolate some specific institutional realities to understand the profession's own role in neutralizing this critical consciousness.[12]

The American literary institution has had two powerful ways to overcome this crisis in criticism. The first is the increasingly seductive voice of the past represented best in the late sixties and early seventies by M.H. Abrams and more recently and more publicly by Denis Donoghue, Susan Sontag, Robert M. Adams and the like. The second is the institutional machinery of cooptation and dispersal which simply incorporated the rhetoric of crisis into academic publications, curricula, and prizes thereby disarming its critical implications. *Diacritics, Glyph, boundary 2, Critical Inquiry, The Georgia Review*, and others—all these journals to differing degrees and at various times in different ways became sites for the initiation of many into *la nouvelle critique*—which was good—and into the hierarchical reward structure of the university—which is unavoidable. Yale responded institutionally to the intense awareness of change in New Haven with the Literature Program, an undergraduate curriculum for literary theoretical, comparative, interdisciplinary study (a program now moving in somewhat different political directions) and with several issues of the *Yale French Studies* on French Freud and the pedagogical implications of contemporary criticism.[13] The University of California and the NEH combined to form the School of Criticism and Theory at Irvine under the direction of Murray Krieger, himself no friend of poststructuralist criticism.[14] For a time, even the generally moribund *PMLA* found it acceptable to publish poststructuralist articles and to note the frequency with which the name of Derrida appeared in its pages

Rather than see these events as openings in the essentially closed economy of American criticism, I take them as movements of domination which make overt exactly how dependent upon the central institutions of state, bureaucracy, hierarchy and capital so-called "advanced" criticism really is. Deconstruction is, as Derrida himself might put it, always already coopted; it is always and everywhere hard to differentiate from its avowed academic antagonist.[15] One can see how difficult it is for the American academy to take seriously, that is, to take in any critical and reflexive spirit, the crisis of criticism when one considers the celebrity and authority of Jonathan Culler who professes throughout his work to be providing "guides" which essentially commodify serious critical work and deny that work all of the power of negation.[16]

The effects of the critical crisis have not been as irreversible as de Man supposed because the liberal humanistic tradition is still ideologically quite powerful and has, in a generally conservative historical moment, regained much of its former strength. When Abrams debated J. Hillis Miller, for example,[17] Abrams' role or function was to place the massive authority of his reputation as a literary humanist in opposition to "deconstruction's" "threatened barbarism." In effect,

Abrams granted many academicians a dispensation from studying the newer critical texts and those of their forbearers: Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Saussure, Lacan, and Heidegger. Abrams intends his work to further civilization by enhancing knowledge and communication; but during the seventies his most important function within the academy was as a force for closure, a full-stop authoritatively representing both the unwillingness of too many to study a new point of view and the stake which the humanistic institutions of literary study have in closing out (except for the tokens) serious consideration of the work of recent critics.

II

I would like to move from the margin of my proposed topic and return to the parenthesis of de Man and Derrida on Hegel which I opened so long ago. The reason for having moved to the margin is quite simple: my topic itself always exists on the margin of the American literary critical establishment and I have been confronting it all along. My primary concern is with Marx and Nietzsche's interest in criticism's relations to institutions and education.

But before I can move directly to that topic, the issue of deconstruction's relation to Hegel must be taken up very briefly.[18] In "Genesis and Genealogy in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*," de Man claims that literary criticism is largely carried out within a Hegelianism. Modern literary criticism attempts like Hegel, to totalize different elements of textuality and literary history—which de Man finds incommensurate in themselves—within one circular figure where the begining and the end of interpretation are similar because the beginning is the end. De Man argues that *The Birth of Tragedy* is a double text, a deconstruction of the very genetic and genealogical metaphors which structure its own narrative model. He also says that, despite the claims of the High Modernists and their explicators, linear and circular models of history are analogous. De Man claims to have found in Nietzsche's text a rigorous demonstration that the apparent differences between the teleological structure of linear consciousness associated traditionally with the hierarchical model of Christianity[19] and the dialectical or "evolutionary" forms of history represented in Hegel's *Erinerung*—that both these forms emerge from one important interest: the desire to develop continuous, teleological models for the interpretation of the history of the West which culminate in the highest possible parousiacal synthesis of temporal events in a transcendent whole. This abstract, unitary, historical model, de Man concludes, obscures the consistent interruptions into narrative continuity which plague all texts—novels,

critical books, and histories. Nietzsche's text has, he tells us, enacted the universal situation of all writing, that is, the duplicity of writ:ng in a multiplicity of ironic voices which inevitably subverts its own movements of cohesion. In writing, "truths" cannot be brought to rest; if they appear to be stabilized conceptually "within" texts, especially within narratives, as in Fichte's narrative of subjectivity, that is only because the improvisatory, buffoon-like generative power of irony as the trope of tropes, as the "permanent parabasis of allegory," has been obscured by a technologically based culture, the stable forms of which cannot seriously open themselves to the freer circulation of signifiers in a non-narrative, non-teleological writing. In fact, for de Man, the primary location of the suppression of language's ironic duplicity is historical narration.

