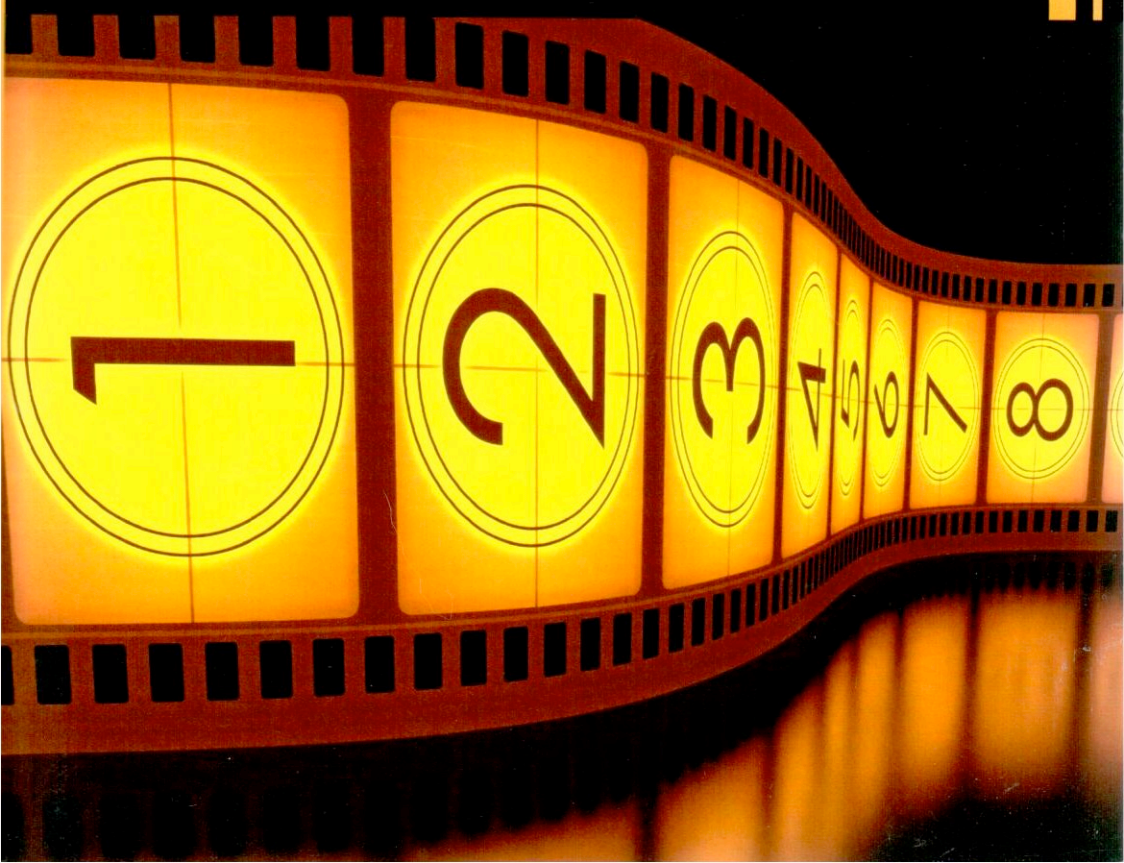


FEAR, CULTURAL ANXIETY, AND TRANSFORMATION

*Horror, Science Fiction, and
Fantasy Films Remade*

edited by Scott A. Lukas and John Marmysz



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Chapter 5

Cultural Change and Nihilism in the *Rollerball* Films

John Marmysz

In 2002, a remake of the 1975 film *Rollerball* was released in theaters. It flopped at the box office, disappearing quickly from movie screens and reappearing shortly thereafter on home video. Although popular success is not the best indicator of a film's aesthetic worth, in the case of this 2002 atrocity, box-office failure and bad filmmaking did indeed go hand in hand. This was especially disappointing, as I had been looking forward to this remake for quite some time. I consider the original version of *Rollerball* to be something of a classic; prescient in its vision of a world dominated by corporate monopolies, and philosophically perceptive in its depiction of nihilism. The remake, though faintly echoing some of the same themes as the original, fails to treat these issues in anything but the most superficial manner. Rather, it distracts the audience with unexciting action sequences, insipid dialogue, and characters that are just plain uninspiring. Whereas the original version of *Rollerball* artfully contrasts the flash and violence of a warlike future sport with the inner existential crisis of that sport's superstar, the remake fails even to convey the excitement of the titular game.

While aesthetically horrendous, the remake of *Rollerball* is instructive, as it provides a point of contrast to the original film, highlighting a change in our culture's manner of engagement with the difficult philosophical problem of nihilism. Both films share a roughly similar plot, yet in the differing manners that they explore and develop that plot, we can glimpse two separate ways in which nihilism may be discovered, confronted, and dealt with. The differences are quite striking.

In the original 1975 film, nihilistic melancholy is depicted as a situation stemming from individual strength and the aspiration toward excellence. The forces of culture, and of nature itself, are portrayed as conspiring against any individual who strives for absolute spiritual fulfillment, with the ultimate message that personal honor, nobility, and success can be had only at the cost of forsaking public adoration and the economic rewards offered by corporate culture. In the 2002 remake, on the other hand, the encounter with nihilism is depicted as a result of personal inadequacy and individual weakness. This version portrays the entanglements of mass culture more sympathetically, in the sense that they offer the failing individual a way out of personal hopelessness. Whereas the original 1975 film ends with the main protagonist resolutely and fatalistically braving his destiny alone, the 2002 remake ends with the main character taking part in a mass movement against the powers that be.

The different sensibilities of these two films are best summed up in this last contrast, which also points to a characteristic difference between the ways that modern and postmodern cultures tend to view the philosophical issue of nihilism. Whereas modernists view nihilism as arising out of the individual's confrontation with a world naturally hostile to the innate strivings of authentic and self-reflective human beings, the postmodernist perspective sees nihilism as merely a transitional stage in the evolution of mass culture; one that might be overcome with the abandonment of older, more individualistic ways of thinking. Thus, in the relatively brief interval between the releases of the two versions of *Rollerball*, we can detect a shift from a modernist to a postmodernist rendering of the predicament of nihilism.

The Existential and Ontological Axes of Nihilism

Friedrich Nietzsche puts matters quite correctly when he observes that the term nihilism is "ambiguous."¹ Though the general phenomenon is familiar to most of us, the philosophical meaning of the term remains quite unclear and often misunderstood. Too often, nihilism is thought to refer to situations or states of affairs that are absolutely negative, and which have no redeeming qualities whatsoever. However, this loose usage of the term does not do justice to its subtleties as a philosophical concept.

