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NIETZSCHE AS PRISM

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On the Fluidity of Nietzsche's Writing: Nietzsche as Prism

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Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit bietet eine kritische und einleitende Auseinandersetzung mit einigen Problemen der gegenwärtigen Nietzsche Deutung. Mit der Konzentration auf die Problematik von Begriffen, Stil und Struktur in Nietzsche's Werk geht diese Studie in erster Linie der großen Vielfalt der unterschiedlichen Auslegungen nach. Die Arbeit beschäftigt sich nicht mit der Aussage des Werkes an sich. Vielmehr versucht sie, die verschiedenen Interpretationen als methodologische Stellungnahme jeweiliger Kritiker nachzuweisen.

Nietzsche wird also als Prisma betrachtet und die große Zahl von Deutungen als Lichtstrahlen, die alle den Kern des Prismas zu fassen versuchen. Weil sich der Kern dieses Körpers jedoch nur schwer aufdecken läßt, verraten die 'Streulichter' vielleicht nicht mehr als ihre eigenen vorgefaßten Methodologien und Meinungen.

Diese Arbeit ist im Ansatz empirisch. Weniger die hermeneutische Frage des Inhalts des Werkes Nietzsche's steht im Vordergrund als die Beschäftigung mit den verschiedenen Rezeptionssträngen.

Während der erste und zweite Teil sich auf die Frage von Begriffen und Stil als Problemstellungen konzentrieren, wird sich der dritte Teil mit den verschiedenen Weisen auseinandersetzen, in denen die Struktur von Nietzsche's Werk für Interpretationszwecke genutzt wurde.

Summary

The following is an account of some of the difficulties in Nietzsche interpretation to date. While focusing on problems such as concepts, style and structure in the Nietzsche text, the analysis, in its first conception, exposes the large variety of Nietzsche interpretation itself: while moving away from the difficulty of the text, it attempts to demonstrate that the different interpretations, rather than referring to Nietzsche and his writing, are first and foremost indicative of the methodological stance of the interpreters themselves.

Nietzsche, then, will be considered as prism, and the different interpretations as bundles of light that capture its essence. Yet, the essence of the Nietzschean prism may be difficult to find; the lights merely act as reflections of pre-conceived methods and opinions. The analysis is empirical in its approach: rather than focusing on the hermeneutical question of the Nietzschean content, it deals with the different manifestations of its manifold reception.

While the first and second part focus on the questions of concept and style as points of contention, the third part is more concerned with the different ways in which the structure of Nietzsche's oeuvre has been used for interpretation.

Introduction

The starting point of an analysis on the variety of Nietzsche interpretation has to be Nietzsche's philosophy proper. Before going into the intricacies of the different interpretations, it is wise to start off with the thought itself. We must concern ourselves with questions such as why there are so many interpretations of his philosophy, and what it is that makes him somehow so fluid. Even today, publications such as *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: essays pro and contra* indicate that the controversy about Nietzsche's intentions is of topical interest.¹ There has never been any real consensus about what Nietzsche had to say, nor about the questions of how and why he said it the way he did. In fact, interpretations often have a contradictory nature.

Longinus Dohmen in his analysis of what he has termed Nietzsche's "veiled anthropology" argues that on the most basic premises of Nietzsche's philosophy interpreters will disagree. He states: "[o]ne should conduct a simple experiment and ask any number of Nietzsche specialists the following questions on his world view. Does Nietzsche actually possess a cosmology, and if so what is its nature? Is Nietzsche's world a world of order or of chaos? Are there any laws underlying this world, and if so which are they? Is reality for Nietzsche purely accidental, intentional or just merely based on necessity? Which thinkers have influenced Nietzsche's outlook on nature? I'm putting it mildly when stating that the answers to these questions will considerably differ with each interpreter" (204).²

For Dohmen, one of the reasons for this disagreement lies in the fact that the major tenets of his philosophy are never explicitly and structurally elaborated. The interpreter of Nietzsche, therefore, is faced with the difficult task of uncovering an argument which not only has evolved over time, but one that consists of a large number of scattered fragments. Other critics may propose different reasons for this thorough disagreement over Nietzsche, yet the majority of them hold at least some opinion about Nietzsche's distinctive philosophy and style.