History-writing's adaptation of the genetic model of continuity is a transference from a level of scientific reference in biological sciences to a metaphoric level in narration—a transference which, according to de Man, cannot be made with epistemological rigor. Therefore, he concludes, since there is no reason for this transference, an explanation for its pervasive occurrence, particularly in literary history, can be found only in the power of its effects. Hence de Man's preoccupation at that time with analysing major literary figures, such as Rousseau, Shelley, and Nietzsche, to show that they are already demystified, that their texts are already aware of their own status as double-writing, and time and again demonstrate how the disfigured, fragmentary nature of writing prohibits its historical hermeneutic recuperation and always anticipates its best (Hegelian) interpreters.

Derrida in a similar movement—Derrida's differences from de Man are not crucial here—repeatedly figures the Hegelian dialectic as a recuperative machine which totalizes and synthesizes by taking up all binaries into a third term moving irrevocably toward totalization. This is an all-powerful machine of interpretation: it first dissolves complex differences ino antitheses and then sublimates them "in an anamnestic interiority *(Erinerung)*, while *interning* difference in a presence to itself" (*P*, p. 36). Derrida represents the Hegelian hydra as a perpetual reconstitution of the "dual opposition." And the object of this Hegelian assault is always the

> undecidables, that is, simulative units, 'false' verbal, nominal or semantic properties, which escape from inclusion in the philosophical (binary) opposition and which nonetheless inhabit it, resist it, and disorganize it, but *without ever* constituting a third term, without ever occasioning a solution in the form of speculative dialectics .... In Fact, it is against the incessant reappropriation of this simulative activity in a Hegelian type of dialectics.. that I am attempting to channel the critical enterprise ... (*P*, p. 36)

De Man and Derrida feel the Hegelian model must be displaced since it is the most powerful and closed economy epitomizing Western metaphysics and its critical substratum. Derrida always sets himself "against thought" precisely because, as he learns from Bataille, whenever Hegelianism appears to be displaced, there it is most effectively controlling language and *producing* thought: "It is the emptiness given the substance of a highly derivative ideality: the effect of a difference of forces, the illusive autonomy of a discourse or a consciousness whose hypostasis must be deconstructed . . . ." This general deconstruction, we learn, is an attack on history and hermeneutic understanding:

> Must I recall that, from my first published texts, I have attempted to systematize deconstructive criticism precisely in opposition to the authority of meaning (*sens*) as a *transcendental signifier* or as a *telos*, in other words against history ultimately understood to be a history of meaning (*sens*), history in its logocentric, metaphysical, idealistic representation. . . going so far as to include the complex imprints it was able to leave on Heideggerean discourse? (*P*, p. 39)

Yet, Derrida uses the word "history" himself, but not in either its linear or circular sense; by his definition, both of these are inside the closure of metaphysics: a set of "faults always different from one another, of divisions whose mark or scar is born by all philosophic texts." What Derrida offers as history is repetition and trace; it is, in other words, textuality. The central movement of deconstruction, then, is the displacement of history as sense of reference and content by a "general text" (*P*, p. 43). Derrida's struggle against unitary history means there are, indeed, many different histories to tell, but all these different histories are marked by the same: they are "different as to their kind, their rhythm, their mode of inscription, unbalanced, differentiated histories . . . . " Always and everywhere, only textuality is an alternative to the closure of metaphysics; history is recording, retrieval, and transposition of meaning: "What I call text," says Derrida, "inscribes and extends beyond the limit of such discourses . . . "(*P*, p. 42).

That Derrida's speculations have been productive for critical writing is beyond doubt.[20] Yet—and now I wish to move out of my parenthesis into the main text of my argument—this concept (or non-concept) of a pervasive textuality which alone struggles against metaphysics—this too is an idea or movement caught up in metaphysics, but not simply in the same ironic Derridean sense that deconstructors such as Hillis Miller all too readily readily admit.[21] Nor do I mean this in quite the same sense that Derrida anticipates in *L'Ecriture et la difference*.[22] That is to say, I do not mean merely that deconstruction's troping of "history" with "textuality" is a metaphysical figure because, like Levi-Strauss' use of the sign, it is an unavoidable bricolage of the

rhetoric of presence. I mean rather that in its totalizing preoccupation with textuality—despite the ironies this allows—deconstruction *is* the highest form of metaphysics.