Understood in its richer, philosophical sense, nihilism describes a distinctively human state of separation from the highest objects of aspiration. As human beings, we have the capacity to formulate notions of absolute Being, Truth, Justice, and Goodness, yet so long as we live we must constantly fall short in our pursuit of these perfections. According to the nihilist, human finitude necessarily separates us from the full realization of any form of absolute perfection, and so we must forever remain frustrated in our attempts to achieve those goals that are the most important to us. Human life is, as Albert Camus puts it in "The Myth of Sisy-

phus," "absurd," being characterized by an ongoing battle between the individual, human demand for meaning and fulfillment, and the resistance of the world around us to deliver on that demand:

The world itself, whose single meaning I do not understand, is a vast irrational. If one could only say just once: "This is clear," all would be saved. But men vie with one another in proclaiming that nothing is clear, all is chaos, that all man has is his lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him.²

In this sense, nihilism is not simply a synonym for despair or negativity, but is, rather, a philosophical doctrine that attempts to characterize the human condition.

Though nihilists claim that all humans are necessarily alienated from the absolute, most of us are not fully aware of, or even interested in, this predicament. Humans commonly ignore their nihilistic separation from Being, Truth, Justice, and Goodness, focusing their attention on more humble, and more attainable, worldly goals. While the pursuit of these sorts of modest objectives may produce feelings of potency and happiness in the short run, such pursuits also have the effect of distracting us from our actual state of alienation from the ultimate. This underlying alienation, claims the nihilist, can never fully be covered over. Though it may become obscured in the course of pursuing our everyday activities, it nevertheless reasserts itself and makes itself known in a number of different ways.

An existential feeling of alienation frequently offers us our first access to the phenomenon of nihilism. For an individual whose fundamental aspiration is for the absolute, the modest, attainable goals ordinarily pursued in the course of living life must at some point lose their sustaining power. It is then that life, as commonly lived, becomes shallow, flat, and unsatisfying. Lived existence becomes "a desert-like emptiness, a malaise, an illness of the spirit and the stomach."³ These feelings of distress may provoke individuals to embark on an inquiry into the causes of life's deficiencies, and in the course of such an inquiry, they may be forced to recognize the pervasive scope of the phenomenon of nihilism.

From an existential encounter with personal meaninglessness, the nihilist discovers that all is not right with the world. As Camus asserts, "We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart."⁴ The source of this existential discontent is the perception of an incongruity between the aspiration toward infinite perfection, on the one hand, and the finitude of human being, on the other. This incongruity is, in its very essence, irresolvable. Humans are finite, and so their very being is at odds with the state of being that they wish to achieve. The existential struggle with this state of affairs opens the way for an encounter with ontological nihilism. Ontologically we have "fallen away" from Being. We are separated from the absolute and there is no hope of ever mending this rift. Our relationship to reality is naturally defective, and like puzzle pieces that fit nowhere, we are doomed to remain out of place and estranged from Being itself.

Ontological alienation and the existential sense of anxiety that accompanies

it have often been pointed to as self-evidently negative aspects of nihilism. In modernist accounts of nihilism, these negative aspects are often viewed as grounds for a kind of despair that, while incapable of fully being overcome, may nevertheless be faced with heroic or superhuman resolve. We find such accounts in the writings of Nietzsche and Camus. For Nietzsche, because humans are fated to struggle against the chaos of reality, and in the process eternally to suffer, they should develop the psychological capacity to endure this struggle and suffering, and even to take pleasure in it. Thus we find Nietzsche advocating the goal of the "Superman." The Superman understands "every kind of 'imperfection' and the suffering to which it gives rise [as] part of the highest desirability."⁵ Such an individual can endure recurrent feelings of alienation and despondency, utilizing those feelings as a motivation actively and creatively to affirm life. For Nietzsche, existential and ontological nihilism are realities that, once faced, may serve the positive end of cultivating individual strength and nobility of character. Likewise, Camus suggests that while the recurrent struggles and sufferings of life never end, a heroic and strong individual can resolve to rebel against the ontological injustice of the world and, like Sisyphus, take pride and joy in affirming that "the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart."⁶

On the contrary, the postmodern approach to existential and ontological nihilism sees them as something to be overcome and left behind, like bad dreams are forgotten upon waking from an unsettled sleep. Jean-François Lyotard provides perhaps the clearest and most straightforward articulation of this viewpoint when he characterizes postmodernism as a sort of "war on totality."⁷ Being, Truth, Justice, and Goodness are viewed by Lyotard as outdated ideals and totalizing "meta-narratives" that vainly attempt to sum up the absolute. In focusing our attention on these ideas and aspiring toward them, humans doom themselves to despondency and despair in the pursuit of the unattainable. It would be better, then, to turn our backs on these traditional values and immerse ourselves in creative and ongoing play aimed at no final, totalizing goal. According to the postmodernist, existential and ontological nihilism are conditions of modernism that may be overcome and left behind if we can just give up on our antiquated aspirations. Nihilistic thinking is a sort of nostalgic longing for a bygone era, according to this point of view, and it is about time that we move on into the future. Once we abandon the desire for the absolute, we can get on with life, untroubled by the worries that accompany nihilistic alienation. The freedom to pursue diverse ways of thinking about the world will be more frequently exercised, and we will no longer be concerned with dogmatic assertions concerning the "reality," "truth," "justice," or "goodness" of human creations. All of these creations will be understood as equally legitimate and not in the least bit substandard, since we will no longer judge them according to totalizing and absolute ideals.

Whereas the modernist is an idealist, the postmodernist is a pragmatist. This, in a nutshell, is what defines their difference. The modernist is constantly struggling to attain the unattainable; the postmodernist finds satisfaction in what is at-

tainable. While the modernist aspires to the ideal, and thus remains unsatisfied with the real, the postmodernist considers what has been made real, in all of its diverse forms, as good enough. There is, then, an inherent conflict between modernist and postmodernist approaches to the phenomenon of nihilism. According to modernists, nihilism (in both its existential and ontological guises) cannot truly be overcome, but must merely be endured and resisted. In this view, existential nihilism results from the awareness of an ontological reality that can never authentically be denied. For postmodernists, however, nihilism is simply a way of thinking, not a final description of reality, and so it may be overcome if we can become adept at creating new ways of thinking that are not reliant on absolutes. For modernists, it takes strength to endure the ontological truth of nihilism. For postmodernists, languishing in nihilism is a sign of weakness, as it indicates one's inability to break free from a nostalgic longing for the past. While both consider the struggle against existential nihilism to be a potential source of vital activity, they disagree on its ontological origins, and as a result, modern and postmodern perspectives tend to characterize the struggle with nihilism differently. From the modernist perspective, nihilistic struggle has a hint of fatalism and tragedy to it as the nihilistic superhero vainly battles reality alone and isolated from those who have chosen to ignore the Truth. From the postmodern perspective, on the other hand, the confrontation with nihilism is seen as a transitional stage after which an individual might successfully break free from the outdated mode of thinking that had previously constrained his or her manner of being. In this liberating struggle, the postmodern nihilist tends to develop sympathy for the viewpoints and aspirations of others, accepting that there are many different and divergent ways of conceptualizing the "truth."