1 *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: essays pro and contra*. Ed. Clayton Koelb. New York: The State University of New York Press, 1990.

2 Longinus Dohmen: *Nietzsche over de menselijke natuur: Een uiteenzetting van zijn verborgen antropologie*. Kampen: Kok Agora, 1994. The full quote reads: "Men neme de proef op de som en stelle aan een willekeurig aantal Nietzsche-specialisten de volgende vragen over zijn wereldbeeld. Heeft Nietzsche wel een eigen kosmologie en zo ja wat voor een? Is de wereld volgens Nietzsche orde of chaos, heersen er natuurwetten en zo ja welke? Ziet Nietzsche in de werkelijkheid toeval, opzet of noodzaak? Welke auteurs hebben hem beïnvloed in zijn denken over de natuur? Ik druk mij voorzichtig uit als ik stel dat de antwoorden behoorlijk uiteen zullen lopen. (Dat is niet per se de schuld van de Nietzsche-commentatoren. Evenals dat het geval is met zijn visie op de mens heeft Nietzsche namelijk een verborgen visie op de natuur ontwikkeld)" (204).

In the following, I intend to analyze a few difficulties of Nietzsche's thought and style. Nietzsche's text is not a pamphlet or manifesto, lucidly structured to convince as many a reader as possible. That this is the case is not a new observation: as said, many critics have indicated the fluidity of his writing. Yet, the observations often remain tentative, and never really commented upon in a structural fashion. In this analysis, I will specifically refer to a number of critics who have dealt with the question of understanding Nietzsche, and will attempt to establish that for a large number of them the difficulty of interpretation is indicative of what Nietzsche was trying to say. Style and content converge in a clear message on nothing less than the incommunicability of the message itself. I should add, perhaps unnecessarily, that I do not have the intention to say anything definitive about the content of Nietzsche's writing. Besides the fact that many commentators have done so (and undoubtedly better than myself), this is not the place for such an analysis. What I will indicate and argue, however, is that the difficulty of Nietzsche's style and that of the structure of his writings are conducive to the many readings of his work. To be sure, different times will interpret in different ways, no matter how unified the message of a text is. Yet, with Nietzsche the message itself is ambiguous, and in contrast to most other texts, poses questions about its own validity.

The prism: Three attitudes towards inconsistency as reflections of an underlying methodological stance

This analysis, then, entails some of the basic and more theoretical tenets of Nietzsche interpretation. I will explore the specificity of Nietzsche's philosophy, and will attempt to establish the nature and validity of a number of its apparent contradictions. I will be mainly concerned then with three different attitudes towards these contradictions: the first is adopted by those who dismiss contradictions and focus on what stands undisputed, the second by critics for whom contradictions in Nietzsche are the necessary steps towards a theory which for the most part remains hidden, and the third for whom Nietzsche's ambivalence is somehow indicative of his philosophical message. Whereas the first group of interpreters may uphold the criteria of unity and clarity in assessing his philosophy, the second argues that textual and thematic coherence need to be intricately established by the expert eye. The third holds that his philosophy, through the ambivalence of style, questions the validity of these very criteria. For the second group Nietzsche's ambivalence is not even so much intended, as indicative of a struggle for truth Nietzsche progressively realizes he cannot obtain. For the third his ambivalence is intended.