While the deconstructors hope to reveal the possibility of a general economy in various writers, and thus the closure of metaphysics in the trace, irony, or the uncanny (one can, of course, with Derrida and some of his followers proliferate "non-concepts" here), they reproduce the essential movements of Hegelianism—its idealistic abstraction from concrete history and matters of power and institutions.[23] One must concede, as Said has done,[24] that deconstruction is intended as an oppositional practice; but for that very reason one must repeatedly point out that, in its failure to understand the materiality of the very discourses it claims to deconstruct, it fails to understand the realities of power. Of course, this general claim has now been made many times, but perhaps its truth helps to explain many aspects of the contemporary critical scene in America:

- this valorization of textuality is itself one cause of the general failure of theory to sustain the crisis within criticism;
- the aesthetic dimensions of textuality and its refusal of historicity have allowed the American critical institution to ignore, disarm (by dissipation), and profit from deconstruction;
- focusing on only the rhetoricity of the dominant culture has played into the hands of the closed economy critical thinking hopes to negate;
- does this concern with "textuality" not too closely echo that of both the New Criticism and liberal humanism in their fascinations with rhetoric, romance, and separation of text and history?

III

I would like to illustrate some aspects of this deconstructive misunderstanding of the institutional nature of empowered discourse by examining Jeffrey Mehlman's reading[25] of Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire*[26] and Paul de Man's influential reading of Neitzsche's *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. I hope to show that in both cases the texts preempted and moved beyond the abstracting powers of their critics precisely because such abstraction is a tool or weapon of the dominant Hegelian model against which they are both partly in revolt.

In *Revolution and Repetition*, Mehlman attempts to show the universal presence of Freud's uncanny in writing. What is most uncanny about the uncanny, Mehlman claims, is precisely that it can occur in any guise, anywhere. Mehlman's desire is to show that *The*

Eighteenth Brumaire is itself subverted from within as a historical recuperation of events by the uncontrollable and unaccountable presence of "Bonapartism." Mehlman's analysis convinces him that Marx intends to apply rigorously, to the events of 1848-51, a *Marxist* model of causality based on a direct reflective relationship between base and superstructure. In other words, Mehlman would have it that Marx is mechanically accounting for the history of this counter-revolutionary period in terms of a linear model of development which sees the necessity of proletarian revolutions following upon that of the bourgeoisie; in addition, he would also claim that Marx is equally mechanically asserting that the State is always and everywhere a simple mirror representation of the forces of oppression, in this case the dominant bourgeoisie. Into this recuperative model, which Mehlman rightly points out represents one line of thought in classical Marxism, comes the dictatorship of Louis Bonaparte as a trace, a farcical repetition of his uncle, to disrupt the Marxist dialectic of history: Bonaparte is a third term outside both specularity and representation. He is the return of the repressed in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and the break or fold in Marx's text. He cannot be represented or inscribed within a specular system; he breaks the closed economy of Marx's representative interpretation of history. The State under Bonaparte is not the instrument of class oppression because Louis is not the representative of any class; he is, as a farcical character, completely *déclassé*. He destroys the Party of Order and thus oppresses the bourgeoisie; he allies himself with the *lumpen* and consequently is opposed to the workers; and while he may appear to represent the peasants, this is itself comical since he misrepresents himself as the son of his uncle, Napoleon Bonaparte, to gain their support and extend his authority. He hides the truth from the peasants: the reforms of the Uncle are the exploitations of the Nephew. Furthermore, as Mehlman's analysis goes on, he locates Marx's anxiety about Bonaparte on the level of economy as a sign of Marx's desire to repress what Bonaparte represents inside the general text of writing and history:

> We have already linked the extravagent expenditure[s] of Bonapartism to a crisis of representation. But in that case, one is hard put not to see in that frenetic circulation of money which exhausts the fiscal policies of Bonaparte—Marx: "to steal the whole of France in order to make a present of her to France"—a Marxian counterpart to the extenuating circulation of meaning found in Freud. This principle of absolute expenditure, in which we would see an intuition of the utter mobility of terms within a fantasmatic structure, is even apt to play implicitly within Marx's theoretical formulations. (*RR*, p. 33)

One can, of course, hear echoes in Mehlman not just of Freud but of Derrida and Laplanche as well. The move Mehlman makes here is that typical of all deconstructive turns: the location of the repressed element of textuality which resists efforts at its recuperation into a binary opposition and then a synthesis into a third term. Mehlman puts it this way:

> If there is indeed a *break* in these texts, it is by no means between a truth and an ideology which would have originally suppressed or masked it. It is rather in the heterogeneous movement which would endlessly emancipate an *unheimlich* dimension indifferent to the distinctions: truth/error, suppressor/suppressed. (*RR*, pp. 40-41)