In the old and new versions of *Rollerball*, we see these differences illustrated and played out to their logical conclusions. The 1975 version represents the modernist perspective, portraying the main protagonist, Jonathan E. (James Caan), as a professionally successful, yet tragic, individual who has no choice but to engage in a vain battle against the world around him. The 2002 remake, on the other hand, takes up a postmodernist perspective, depicting its hero, Jonathan Cross (Chris Klein), as a professionally unsuccessful, but opportunistic revolutionary who ultimately leads an insurrection against his oppressors. Contrasting and comparing these films will produce several concrete illustrations of the internal vicissitudes of nihilism that are not only philosophically instructive, but which also offer insights into the shifting landscape of American culture over the last twenty-seven years.

***Rollerball* (1975): A Modern Nihilist Superman**

The original version of *Rollerball*, starring James Caan as the hero Jonathan E., begins and ends ominously with Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* playing on

the soundtrack. This is a significant detail that sets a tone quite different from that of the 2002 remake. *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* is popularly associated with tales of terror, and so the feeling produced in the audience is one of foreboding and danger. At the very start of the film, as track lights and instrumentation are tested, as the audience for the game streams in, and as the corporate executives take their places, deeply menacing organ music dominates the soundtrack and creates a mood that will remain a major undercurrent throughout the course of the movie. We are not encouraged to feel excitement or enthusiasm by this mood-setting music, but rather anxiety about some sort of looming threat. Furthermore, the danger that represents the threat we are encouraged to be anxious about is not easily identifiable. It could be the violence of the game to come, it could be the crowd of spectators, or it could be the corporate executives dressed in suits and ties who seem somehow in control of all that is going on. In fact, it will turn out that the danger faced by the film's hero is composed of all these things. The very being of Jonathan E's lifeworld is made up of the culture that surrounds the ultraviolent sport of rollerball, and as the plot develops, we watch him become increasingly alienated from this world. His fall occurs not as the result of his choices, but rather is due to forces beyond Jonathan E's control and understanding. Ultimately there is nothing that he can do to change his fate, and though he is the captain of a championship sports team, he will end up alone as he rebels against his world and the forces that control it.

This opening scene of the 1975 version economically and artfully blends together many of the major elements that will be important to the rest of film. From the outset we know all is not well, and we quickly suspect that Jonathan E. is a sort of tragic hero on a collision course with destiny. According to Nietzsche, the tragic hero is a figure who "prepares himself pre-sciently by his destruction, not by his victories," and as we watch him we, the members of the audience, experience the "joy to which the path through destruction and negation leads."⁸ Jonathan E. embodies the tragic reality that there is always, even for the most successful individuals, an abyss that separates humans from Being itself. The longing for heavenly tranquility is doomed to failure, and even champions like Jonathan E. are destined to fall, no matter how heroically they assert their individual strength. We sense this as the first players assemble in formation on the rollerball track at the start of the film. As our hero stands with his team and impatiently endures the playing of the "corporate anthem"—his impatience illustrated by the fact that he nervously beats his fist against his leg for the duration of the anthem—we get a feeling for what he is up against and of how hopeless his struggles will be. Corporations rule the world now, and the game of rollerball is a rationalized, formalized, and highly controlled substitute for the old-fashioned forms of warfare engaged in when political states dominated the Earth. The corporate anthem is an organ piece, heard by the characters within the film, that reminds us, the audience, of the foreboding organ music we heard during the opening sequence. The multinational corporations, like God or Big Brother, are everywhere and control everything. Each time

that the corporate anthem is played, we are reminded of the ever-present threat that Jonathan E's world poses to him. His destruction seems certain, yet we anticipate that he will exhibit the sort of personal authenticity and strength of character that we expect from a tragic hero.

The first rollerball game between Madrid and Houston (Jonathan's team) introduces us to the breathtaking action, violence, and frenzy that are integral facets of this "sport." While the game is certainly vicious, it has strict rules of conduct that must be observed. Penalties are called for illegal moves and time limits for play are set. Players who violate the rules are pulled from the game, and in particular we see Jonathan's friend, Moonpie (John Beck), penalized for unnecessary roughness. The staging of the match is masterfully executed, giving us the sense of a highly stylized and organized gladiatorial competition. The choreography of the players' moves, the color of the costumes, and the design of the rollerball rink (which is actually the Olympic bicycle stadium in Munich, Germany), all contribute to a sense of realism and energy that helps us to understand why Jonathan is led to exclaim toward the end of the match, "I love this game!" It is in the midst of the action and the excitement of play that Jonathan feels most at home. He feels as one with this world that has predictable rules, a predictable duration, and clear-cut goals. Uniforms differentiate those who are with him from those against him, and he feels comfortable counting on the people around him to carry out their duties. Yet, as he leaves the arena, surrounded by chanting crowds of fans, the organ theme from the opening sequence booms out again. The camera pans upward and zooms in to reveal the looming presence of the office building of the Energy Corporation, the company that owns Jonathan's rollerball team. We are thus reminded that, despite his victory in the roller rink, all is not well. Though Jonathan may be a great team captain, his world is far more complicated than he can understand, and it is about to fall apart.

We soon see how uncomfortable and out of place Jonathan feels when taken out of the rollerball arena. A meeting with Mr. Bartholomew (John Houseman), the head of the Energy Corporation, reveals that the game is only part of a much larger reality, and that this larger reality has "rhythms" and "rules" that override those within the world of rollerball itself. While Jonathan may be the consummate athlete, he is completely out of his element when it comes to understanding the world beyond his sport. As a symbol of this awkwardness, in the corporate office he stumbles, cuts his finger on a decoration, and generally feels ill at ease as Bartholomew proclaims rollerball to be a "stupid game" from which Jonathan should be happy to retire. When Jonathan expresses his surprise at being asked to retire, Mr. Bartholomew explains that the game was never supposed to be a tool for individual glory, but rather was designed by the corporations in order to demonstrate to the masses that team effort is what makes for greatness. Though not made explicit during this conversation, it later becomes clear that Jonathan has undermined this purpose by rising to superstar status. He has become too much of an individual figure, a sort of Superman in the sport. For this reason he must leave the game and

eventually fade from the public consciousness. Jonathan is merely an instrument used by the corporations, and since he has ceased to serve his assigned purpose, the corporations want him out. It is interesting that even Bartholomew admits he alone is not fully in control of this decision concerning Jonathan's fate. Rather, there are a variety of corporate forces pressuring Jonathan to accept a generous retirement package that will include a television program celebrating his life and career. What is important is not *why* Jonathan must retire, but *that* he must retire, for whatever reason.