Thus André Gide, as an early representative of the first camp of critics, dismisses Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence as something which just simply does not make sense: "Nietzsche again. (...) Nothing more incomprehensible or useless than this proposition. It does not add anything to Nietzsche's system, and I can only understand the degree of enthusiasm that he has for it as a symptom of his approaching madness" (Lang 115).³ It should be noted here perhaps that modernist authors have generally focused on the *Birth of Tragedy*, which is straightforward in approach and style. Modernism may consider Nietzsche as ungraspable at times, yet this sense of complexity does not prevent these authors from defining it in terms of a consistent whole. It approaches his thought as a coherent and practical philosophy of life: a theory which may defy description, but which is always to be assessed on the basis of its consistency.⁴

Longinus Dohmen, as a more recent representative of the second camp of critics, defines Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of a "veiled theory" (*een verborgen leer*), a set of principles to be discovered by the expert eye of the accurate interpreter. For Dohmen, contradictions and ambiguities may exist, yet they do not preclude a generally consistent theory behind the surface of ambivalence. In fact, ambivalence in Nietzsche may have different reasons, the foremost being perhaps just simply the struggle with defining reality over time. Style and content are indicative of the pain with which Nietzsche not just attempted to, but actually succeeded in elaborating his theory. Typical of Dohmen's systematic approach to contradictions is the following quote:

The fact that Nietzsche at one time attributes sensation, at an other intelligence to force [and drive], while both rejecting and subsequently acknowledging these qualities again afterwards, reflects his doubts about these distinctions (266).⁵

Yet, for Dohmen doubts do not preclude a final resolution and stand: Nietzsche's uncertainty at this particular point just simply demonstrates the difficulty of the problem, and the contentious nature of the argument he makes. Yet the argument is ultimately not that am-

3 The quote is taken from Renée Lang: *André Gide et la pensée allemande* (Paris: Egloff, 1949), and reads: "Nietzsche encore (...) Rien de plus gratuit, de plus vain qu'une telle hypothèse. Elle n'ajoute rien au système de Nietzsche, et je ne puis prendre la sorte d'enthousiasme qu'il en éprouve, que comme un signe de sa naissante folie" (115).

4 Foster argues in *Heirs to Dionysus: A Nietzschean current in Literary Modernism* that Gide's (and Mann's) interest in Nietzsche "was based largely on the *Birth of Tragedy*" (146): "In 1899, Gide could write that *Birth* epitomized Nietzsche's whole philosophy -"all of his future writings are there in germ"- and many years later, in a retrospective on his life-long fascination with Nietzsche that appeared in 1947, Mann closely echoed this judgement. In its main outlines, Nietzsche's thought "was completely there from the beginning, was always the same, and ... not only the germs of his later teaching" but the entire doctrine was already present in early writings that included *Birth*" (146).

5 The quote reads: "Uit het feit dat hij nu eens gewaarwording, dan weer intelligentie aan de kracht toekent, dan weer beide afwijst om ze vervolgens beide weer toe te kennen, blijkt zijn onzekerheid over deze kwalitatieve bepalingen" (266).

bivalence is inevitable, but that drives and forces are intelligent. Dohmen's method of interpretation is an elaborate study of the changes in emphasis, subtle differences that can be revealed by "a progressive condensation of [the] different contexts" in which the problematic notions are used.⁶ The method is thus an accurate instrument in establishing the final emphasis in Nietzsche's theory.

Beyond these two types of criticism, a third argues that ambiguity in Nietzsche is intended: the difficulty of interpretation does not reflect the failure of the text, but rather that of the conditions of interpretation itself. David Allison argues that Nietzsche's writing contains "this kind of fertility or richness that refuses to be systematized, discretely categorized, and, ultimately, calcified by some ruse or device of language, some simple definition, or essence, or form" (xiv). Nietzsche's textual ambiguity reveals interpretation as the forceful attempt to establish a system and categories, precisely because the text so obviously lacks and resists these deceptive qualities. Nietzsche's text, then, is like a mirror in which the ardent interpreter sees reflected not the truth, but his or her own metaphysical longing for truth. Allison further states that

[n]owhere(...)has the style of a philosopher's expression so forcefully reflected its content (xiii).

Style and content fuse in a "profusion" of thought without system to indicate the human impossibility to grasp what is real, or to objectively know any underlying system.