It would seem difficult to fault Mehlman's reading to this point. One feels he has shown that Marxist writing cannot escape from the problematic of the non-specular dimension of writing. Or put more positively, Mehlman seems to have advanced one aspect of the Derridean project by going to the heart of the enemy—revolutionary historiography—only to find lurking there what, to quote Derrida again, are the "undecidables," that is, simulative units, 'false' verbal, nominal, or semantic properties, which escape from inclusion in the philosophical (binary) opposition and which nonetheless inhabit it" (*P*, p. 36). But somehow, in his analysis, Mehlman seems to have forgotten that Marx's text is also a political act and not only a segment, so to speak, of the "general text." While one could easily extend Foucault's critique of Derrida's valorization of *l'ecriture* as a negative transcendental to Mehlman's idea of the universal uncanny, this would itself remain merely a philosophical distinction unless it were immediately shifted to the material grounds of politics.

Critics must be cautious not to concede textual analysis in advanced scholarship to the deconstructors. On the contrary, an approach to texts as material events, such as those elaborated by Said or Foucault under the influence of Gramsci and Nietzsche, must be developed further. It might be useful to begin by examining the hypothesis that *The Eighteenth Brumaire* takes account of itself as a political text in a way which neither classical Marxist analysis, as represented by Maximilien Rubel,[27] nor Mehlman's deconstruction can recognize.

The essential flaw in Mehlman's understanding of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* is his insistence that Marx is trying to cover-up the scandal of the detachment of the State from Society in Bonapartism. But his error is based on the misconception that Marx always and everywhere systematically attempts to mediate the relationship between State and civil Society. Rather than repetitively and universally carrying out such mediations, Marx often, especially in his more polemical pieces,

uses his critical and historical tools to engage in a contest for power, in this case against Bonaparte immediately, in others, against capital in the long run. Hence Marx's famous statement about "the weapons of historical research, of criticism, of satire, and of wit" (*EB*, p. 8).

Critics of Marx have often noted that he positions himself to oppose Proudhon and Victor Hugo in describing the events of 1848-1851. What they have noticed less frequently is that he also puts himself, as author, into direct competition with Bonaparte. For Bonaparte and Marx are engaged in a contest for the extension of authority into economic and social institutions. Louis originally has no tools other than those ambiguous ones granted him by the Party of Order's interpretations of the constitution; but through a careful analysis of the configuration of forces in France at that time, Bonaparte slowly gathers real power to himself. Whereas originally all of "his" power was derivative, he gradually assumes independent authority and detaches himself and the State from Society as a whole. Within the narrative history which *The Eighteenth Brumaire* constructs, Bonaparte and Marx are parallels, or, if you will, protagonist and antagonist, in the same drama. As Marx represents the events of 1848-1851 it becomes clear that only he and Bonaparte are able to see what in fact is happening in France—that is, only he and Bonaparte can construct an interpretation of the present events which will allow for a real grasp on the operations of power, politics, and culture. Only these two are able to appreciate the comic autonomy and self-conscious, parodic manipulation of both the Party of Order and the Napoleon legend. There are other parallels as well. Both Bonaparte and Marx exist outside the class structure, that is, they are the only actors on the stage of history whose perceptions are not obscured by the ideology of a class position. Consequently, their different political understandings of events are comprehensive and thorough in a way that no one else's can be. Also, they are both repetitions of previous figures and both are self-conscious of their belated position and employ that belatedness, paradoxically, to gain power resulting from the insight it allows:

> Hegel somewhere remarks that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce. Caussidier for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robbespierre, the *Montagne* of 1848-1851 for the *Montagne* of 1793 to 1795, the Nephew for the Uncle. And the same caricature occurs in the circumstances attending the second edition of the eighteenth brumaire. (*EB*, p. 15)

What is interesting in this passage is the way Marx's relationship to Hegel is a doubling of the Nephew's relation to the Uncle. While the Nephew gains power as an "heir" to the "father," he is in fact comically

a misrepresentation. But his authority is gained, Marx reminds us, not simply by an abstract manipulation of image or text, but by the real material reorganization of genealogical charts and the laws which regulate genealogical research. His swerve on the line of hereditary authority gains Bonaparte real power. Marx's swerve from Hegel is also materialist not just in its conception, but in his revision of Hegel for material effect in the world.

Marx appears to represent history as an evolutionary, dialectical event in the shade of Hegelian dialectics. But his writing diverges seriously from that set of figures. He not only "repeats Hegel with a difference" by insisting on the farcical nature of repetition, but he makes Hegel's into a materialistic dialectic and, thus, to gain his own authority, reproduces the product of *his* "father's" writing on a more powerful level of political competition.

While these comments on *The Eighteenth Brumaire* have not yet demonstrated the problem with Mehlman's reading, they do suggest that Marx is aware of the dangers of his relationship to Hegel. He intends to turn away from the ideal meaning of the Spirit's history and toward the comic representation of concrete history—a move which assumes and enacts the existence of critical writing as an event within the material realities of the social world.