After this first meeting with Bartholomew, an abyss opens up in Jonathan's world and he begins to fall away from all that previously brought him comfort and security. His entire identity and sense of self-worth stems from his rollerball-playing acumen, and now all of that is going to be taken away. As it turns out, Jonathan had a sense that something was wrong long before this crisis. His wife, Ella (Maud Adams), was taken from him because a corporate executive desired her for his own. Presumably, Jonathan did not make a big deal over this at the time, since the corporations were otherwise being so generous to him. But now that he is threatened with retirement, Jonathan starts to reexamine his feelings and he realizes that these two episodes in his life—the loss of his wife and now of his career—result from some common cause. He repeatedly expresses a sense of bewilderment over just what this cause is, claiming that he doesn't understand why things seem to be falling apart in his life. He tells his friend Moonpie that "someone is pushing" him and that "something is going on," but that he doesn't know what it is. A sense of existential anxiety and emotional discomfort attunes Jonathan to the fact that he is not in control of his own world, that something is out of joint, and that his spiritual health is deteriorating as a result. Jonathan's growing uneasiness, and his consequent reflection and meditation on his situation, are encouraged by the fact that now, like never before, the smooth functioning of his life's routines has been interrupted. These routines, in a Heideggerian sense, have now become "unhandy," and so, like a carpenter clutching a broken hammer, Jonathan must stop and thoughtfully consider what to do next.

Moonpie laughs all of this off. Unlike Jonathan, Moonpie has no concerns other than the acquisition of more wealth and luxury. He tells Jonathan, "We're living good! You know we are!" yet Jonathan is too far along the path of nihilism to take Moonpie's comments seriously. Moonpie is so distracted by all of the luxuries that his career brings him that he doesn't even care to question why he is of value to the corporation and the crowds that adore his team. Jonathan does wonder about this very issue, if only because now his personal strength and charisma have become more of a threat than an asset to the powers that be. As his relationships with those around him disintegrate, Jonathan is led to the realization that although he is physically surrounded by people, he is also spiritually alone. His fans still adore him and cheer his victories, and his friends still profess their loyalty to him, but Jonathan nevertheless develops a progressively contemptuous attitude toward them and their placid manner of existence. He views them as participating in

a way of life that makes them into tools of the system rather than fully developed and autonomous agents. While people like Moonpie cannot even conceive of leaving such a world behind, Jonathan is in the process of becoming ever more alienated from it. The further that this alienation progresses, the more isolated Jonathan becomes and the more suspicious and hostile he is toward the crowd and its complicity with corporate culture.

In the world that Jonathan and Moonpie inhabit, the masses and the corporations are mutually dependent on one another. The corporations require a large consumer base, which the masses provide, and the masses require easy access to goods and services, which the corporations supply. So long as products and luxuries are readily available, the crowd will continue enthusiastically to support corporate control and domination, regardless of how much freedom must be surrendered by particular individuals. In the event that someone did come forth to threaten the authority of the corporations, and consequently to endanger the economic comfort of the people, the "herd" would instinctively defend the status quo, siding with their corporate benefactors in order to resist and subdue any threat to predictability and tranquility. Jonathan foresees this, realizing that he will continue to be adored by the masses only so long as he submits to his role as an instrument of the corporation. At one point in the film we even overhear debauched partygoers at an Energy Corporation gathering who speculate that rollerball players are simply robots programmed for the purpose of playing the game. If Jonathan's rebelliousness were to result in any sort of decline in the efficiency with which the necessities and luxuries of life were delivered to these people, they would be certain to do away with him the way that they would do away with a malfunctioning machine. He himself would have become "unhandy" to those around him. As Nietzsche repeatedly observes, the herd's love of the Superman is never unconditional. When working toward purposes and goals that promote their group interests, the herd loves the Superman. However, since his strength cannot invariably be controlled, the herd also fears the possibility that the Superman may go his own way, becoming an impediment, rather than an asset to the group's way of life. Under such circumstances, it would be usual for the masses to turn against such an individual in an effort to protect their familiar and comfortable routines. Jonathan has now reached the point at which he is being forced to make a choice between retirement to the junk heap or resistance to the corporate machine. Furthermore, since the purposes of the corporate machine have the unwavering support of the herd, Jonathan, if he chooses resistance, is taking on the entire world, and this is a battle that he is bound, tragically, to lose.

The characters of Jonathan and Moonpie represent two aspects of the human attitude toward nihilism. In Moonpie, we see a character that does not care to reflect on the value or worth of his life. Since, unlike Jonathan, he has never been put in a position where he has to worry about his place in the world, he has never had the motivation to question the meaning of life. He remains content and happy with the things that he has earned, and which have been granted to him by the corpora-

tion. Moonpie is mystified as to why Jonathan would even be curious about the behind-the-scenes workings of corporate culture, since he himself has never had the occasion to experience discomfort or anxiety as a result of the outcomes of these workings. He represents that aspect of the human personality that doesn't want to make waves, but would rather take what the world has to offer without question. Moonpie desires stasis, predictability, and the absence of anxiety, and he rejects anything that threatens to destabilize this contented state of being. Yet his state is one of ignorance and, in the terminology of Heidegger, it consequently "covers over" the true nature of Being itself. In his contentedness, Moonpie refuses to raise the question of Being in the first place, and by refusing to raise such a question, he remains alienated from Being, and thus in a state of unreflective, though non-anxious, ontological nihilism. Thus, Moonpie exhibits the characteristics of an "inauthentic" individual, or one who has become "tranquilized" by the distractions of his world. As Heidegger writes, "The supposition . . . that one is leading a full and genuine 'life' brings a tranquilization to Da-sein, for which everything is in 'the best order' and for whom all doors are open. . . . This tranquilization is inauthentic being."⁹

Jonathan, on the other hand, experiences a chronic state of anxiety throughout the film. At one point he too was like Moonpie, but now a sense of existential nihilism has become overwhelming for him. Though he may wish that he could turn back and become more tranquil like his friend, Jonathan is unable to do so. His existential angst has opened the doors of reality to him, revealing that there is more to life than just his own comfort. To remain passive and content is no longer an option now that he has caught a glimpse of the world beyond his rollerball career. What would he do once he retired? Certainly he would have luxuries, women, and money. But Jonathan has come to realize that these sorts of things are not ends in themselves. For him, material goods are worthwhile only as measures of his individual struggles. As he says to his ex-wife at one point in the film, "It's like people had a choice a long time ago between all them nice things or freedom. Of course they chose comfort." For Jonathan, happiness and material goods are not equivalent. For him, happiness is to be found in struggle, contest, and the freedom to push himself to new heights.