These three approaches to Nietzsche's philosophy may not always be so clearly defined, yet what they do indicate are the extremes on the large scale of responses to his philosophy. As said, while the first type of criticism tends to discard or ignore that which remains ambiguous in favour of a coherent system, the second holds that ambiguities indicate crucial turning points in a largely consistent thought experiment evolved over time. For the third, then, ambiguity itself is part of Nietzsche's message and strategy.

It is not my intention to take sides in this debate, not at this stage at least. What I will indicate, however, is that the way in which the critics have approached Nietzsche's philosophy tells us as much about these critics as about Nietzsche himself. Interpretation (of Nietzsche's writing especially) is never just making apparent an underlying meaning: interpretation is making ideologically motivated choices about the status and value of Nietzsche that often fit the way in which oneself understands the world. In fact, Nietzsche himself somewhat provocatively argues that interpretation equals appropriation: one can only understand that which is already somehow known. And, ultimately, making something one's

6 Dohmen speaks of Nietzsche's notion of power: "Langzaam maar zeker wordt duidelijk, niet op de laatste plaats vanwege een geleidelijke verdichting van deze verschillende contexten, waar het accent komt te liggen en welke functie het machtsbegrip in Nietzsches filosofie krijgt toebedeeld" (296).

own may be nothing more than the structuring of meaning according to a set of preestablished givens.

In the following, I will be focusing on some of the complexities in Nietzsche's writing, such as concepts, style and structure, and will attempt to relate these to the three approaches to contradictions. Each of these difficulties will thus be considered not just in themselves, but also as indicators of methodological and strategical choices made by the different interpreters. Nietzsche will be primarily used then as a prism carefully positioned under the interpreter's beam of light. The different configurations reveal as much about the source of the beam as about the prism itself.

The concepts: The self-consumption of Magnus, Stewart and Mileur

One of the most interesting problems in Nietzsche's philosophy is that of understanding his concepts. The concepts stand for his entire philosophy in that they too resist precise identification. And this perhaps not even so much because of their complexity, as the uncertainty about how to approach them. The concepts are rather fluid in that they can be understood at different levels and in different degrees of complexity. The various interpretations may somehow complement each other, yet their exact relation is often only established with difficulty. Thus the Dionysian, for instance, is sometimes explained (both by Nietzsche and his commentators) in terms of knowledge and experience. Knowledge of something like the ultimate truth; experience of, for instance, sexual intoxication. It is said to be identical to both rapture and play, both the abyss and the experience of the abyss. Though freely translated, Eugen Fink speaks of the Dionysian in terms of a "panic-stricken ecstatic awareness" of life (188).⁷ Dionysus may also stand for both Nietzsche and his *Übermensch*, and sometimes his whole philosophy in its practice is termed a Dionysian philosophy. John Sallis's words of introduction to his "Dionysus -In Excess of Metaphysics" (Krell and Wood 3-12) are indicative of this type of ambivalence and complexity that surrounds the Nietzschean Dionysus. He states:

I shall be concerned with a figure, one that is different from most, perhaps from almost all, others; a figure drawn, or rather withdrawn, in such a manner that it can have no direct image, even though, on the other hand, it can become, in its way, manifest. This figure could be considered the most perfectly metaphysical,

7 The full quote reads: "Das dionysische Gipfelglück des Menschen liegt in der panischen Erfahrung, die uns die Nichtigkeit alles individuierten Gestalten kundgibt, das Individuelle in das Geschehen des Individuationsspieles zurücknimmt" (*Nietzsches Philosophie*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1973).

the original *an sich*, so compactly an original, so thoroughly *an sich*, as to withhold itself from direct disclosure in an image (3).