Marx's turn from Hegel does undermine Mehlman's reading. Marx self-consciously employs Hegelian forms of dialectic and recuperation neither to repeat them as such nor to undermine them deconstructively. Rather he employs them as tools useful to various degrees in grasping the situation as he sees it: this is the political use of bricolage. In this text, Marx does not valorize the dialectic. He merely employs it instrumentally in a contest with Bonaparte and capitalism so that his own analysis might gain authority from its exactitude. (I will return to the problem of the adequation of Marx's text to the historical situation).

I want to stress that Marx is involved in at least a tripartite battle: first, with Hegel; second, with those others who have written about the events of the second brumaire—Hugo and Proudhon; and third, with Bonaparte and capitalism. The story of Marx's biographical and intellectual resistance to Hegel is too well-known and too nuanced to be treated here.[28] What has not often been noticed is that Marx is battling against Proudhon and Hugo's versions of these events because their texts, different as they are, *both* give authority and power to Bonaparte. So, consequently, Marx's attempt to displace their versions is only one stage in his own struggle with Louis. In fact, his text is a violent, polemical attempt to make room for an historical analysis which will not lend authority to the forces of reaction. There is, in

other words, an identifiable strategy to Marx's satirical empiricism in this text; it is ideological and cannot be neglected in any attempt to get at the text's function. Marx is less interested in the so-called consistency of the "system" of history he represents than in both attacking Louis and also appropriating some of the forces of the economic, literary, and philosophical disciplines as weapons for the progressive forces of history.

Marx's own discourse acknowledges the complexity and contradiction of the events confronting his analysis and so as well, at least implicitly, the difficulty in constructing an adequate verbal model of the historical moment. He begins radically. In a completely un-Hegelian manner, he asserts that history itself as an orderly process, as it is usually understood in the contemplative German tradition, has been suspended. Disorder is not, as Mehlman would have it, the parasite in the body of Marx's repressive model of limited economy. Rather, it is the original scene of historical awareness. It calls upon Marx to produce a text which, while not systematic, is persuasive, powerful, demystifying, and irresistible: "This period that we have before us," says Marx, "comprises the most motley mixture of crying contradictions" (*EB*, p. 43). In fact, Marx ridicules any expectation of orderly, systematic, totalizing understanding of historical events as a naive belief in miracles. Ironically, his description of those naive Frenchmen who believe in such models sounds remarkably like the image of Marx the repressor which Mehlman conjures up:

> As ever, weakness had taken refuge in a belief in miracles, fancied the enemy overcome when he was only conjured away in imagination, and it lost all understanding of the present in a passive glorification of the future that was in store for it. (*EB*, p. 20)

It is precisely the temptation to repress the sudden and abrupt appearance of the unaccountable in the present which Marx is attacking here. He identifies such desires with poor historical understanding, a desire to replace actuality with language, and an abandoning of the present reality for possibilities contained in some hypothetically assumed-to-be-future. Those who yield to this repression, or even further it by their service of the capitalist hegemony, close their analysis to such "undecidables," as Derrida would call them, and they are struck by unpredicted events as if by thunderbolts; their entire systems of representation collapse, leaving them at the mercy of those like Bonaparte whose understanding is not fixed and whose systems of representation are always modulating in response to changing circumstances. This ongoing modulation of understanding provides the linguistic basis for power because it copes with the continuing need to abandon or modify

networks of representation as they become inadequate to the political task of the historical moment, that is, as they hinder an effective grasp on the social and political structure of the present.

I am not suggesting, as Mehlman does, that Bonaparte is the uncanny which must be repressed. Rather, in this view, Bonaparte is the principle of historical understanding and effective political action which must be illuminated. Marx and Bonaparte alone can develop complex, duplicitous, contradictory figures of representation which can empower language to function as an effective political weapon within a real struggle. As figures of declassification, they represent the possibility of escaping the mystification which comes from unconscious ideational formations. They can go further than all other Frenchmen in their understanding of the current events because they do not think in terms which are analogous to the way other members of society act—that is, according to their class position. They are the process of historical action as representation freed from limits of delusion and, as such, they are alike and in competition. The struggle between Marx and Bonaparte is then an equal one—on the level of textual drama. But on the level of political power, it is a totally unequal one. Bonaparte governs and Marx is sent into exile. Marx has recourse to the weaponry of langauge precisely because recourse to other forms of action is largely denied to him.