Despite their opposing reactions to the threat of nihilism, Jonathan nevertheless cares for his teammate. We see this when, in a game against Tokyo, Moonpie is injured and falls into a persistent vegetative state. Since Moonpie apparently has no other family to see to his affairs, it is up to Jonathan to sign the papers that would authorize ending life support for his friend. Jonathan refuses to do so. Earlier, Moonpie had tried to convince Jonathan that his life was perfect, and now Jonathan sees in Moonpie's brain-dead state the sort of stasis, predictability, and lack of anxiety that Moonpie sought all along. There are beautiful nurses to take care of him, fresh cut flowers to add color to his quiet room, nutrition provided intravenously, and perhaps even dreams to keep him entertained. When Jonathan tells the doctor to "Just leave him as he is," he is, in fact, recognizing that Moon-

pie's life is not substantially different now from how it always was. The corporation always did (and now always will) supply him with the comforts of life. Now, at least, he doesn't have to play rollerball to get them.

When Moonpie's doctor tells Jonathan that there are hospital rules that must be followed, Jonathan reacts in a controlled, yet angry manner by responding "No there aren't! There are no rules!" It is in this statement that Jonathan finally articulates an important insight that he has been grasping at throughout the course of the film. As he has fallen farther and farther away from his old, comfortable, and predictable way of life, he has come to see that, as Nietzsche warned, "the total character of the world is in all eternity chaos."¹⁰ Rules are human-created illusions useful only for fending off the chaos of reality. Though we often fool ourselves, taking comfort in the thought that there are objectively valid guidelines and standards of judgment existing "out there" in the world around us, the truth is that we, as individuals, are ultimately responsible for making our own way and carving our own path through life. There are no rules, no universal values, and no absolutely certain set of "facts" about reality that can serve as the cornerstones of an authentic life. Instead, human beings are radically alienated from the totality of Being, and in our vain struggles to understand Being itself, the human mind always falls short of its goal. Anytime that we try to bring an end to our struggle with reality by claiming that one set of rules or facts is indisputable, we lapse into laziness, inauthenticity, and self-deceit.

This point is driven home to Jonathan when, earlier in the film, he seeks out information about corporate decision making and corporate history. Since all of the world's books have been summarized and digitized as computer files, he must travel to the world's storehouse of information: a supercomputer named Zero. Upon his arrival, Jonathan is informed by the head computer scientist (Ralph Richardson) that Zero has misplaced the entire thirteenth century. "Not much in the thirteenth century," he is told. "Just Dante and a few corrupt popes." The sheer volume of facts that Zero has been entrusted with is overwhelming, even for a machine. There are just too many details about the world to store or to recall, and Jonathan is told that Zero is continually confused as a result. Not even a supercomputer can recollect everything that has ever happened, and if there is no brain big enough to recall the "truths" of history, what good are those "truths"? Jonathan is told, in fact, that it is as if Zero "knows nothing at all." When Jonathan asks Zero about corporate decision making, the computer answers in a series of tautologies: "Corporate decisions are made by corporate executives. Corporate executives make corporate decisions." All of the bits of information, all of the "facts" that Zero has stored, amount to nothing in the final evaluation. Absolute certainties are, when it comes right down to it, useless tautologies. As David Hume observed, propositions that offer us certainty tell us nothing new or useful about the world, and those statements that do tell us something new or useful are always uncertain. But whereas Hume recommended a form of "mitigated skepticism" in response to this state of affairs, suggesting that we go along with convention rather

than struggling against it, Jonathan follows another path. He concludes that no authority, no so-called expert can tell you what is real. In the end, it is up to you as an individual to aspire to your own vision of the Truth, to struggle toward it, and to ignore the distractions that always threaten to pull you away from it. It is up to each individual human mind to impart meaning, coherence, and significance to the information that it collects. When our hero turns to Zero for an answer to his nagging questions about life, he is rewarded with nothing—zero. Here lies Jonathan's most profound lesson: No one, not even those who are the smartest, strongest, and most erudite, are in touch with absolute Truth or Being.

At the end of the film, Jonathan will play one last game of rollerball, during which all rules have been suspended. This final match is intended as a fight to the death, and the corporation heads anticipate that Jonathan will be killed during its course; thus reducing him to "zero." Jonathan, however, has learned his lessons very well, and as his awareness of ontological nihilism grows, so too does his resolve to fight even harder against it. In the final scene of the film, the ominous sounds of *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* once again resonate. As the crowd of spectators chants his name, and the corporate executives angrily look on, Jonathan E. remains the last man standing in the rollerball arena. Alone, he skates around the track until the movie ends in freeze-frame, and we, the audience, are once again, as at the beginning of the film, left with the feeling that no good will come of this. Though Jonathan may have triumphed in the roller rink, he is still a stranger to the vast, hostile world "out there." When he steps off of the track, the qualities that allowed him to excel as a sports star—individualism, nonconformity, iconoclasm, and a thirst for victory—will be the very qualities that are sure to bring him, yet again, into conflict with the herd and corporate culture. Nothing has been resolved at the end of the film, in other words, and our suspicion is that as one man against the entire world, Jonathan E. is certainly fated for eventual destruction. His struggles have led nowhere and accomplished nothing, and yet we are left with a feeling of admiration for Jonathan's integrity and strength of character. Herein lies his nature as a tragic hero.

***Rollerball* (2002): A Postmodern Nihilist Opportunist**

The tone set at the beginning of the 2002 remake of *Rollerball* is more frenetic, more action-packed, and ultimately, far more superficial than that of the original. We are introduced to the main character, Jonathan Cross, as he rockets down the winding streets of San Francisco. Now transformed into a twenty-something airhead, in this opening scene Jonathan skillfully avoids collision with cars and eludes the police while taking part in an illegal street luge contest. His competitor ends up losing control, smashing through a storefront window while Jonathan is rescued from arrest by his friend Marcus Ridley (LL Cool J), who pulls him off of his street-luge board and into a speeding car. Instead of the ominous and unsettling

tone of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*, all of this is played out against a rock-and-roll soundtrack that reinforces a feeling of speed, action, and excitement.

It is in Ridley's car that we learn Jonathan is a failed hockey star. He has been unable to make it into the major leagues, and instead has had to pursue his quest for fame in the world of illegal extreme sports. Unlike his precursor in the original film, Jonathan Cross is introduced to us as an outsider who lacks the talent required to excel in his first choice of career. His friend suggests that he abandon hockey and instead sign up to play on a rollerball team. In this film it turns out that rollerball is no longer a product of corporate powers that rule the world, but is, rather, a moneymaking spectacle created by Eastern-European gangsters who are riding the wave of chaos that resulted after the breakup of the Soviet Union. This is quite an interesting reversal. Recall that in the original film, rollerball was a means of social control, utilized by ruling corporate entities to demonstrate the futility of individual effort. It was depicted as a product of the artificial, yet strict order that corporate forces had imposed upon the world. In the 2002 version of the film, on the other hand, rollerball is a sport arising out of chaos and the breakdown of order. The climate of corporate control has been replaced by the climate of anarchy. Whereas Jonathan E. struggled against a powerful, unified, and omnipresent corporate threat, Jonathan Cross struggles against the threats of fragmentation and lawlessness.

Jonathan Cross, like his precursor Jonathan E., is caught in the grip of existential nihilism. However the root cause of his malaise, and thus his response to it, is quite different from Jonathan E.'s. For Cross, his feeling of existential alienation derives not from being torn away from success, but from personal failure in his professional career. Cross, unlike E., never was a success. His desire to become a rollerball player is a second choice, pursued only after he fails at everything else that he really wanted to do. When he departs for Zhambal, Kazakhstan, and joins the "Horsemen," Jonathan discovers a sense of place and at-homeness that is new to him. He is transformed from an outsider and a criminal into an integral part of a bigger sports machine. Here we get to see a different, postmodern perspective on the problem of existential nihilism. The problem, it seems, is not that Jonathan has fallen away from his world, but rather that he never was part of any particular world in the first place. His feelings of unease might, hence, be alleviated by pursuing, and integrating himself into, any environment whatsoever. The particular sport that he plays and the particular set of rules or ideals that he follows are not so important. All that is important is to become a success, and in this remake, success is defined by all of the trappings that Jonathan E. rejected in the first film: money, possessions, sexy women, and screaming fans. So it is that we see Jonathan Cross racing around in expensive sports cars, going to trendy night clubs, sleeping with models, and so forth. He is happy here, and for a while, at least, his sense of existential angst dissipates.

As has already been noted, one of the characteristics of the postmodern response to nihilism is to reject old ideals and goals that, from the postmodernist's

viewpoint, appear simply to be pipe dreams, incapable of fulfillment. Why torture yourself by working toward objectives that will never be reached? Why continue struggling to hit a target that is infinitely far away? As Lyotard has observed, such a life can only end in despair, and the experience of nihilism results from the failure to realize this fact. Instead, Lyotard has advised that we wage "war on totality." The postmodern hero, in this regard, is one who recognizes the absurdity of struggling toward absolute ideals, and who rejects despair and frustration by "lowering the bar," so to speak, setting new, attainable goals in place of the old, unattainable ones. Like Jonathan Cross, the postmodernist is a sort of opportunist and a pragmatist who is not committed to any particular vision of perfection, but is willing to bend in order to fit whatever world will accept him or her into its domain. Prewritten "metanarratives" are to be rejected and instead we are encouraged to make up the rules as we go along. Success and happiness may be discovered in compromise, accommodation, and flexibility rather than in single-minded commitment and determination. Thus, for Jonathan Cross, hockey is no more desirable than rollerball. What matters is to find a niche, a home, and a place to fit in. This is the only escape from existential nihilism according to the postmodernist. Because nihilistic feelings derive from a silly attachment to outdated ideals and old-fashioned goals, all that is needed in order to overcome these feelings is to reject the traditional pursuits that have led to frustration, and so Jonathan Cross leaves the US and finds his contentment in the chaos and anarchy of Eastern Europe. Though in his home country he is an outsider and a criminal, in another, more unstable culture, he can be a hero and a role model.

However, as he quickly distinguishes himself overseas as the star of the Horsemen, Jonathan begins to sense that his triumph is had at the expense of other people. The irony of Jonathan's newfound success is that the very conditions that allow him to prosper are also the conditions that are repressing those around him. His teammates are treated as expendable parts by the team's owner. Not only are their player numbers tattooed on their faces, marking them as property, but when the viewing audience enjoys seeing players killed in action, the owner organizes the deaths of various members of the team. Furthermore, it turns out that the main audience for rollerball is composed of economically disadvantaged mine workers who toil like slaves for the very individual who owns Jonathan's team. It is here that we get a faint echo of one of the themes that was first sounded in the original film. There is some sort of nefarious force that is orchestrating rollerball in order to keep the proletarian masses placid and content. The difference in the remake, however, is that the force behind rollerball is a greedy individual who is out to exploit the current social disorder. In the original film, on the other hand, the force behind rollerball, though represented by Mr. Bartholomew, is more shadowy and corporate. It was not out of greed that the corporations created the game, but out of a desire to maintain comfort, safety, and security for the entire world. In the original film, the enemies are a corporate suit, a culture of conformity, and a world in which the individual is subsumed by the masses. In the remake, the enemies are

the leather-clad, unshaven Eastern-European gangster Alexi Petrovich (Jean Reno), a culture of disorder, and a world in which the masses are exploited by greedy individuals.

Though the new version of *Rollerball* was obviously intended as an action-packed adventure film, the action sequences are so ill-conceived and executed that they are ridiculous rather than exciting. The rollerball matches take place on a roller rink that is tiny and too filled with gadgets and contraptions to give us a clear view of the contest as it takes place. Because there is no letup in the violence even outside of the roller rink, the games do not shock us or even hold our attention for very long. Instead of the somber and foreboding organ music of the corporate anthem, the matches are accompanied by rock bands playing on the sidelines. Instead of Bach, it is Pink, Slipknot, and Rob Zombie that provide the soundtrack for the film. The mood that is thus conjured up is not contemplative, but frenzied and distracted. We are not encouraged to care about the feelings of the main character but to anticipate his next violent and audacious maneuver. Action instead of reflection seems to be the keynote here. Whereas in the original version the three pivotal game sequences were masterfully executed, providing important anchor points around which the rest of the story unfolded, in the new version, the game sequences seem almost incidental to everything else that is occurring in the movie. During the rollerball matches, the actors are filmed in close-up, so the audience misses out on the overall scope and sweep of the games. Each character is given an "outrageous" name, costume, and personality, transforming them into cartoon characters that resemble contemporary professional wrestlers. There are even sequences where a trading card of each of the players is superimposed over (and thus allowed to obscure) the rollerball action scenes. All of this contributes to a very particular vision of individuality that distinguishes the message of this remake from that of the original.

In the postmodern world, individuality is expressed through superficial diversity. To be a postmodern individual is to be unique in appearance, thought, and orientation, though at the same time to be tolerant of the differences that others exhibit. As Richard Rorty puts it, the aim is to pursue "an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description."¹¹ For the postmodernist, one's individuality derives from the willingness to take action and to resolutely construct a unique vision of reality. Such visions have no grounding in absolute Truth, but are simply interesting expressions of particular perspectives and viewpoints. The personal narrative, rather than the overarching "metanarrative," is the model. The only real "sin" for the postmodernist is to impose one's personal narrative too vigorously on others. Toleration, liberality, and openness to the "other" are defining characteristics of postmodern ethics, and in the new version of *Rollerball* we see an expression of this view. While Jonathan Cross searches for his place in the world, he is depicted as someone who is not content to occupy that place to the detriment of others. Though intent on fulfilling his individual desires, he does so with the presupposition that everyone else is free to do so as well.