Marx likens the effect of his writing to Bonaparte's act in staging the coup. The monster of Bonapartism was contained embryonically in the parliamentary republic which drafted the constitution, but could only be seen when the bayonet of the coup tore the womb to let the monster appear. Similarly, Marx's analysis of Louis' comic role as Nephew effectively gives birth to the monster. In other words, Bonapartism has two births: one in political history and the other in Marx's representation of it as a monstrosity. Ironically this "second" birth is also its death; Marx removes the monster's power and authority by revealing the conditions of its existence. He employs the weaponry of criticism not only to clear a space inside his culture for a more effective representation of history, but also, and quite specifically, as a way to gain power for what he sees to be the forces of progress.

If Bonaparte and Marx are alike in their lonely understanding and representation of the contradictions of French society, then the only marked difference between them must exist on a nontextual level. Intention extends itself beyond textuality into other networks of power and determination and so requires that the critic deal with authors like Marx as historical actors and their "texts" as events. They are not merely textual counters available for academic analysis. The power of oppression and the restraints on revolutionary desire—this

difference brings critics to the point of choice, where politics and morality dictate that the complex agency of authors not be reduced, by any one set of analytic tools, to a reality seemingly completely explicable by one academic discourse. Such reduction is always the danger of deconstruction. Because Marx's text confronts us with this choice and demands our involvement, we cannot as critics respond with scepticism regarding the value of Marx's project or with systems claiming to provide disinterested forms of verbal and psychological analysis which, interposing between us and the event of Marx's writing, keep us from recognizing our own need to assume a stance vis-à-vis the materials we read. If we allow this last interposition to continue, then we are no longer critics and we join forces with—in Marx's terms—Hugo, Proudhon, Bonaparte, and, we might add, Jeffrey Mehlman. In so doing, we deny to criticism the power of direct involvement with material realities of society and its institutions whose organizations are not, *a priori,* assumed to be textual in nature. Moreover, we would retreat to an idealist position which detaches language and action absolutely. We willfully forget the power associated with systems of representation and we try to continue to remove ourselves as critics from any position of responsibility.

IV

An analoguous forgetting of the material and institutional postion of writing has occurred in de Man's reading of Nietzsche. I cannot here do the detailed analysis needed to follow all the intricate movements of de Man's essay. His conclusion, however, is clear enough and is useful for the purposes of my argument: he claims one can account for the essential contradiction of all writings in rhetorical and performative terms.

One version of this contradiction can be found in the concept of the "modern": all writers try to be original, but the very attempt inscribes the writer into tradition and "he enters into a world that assumes the depths and complications of an articulated time, an interdependence between past and future that prevents any present from ever coming into being" (GGN, 161). De Man goes on to write that "The more radical the rejection of anything that came before, the greater the dependence on the past." He then draws a conclusion which seems to make a universal claim: "The distinctive character of literature thus becomes manifest as an inability to escape from a condition that is felt to be unbearable.... The continuous appeal of Modernity, the desire to break out of literature toward the reality of the moment, prevails and, in its turn, folding back upon itself, engenders the repetition and

the continuation of literature" (GGN, 162). The problem which holds de Man's interest in this reading of Baudelaire and Nietzsche is whether or not literature allows escape into history, or, put differently, "whether a history of an entity as self-contradictory as literature is conceivable" (GGN, 162).

Nietzsche's text has a more specific, yet more general, concern. The interposition of the idealizing movements of deconstruction block access to it. Nietzsche directs his own deconstruction against the excessive incorporation of historical study in the German educational system which might prevent other types of thought:

> I have striven to depict a feeling by which I am constantly tormented; I revenge myself by handing it over to the public . . . most people, however, will tell me that this feeling is altogether perverse, unnatural, detestable and wholly impermissible, and that by feeling it I have shown myself unworthy of the mighty historical movement which, as is well known, has been in evidence among the Germans particularly for the past two generations. UD, p. 59

Even in his seemingly most anti-historical moments, Nietzsche addresses himself to the immediate institutional version of the problem that confronts him—not just the discursive formations which empower and control the circulation of the sign. He is aware of the ideological pressures in his societey to close off the possibility of considering the ambiguous social purposes of historical and revisionist thinking—in a discourse of the historical. In fact, he suggests that the prohibition against his instrusive demystification of historical study has the force of Law. Of course, one could, as Mehlman no doubt would, give priority in reading this trope to the Lacanian/Derridean uses of the figure. Such potentials should not be excluded. But one should also see that this reference to the Law is part of an elaborate set of references to state, government, and educational institutions within the text and that these are, themselves, part of the struggle of the day over the forms institutions will take.