When he discovers that there is a domineering force behind the game of rollerball that is keeping others from their own desires, he revolts and vows to lead the oppressed in a war against this force. Thus Jonathan becomes a revolutionary leader precisely because he desires to be an individual among other individuals. The players and spectators that he rallies are of all different colors, nationalities, appearances, sexes, and dispositions. This sort of diversity is good in itself, according to the postmodernist hero. On the other hand, the sort of individualism that the team owner embodies is of a different kind. It is the individuality of the tyrant, and this is a type of individual that the postmodernist detests. Such an individual disregards the diverse views of others, believing that his or her view is the "One Right Description" of reality. But this is intolerable for the postmodern hero for whom there is no one right description, no overarching Truth concerning the nature of reality. The freedom to pursue diverse forms of happiness is what is important, and anything that gets in the way of this, including artificial standards of Truth, is rejected as oppressive.

The 2002 version of *Rollerball* ends, unlike the 1975 version, on an optimistic, and distinctively non-tragic, note. During the climax of the film, Petrovich trades Jonathan's teammate/love interest, Aurora (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos), to a rival rollerball team. As the final game commences, both teams turn their violence not against each other, but rather toward the owners and organizers of the match, leading the audience in a mass rebellion against the corrupt gangsters who have exploited them. Whereas the original version of the film ends with Jonathan E. alone and in freeze-frame as that ominous organ music plays, this film ends with Jonathan Cross and Aurora in the midst of a mob of rioting mine workers. Aurora says to Jonathan (as they make their way through the crowd and into the back of a truck), "You have started yourself a revolution." She then tells him that she wants to take him home "to her bed," kissing him as a rock song by Rob Zombie fills the soundtrack. The revolution is thus ushered in, not as a frightening and ominous prospect, but as a sexy, exciting, and hopeful adventure.

The Ethical, Political, and Cultural Implications of Nihilism in the *Rollerball* Films

Traditionally, nihilism has been viewed as an unequivocally negative and life-denying phenomenon that should be avoided, left behind, or overcome at all costs. Philosophers tend to emphasize the anguish, despair, and torment that is associated with nihilistic struggle, suggesting that the experience of nihilism has nothing at all positive about it. If our examination of the old and new versions of *Rollerball* has taught us anything, however, it has taught us that this traditional viewpoint is simplistic. In truth, "[t]he essence of nihilism contains nothing negative."¹² While the separation of human beings from their highest objects of aspiration certainly is a situation that promotes frustration, torment, and anxiety, at the same time it cre-

ates the potential for activity, struggle, and the progressive pursuit of greater and greater levels of achievement. As finite creatures, absolute perfection always remains beyond our grasp, and yet the unending aspiration toward perfection may be the very thing that bestows dignity and worth upon us as human beings. Though this aspiration may often be accompanied by feelings of negativity, it would be a mistake, for that reason, to blind ourselves to the potentially positive power of nihilistic struggle. Both Jonathan E. and Jonathan Cross are examples of characters that use their experience of nihilism, not as an excuse to give up on life, but as a motivation for continued aspiration and activity. While the particular targets they pursue may differ, neither character simply gives up and rolls over in order passively to accept the injustices of the world. Rather, these characters remain alive, vigorous, and vital in the face of a hostile environment.

While it is clear that both versions of *Rollerball* confront the threat of nihilism, neither film advocates the variety of nihilism that Nietzsche has labeled "passive nihilism." Passive nihilism is a symptom of "decline and recession of the power of the spirit."¹³ It occurs at the point when the individual is no longer motivated to pursue humanly created goals. Because all worthwhile goals seem out of reach to the passive nihilist, this individual comes to think that all actions in the world are inconsequential and therefore meaningless. For this reason, the passive nihilist withdraws, submissively giving in and renouncing any concern or care for the struggles of life, or for Being itself. This is, of course, quite unlike the attitude of either Jonathan E. or Jonathan Cross. Both of these characters are supremely active in their nihilism, finding in it an opportunity for the expression of strength, energy, and concern for the world.

However, the mere expression of "will to power" is not an unequivocally commendable thing, and so active nihilism is not, in and of itself, necessarily to be lauded. One of the dangers faced by the active nihilist is that this individual can all too easily fall into a distracted state of busyness, squandering his or her energies on pursuits and goals that lead farther and farther away from, rather than closer to, an attuned awareness of Being itself. This, I think, is the main distinction to be made between the activities of Jonathan E. and Jonathan Cross. Whereas Jonathan E. embodies the active nihilism of a modern Superman who retains an authentic, individual attunement to Being itself, Jonathan Cross embodies the active nihilism of a postmodern pragmatist who has become distracted by the world of the crowd. In his eagerness to overcome nihilism, the character of Jonathan Cross, ironically, becomes ever more entangled in it by losing himself and willfully becoming an instrument for social revolution. As Heidegger writes, "The will to overcome nihilism mistakes itself because it bars itself from the revelation of the essence of nihilism as the history of the default of Being, bars itself without being able to recognize its own deed."¹⁴ Like Jonathan Cross, those who are too concerned with overcoming nihilism tend to forget that nihilism is itself an aspect of Being. As such, nihilism is not something to be avoided, or left behind as quickly as possible. Rather, it is a phenomenon that should be lingered over and taken as an op-

portunity to develop a greater, more authentic, understanding of ourselves, our world, and the relationships that hold between the two.

By scrutinizing the plots of both versions of *Rollerball*, I have revealed a number of common issues that are explored in these two films. In both movies we are introduced to a character that is caught in the grip of existential anxiety. This anxiety in both cases derives from the main character's inability to harmonize with the world around him, and this disharmony, in each case, provokes a search for solutions. In both films, furthermore, the main characters undergo a sort of philosophical transformation in the course of their search. By actively choosing to reflect on the underlying ontological circumstances that have contributed to their anxiety, these characters confront the issue of nihilism. But this is where similarities end, for the original version of *Rollerball* depicts the confrontation with nihilism from a modernist perspective, while the remake depicts it from a postmodernist perspective. In the former case, Jonathan E. is compelled by his conscience tragically to face his destiny alone, rejecting all of the social distractions that threaten to pull him away from the one thing that remains valuable to him: an authentic and conscious awareness of himself and his relationship to Being. Conversely, in the latter case, Jonathan Cross optimistically embraces the "crowd," discovering an escape from the anxiety of nihilism through his entanglement with others in their common rebellion against tyranny and domination. Who he is is nothing more than who he appears to be to those around him. Whereas Jonathan E. attempts to reconnect with his own Being in the course of a struggle against the herd, Jonathan Cross attempts to find a place and function within the herd. In these differing approaches to the problem of nihilism, we see the initial development of a number of themes that never gain full voice in the text of the films, but which deserve more extensive articulation nonetheless. One concerns the ethical implications of nihilism, and the other concerns nihilism's political ramifications. Before closing, I would like briefly to discuss these issues and to suggest that what we find here casts an interesting light on contemporary American attitudes concerning Goodness, Justice, and the meaning of life itself.

Implicit in the plot of the original version of *Rollerball* is an ethical message. That message states that the best way to live one's life is not in the pursuit of pleasure, prestige, and fortune, but rather in the pursuit of personal authenticity. Jonathan E. is a tortured and profoundly unhappy man, an individual who, as his friend Moonpie tells him, "has it all!" yet who finds no comfort in this fact. There is more to life than shallow pleasures, Jonathan seems to think, and insofar as we, the audience, are led to sympathize with this character, we agree with him. What makes him so sympathetic to us is his desire to understand himself and his purpose in life, even if this leads to professional and personal ruin. Public adoration, money, and prestige are, for Jonathan E., all distractions that have pulled him away from an awareness of his authentic self. The powers of the corporation have transformed Jonathan into a "thing," a marketable product, a veritable instrument that, in the end, has outlived its usefulness. It is only when discarded and cast aside by the

Energy Corporation that Jonathan rediscovers his true life's ambition. It never was his purpose to acquire goods, fame, and wealth. Rather, all along these were only ways to understand his place in, and his connection with, the world around him. By becoming too focused on things at the expense of an awareness of himself, Jonathan became distracted and forgot what is really important in life. His message to us, the audience, is that the best life is one in which the individual refuses to forget that the adoration of the crowd is incidental, and even detrimental, to understanding who you are. In the short story that inspired the film, Jonathan E. ineloquently sums up these feelings in a conversation with Mr. Bartholomew:

[Bartholomew] "You don't want out of the game?" he asks wryly.

[Jonathan] "No, not at all. It's just that I want—god, Mr. Bartholomew, I don't know how to say it: I want more."

He offers a blank look.

[Jonathan] "But not things in the world," I add. "More for me."¹⁵

This point is lost, and an entirely different ethical message is conveyed, in the remake of the film twenty-seven years later. Instead of pulling away from particular "things in the world," Jonathan Cross actively pursues those things, finding happiness and purpose in his worldly entanglements. The crowd becomes a means of escape from his personal dissatisfaction. In solidarity with the group, Jonathan finds himself not only loved, but endowed with a purpose and meaning to his life. Whereas the open-endedness of the original film (and short story) suggests that the threat of nihilism has not been, and never will be, overcome, in the new version Jonathan's transformation into a revolutionary leader suggests that he has not only found his place, but that he will, in fact, change the world and make it a better place for everyone. Though the audience may find it hard to sympathize with this poorly-drawn character, the message that he delivers is clear: we should not withdraw into ourselves and reclusively contemplate who we are. In fact, we are nothing until we make ourselves into something, and we make ourselves into something by doing things, making connections with others, and bending the world to suit our will. The best way to live life, in sum, is to find a place in "the crowd" and to make a contribution. In this, we hear the voices of Lyotard and Rorty drowning out the pleas of Nietzsche, Camus, and Heidegger, and we also get the hint of a political message.

The original version of *Rollerball* takes place after the "Corporate Wars," which presumably were times of chaos and disorder. After these wars, the world has become safe, comfortable, and predictable. The inner, existential crisis that Jonathan E. faces is largely a reaction against the life of comfort and conformity that he otherwise enjoys. Jonathan E., in rejecting his success as a part of the "establishment," is the type of individualistic rebel who wants nothing to do with corporate culture. We get the sense that he, like Socrates and Plato before him, holds a very dim view of the masses and their group choices. Most people would "choose things over freedom," as Jonathan tells Ella, and so most people are not equipped

to know what a good life really consists of. In this we sense a sort of antidemocratic sentiment. The masses are stupid followers. They chant slogans taught to them by those who give them what they want, and to put political power in their hands would be to produce a world where, instead of Justice, things, goods, and consumer products are the targets of collective decision making.

On the other hand, the remake of *Rollerball* takes place in the midst of political and social disorder. Jonathan Cross initially finds his place in this milieu, but he soon reacts against it, the way that Jonathan E. reacts against the stability of corporate culture, forming alliances with others in order to pursue effective revolutionary activity. Furthermore, it is with the working classes, the "people," that Jonathan finds his allegiance, not with the exploitative gang bosses. The political message delivered here seems to be that it is only because of oppression that the people appear to be stupid followers. If given the opportunity, the means, and the proper leadership, the masses will pursue the best course of action. This will draw them into a public realm where they will be less concerned with selfish desires, and more concerned with collective justice. Collective justice, furthermore, is understood as the freedom of each individual to be happy, and so, in the final analysis, political activity must be focused on the utilitarian ideal that the best government is one that brings the largest number of people the most amount of happiness.

One suspects that Jonathan E. and Jonathan Cross would not like one another very much. The change in how this main character has been depicted is quite interesting, not only from the perspective of a film critic, but also from the perspective of an American citizen. While it is difficult to fault the democratic sentiments of the remake, it is also hard to sympathize with the shallowness of its characters and the disregard that they seem to have for personal authenticity. American culture changed between the times that these two films were made, and not necessarily for the better. While we may be increasingly confident about our group causes, and more aggressive about asserting our collective will, we have also become less philosophical and, perhaps, concerned with "things" and with manipulating the details of the world more than ever before. The two versions of *Rollerball* are not just movies. They are, in fact, symptoms of the way that Americans think about themselves and their relationship to Being itself. Made shortly after America's defeat in the Vietnam War, the original film was the expression of a people seeking a deep, personal, and reflective understanding of who they are as individuals separate from the crowd. The remake, on the other hand, was made during a period of time when America was gearing up to fight terrorism and foreign enemies. In it we find the expression of a people more concerned with directing their attentions outwards, away from the self, and with banding together in order to alter reality in accordance with collective desires. Whereas the original film is structured around settings of meditative quiet and reflection that are punctuated by action and violence, the remake consists of an uninterrupted barrage of violence, rock music, and unreflective action. Things certainly have changed quite a bit in twenty-seven years, and, it is worth repeating, not necessarily for the better.

Notes

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2. Albert Camus, "An Absurd Reasoning," in *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 20–21.
3. Michael Novak, *The Experience of Nothingness* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), 11.
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6. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 91.
7. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 82.
8. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 77.
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12. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume Four: Nihilism* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 221.
13. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 17.
14. Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume Four: Nihilism*, 240.
15. William Harrison, *Rollerball Murder* (New York: Warner Books, 1975), 81–82.