For example, in Nietzsche's discussion of antiquarian history, he specifically invokes the central organic figure of the tree from Hegel's "Preface" to the *Phenomenology*. He juxtaposes this borrowing to other figures which suggest the reactionary and oppressive nature of the state of the Prussian monarchy at this time as well as the collapsing concord between state and intelligentsia. The allusion to Hegel not only reflects the crisis-like extremity of Prussian cultural oppression, but it is also a reference to the entire debate on the monarchy's relation to Hegel begun just a few years earlier in Berlin. In the 1830's, the conservative valorization of the State as the highest manifestation of reason in history was under some attack and the relation between the

state and its legitimating intellectual servants was troubled. The State's response is typified by its asking Schelling to lecture in Berlin. He insisted that with the end of history, reflected by the flowering of the Spirit in Hegel's system, there has also come an end to the evolution of the State. The tactic failed and the State, to ease the pressure on its cultural alliances, increased censorship.[29]

Nietzsche's allusion to the central Hegelian metaphor for totalization must be read in the context suggested by Schelling's reactionary claims. It is part of the struggle over the nature of the State and its relation to cultural institutions like universities and censorship.

Nietzsche's argument may be briefly summarized in this way. The excessive study of history in Germany and the absolute authority of historicism in aesthetic judgement are themselves aspects of social control and reproduction. He warns against the alliance between State and intellectuals precisely because the latter have not considered their utility to the State. Hence Nietzsche's own ironic self-figuration as a "nurseling of older ages." Hence also his ironically nostalgic advice at the end of the text to adopt the Greek classical model for each individual's rethinking of his own needs in a particular historical situation.

A fuller discussion of Nietzsche's text would have to go on to show Nietzsche's desire to negate Hegel's appropriation of all history for his own belated state as a latecomer. It would have to extend the homologies between the development of various closed cultural forms[30] in Germany and France in the second-half of the nineteenth-century. Nietzsche's text is, therefore, an example of how the intellectual disciplines of a culture can be used to disclose the ways in which systems of power and various nontextual configurations of forces make up a society and preempt the possibility of democratic self-determination on the part of individuals and groups. Nietzsche's attraction to the "folk"—in his discussion of antiquarian history—reflects his concern for the integrity and differences of local communities allowed to maintain themselves in evolving communal patterns of cultural relations. Furthermore, his discussion of this attractive communal image makes clear that the German State's disposition of cultural mandarins to valorize such antiquarian social values is in fact an appropriation of folk tradition meant to make them the province of the high cultural forces manipulated by the reactionaries of the Prussian monarchy. These newly produced objects of historical knowledge go on to become the "populist" base for an oppressive and absolutist state.

Two quotations from Nietzsche make clear the points I have just raised. In discussing antiquarian history, Nietzsche writes:

> The feeling antithetical to this [a restless, cosmopolitan hunting after new and ever newer things], the contentment of the tree in its roots, the happiness of knowing that one is not wholly accidental and arbitrary but grown out of a past as its heir, flower and fruit, and that one's existence is thus excused and, indeed, justified—it is this which is today usually designated as the real sense of history. (UD, p. 74)

This recuperative mentality leads to closed cultural forms which are essentially right-wing populism. Those, Nietzsche argues, who have no respect for every simple antique are "rejected and persecuted" (UD, p. 74). The result of this is that "the historical sense no longer conserves life but mummifies it [and] then the tree dies unnaturally from the top downwards to the roots.... Its piety withers away, the habit of scholarliness continues without it and rotates in egoistic self-satisfaction around its own axis" (UD, p. 75).

This final image returns the argument full circle to the point of departure on the margins of this topic. We return to de Man's suggestion that too much literary criticism is simply habit, the institutional inertia of business-as-usual. Literary criticism rarely asks institutional and political questions about the nature of its own practice or its social function. But there is one ironic explanation which, in small part accounts for the continuing inertia and the coming victory of reaction: deconstruction has failed to ask itself historical questions: why is it here now; why is it so readily adaptable to the conditions of American academia; indeed, how can it so easily coexist with its own apparent antagonist, that large body of literary humanists who think that deconstruction is mere careerism, or, at best, the obscurantist projection of addled brains?

What Nietzsche's and Marx's texts illustrate for us is the possibility of a critical act which takes on a full reflexive rhetorical role while at the same time confronting directly the material and institutional restraints and enabling conditions of its own existence. They show us once more that criticism which fails to do this is the worst sort of metaphysics; it hides in a web of textuality or "tradition," yielding power to the forces which limit and deploy it, precisely because such criticism is comfortable in the secure niche granted by the hegemony to which it is useful. Like Abrams, most liberal educators and critics serve a function of which they are at best only partially aware. It is of the essence that humanism obscure such insights.[31] Until critics began to use their training and tools to understand where they have come from and what purpose they serve they cannot hope to establish any cogent educational plan or purpose.

Ideology we know is inescapable; but quietism should not be the consequence of that insight. It is always the task of the teacher/scholar

to help students to learn to use the tools of the critical disciplines in order both to understand the origins of these tools, why they persist, how they are determinate, and to what ends they might be used. Demystification—escape from "false consciousness"—is not the answer. The critical act can at best allow for a partial understanding of the present, of one's political location. Even such limited knowledge is crucial because as Marx and Nietzsche both suggest, metaphysics always takes the form of a preoccupation with the past and future, either recollection or teleology, and never with the present and its possibilities for human action to grasp and change the social order of discourse and power.[32]

Literary criticism which abdicates its responsibility to a historical analysis of its own institutional conditions of existence is both metaphysical and reactionary. Nietzsche and Marx both point the way toward a model of critical thinking and writing which insists on the scholar's newly acknowledged responsibility to help others determine their own lives. It is crucial that we literary intellectuals follow their lead; there are few if any other (respectable) locations within the intellectual world where critics can truly have a value and effect.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Paul de Man's "Genesis and Genealogy in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," *Diacritics*, 2 (1972), 44-53, hereafter referred to in my text as GGN.
2. Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," *Writing and Difference*, trans., Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 251-77; *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967).
3. trans., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 19), p. 35; hereafter referred to in my text as *P*.
4. F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 57-123, cited in my text as [UD]; and Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans., anon. (New York: International Publishers, 1963), cited in my text as *EB*.
5. For all their problems, Terry Eagleton's two recent books have helped shed some light on the crisis faced by the academy at this time: see *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) and *The Function of Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1984).
6. This was certainly the majority opinion at the conference on "The Mediation of Received Values" which was held at the University of Minnesota, October 9-12, 1984.
7. I have made an argument similar to this in "Variations on Authority," *The Yale Critics*, ed. Jonathan Arac et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 3-19.
8. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 1-30, 179-225.
9. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*, trans., Barbara Harlow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 59ff.
10. *Blindness and Insight* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1971). p. 3; hereafter cited in my text as BI.
11. For some analysis of the history of this intellectual structure in American culture, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
12. It is interesting that, from his very different political and critical position, Edward W. Said has recently reintroduced the term "critical consciousness," the same term de Man used to discuss what had been, he thought, irreversibly changed by the crisis. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 1-30.

13. "Literature and Psychoanalysis: the Question of Reading: Otherwise," *Yale French Studies* ed. Shoshana Felman, nos. 55/56 (1977); "The Pedagogical Imperative: *Teaching as a Literary Genre*," *Yale French Studies*, ed. Barbara Johnson, no. 63 (1982). It is significant that the second volume opens with an essay by de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," originally commissioned by the MLA for its collective volume, *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, but deemed inappropriate for that volume since it questions the basic terms and concepts of such reviews of scholarship and critical purpose. The MLA's reluctance to publish de Man's essay suggests how marginal to the most established bastions of the profession criticism and theory have always been; but it does not deny my larger thesis. The publication of this essay in the prestigous *Yale French Studies* simply indicates how complex the professional system of power and reward is. Furthermore, I am certain that by 1982 the reaction against critical theory marked by Michaels' and Knapp's essay, for example, had already gained the upper-hand.
14. The School has, of course, been in residence at Northwestern for some time and will be moving to Dartmouth College. An interesting essay could be written about the institutional and intellectual politics of the School.
15. See Paul A. Bové, "Variations on Authority," *The Yale Critics*, ed. Jonathan Arac et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 3-19.
16. One should keep in mind, for example, that Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) won the MLA's Lowell prize and not Said's *Beginnings* (New York: Basic Books, 1975). See Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 103f.
17. Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 425-38; Miller, "The Critic as Host," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 439-47.
18. See Rodolphe Gasche, "Deconstruction as Criticism," *Glyph* 6(1979), 177-215.
19. See Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton Books, 197) who makes precisely these contrasts between linear and circular form.
20. The influence of Derrida on the so-called Yale school has been well-documented See Arac et al., *The Yale Critics*.
21. "Ariachne's Broken Woof," *Georgia Review*, 31 (1977), 59-60.
22. (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), esp. pp. 296ff.
23. I make this claim despite Derrida's occasional concern with institutional and political issues. One should take note of where these appear in English. See, for example, "The Principle of Reason: the University in the Eyes of its Pupils," *Diacritics*, 13 (Fall 1983), 3-20.
24. See "Criticism Between Culture and System," *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 178-225.
25. *Revolution and Repetition: Marx/Hugo/Balzac* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), hereafter cited in my text as *RR*.
26. trans. anon. (New York: International Publishers, 1963); hereafter cited in my text as *EB*.
27. *Marx devant le bonapartism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1960), esp. pp. 50ff.
28. Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) and Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp. 121-25.
29. Berlin, *Karl Marx*, p. 50.
30. See Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, pp4f.
31. Paul A. Bové, *Intellectuals and Power: A Genealogy of Critical Humanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), esp. Chapter Six.
32. Bové, *Intellectuals and Power*, Chapter Six, esp. the pages on Kant.