In *Apollinisch und Dionysisch: Geschichte eines genialen Irrtums*, Martin Vogel refers in much the same fashion to the Dionysian as containing an element that resists understanding. Vogel emphasizes that since its introduction by Nietzsche the concept “immediately prove[s] to be unclear” (254), and he draws the comparison with a “badly forged coin”:

Das Wort ‘dionysisch’ ist einer schlecht geprägten Münze vergleichbar. Es gehört nicht zu den Worten, die sich erst nach längerem Gebrauch abgeschliffen haben und unscharf wurden. Es zählt auch nicht zu den Worten, denen in der Umgangssprache ein neuer Sinn unterlegt wurde. Erst durch Nietzsche kam das Wort ‘dionysisch’ in die Umgangssprache und erwies sich sogleich als einer jener unscharfen Begriffe, mit denen man sich nicht verständlich machen kann (254).

[The word ‘dionysian’ can be compared to a badly forged coin. It does not belong to those words that have lost their precision after a long usage. It does not figure either among those words that received a new meaning through everyday speech. Only through Nietzsche the word ‘dionysian’ became part of everyday speech, and proved immediately to be one of those vague concepts which remain largely unintelligible.]

The faceless Dionysian, though as a concept not necessarily inconsistent, defies a quick understanding on the interpreter’s part.

And this observation may very well apply to Nietzsche interpretation in general: though the interpretations may move into the same direction, the actual elaboration takes place on totally different levels. Thus Magnus, Stewart and Mileur in their *Nietzsche’s Case*, for instance, refer to what they call the “self-consuming” quality of the concepts of eternal recurrence and the ideal life (*Übermensch*), which they consider to be “two of Nietzsche’s most significant and dramatic self-consuming notions.” Not the Dionysian this time, but

eternal recurrence is central to his philosophical project. It is the generating thought of his *Zarathustra*, the thought which most divides commentators (25).

It is interesting to see that their description of the self-consuming quality echoes both Vogel’s and Sallis’ (rather paradoxical) explanation of the faceless figure of the Dionysian:

The recognition (..) that a given self-consuming concept requires as a condition of its intelligibility the very contrast it wishes to set aside or would have us set aside is not the recognition of a flaw, a lack, or an absence. It is rather the recognition that the concept entails its own negation, in a special sense, the recognition of which, in turn, is a negation of the negation (25).

The almost casually inserted specifications “in its way” (Sallis) and “in a special sense” (Magnus et al) indicate that one cannot understand either the Dionysian or eternal recurrence from a conventional perspective only. Understanding or appreciating these concepts seem to require a special, unconventional way in which to approach them. As if the con-

cepts themselves are riddles that can be solved on different levels of complexity, yet that render their deepest meaning only when approached from the highest.

Thus Nietzsche's concepts are not just difficult to understand because of this complexity, but generate for these critics an inherently paradoxical interpretive situation: they fall back upon themselves, or *consume* themselves when subjected to the analytic gaze of the interpreter (Magnus, Stewart and Mileur make a qualitative distinction between paradox and self-consumption: the former loses its attraction through exposure, the latter retains it). Eternal recurrence, for instance, suffers not just from the fact that it can be understood on different levels (a cosmological/metaphysical version in which everything will literally recur the way it was, and a normative one in which human beings are asked to act as if), but especially from that its intelligibility depends on the "condition it wishes to set aside" (26). The writers argue that

[a] closer look at the cosmological version (...) reveals rather quickly that the concept of eternal recurrence requires a notion of linear time to distinguish a specific configuration from its recurrence - the very mundane conception of time the doctrine allegedly contests and displaces (26).

The explanation may be as complex as the theory itself, yet at stake is the practical possibility of the concepts themselves: it is impossible to understand eternal recurrence of the same without preestablishing a concept the theory wishes to negate: a linear definition of time. *Recurrence* means that things will happen the way they have before, yet speaking in terms of a repetition implies linear progression (Magnus, Stewart and Mileur argue that it would be better to speak of *occurrences* of the exact same but this concept of one, single temporal circle defies any conception of time to which we are familiar). In its normative version (that is, acting as if everything were to recur), eternal recurrence is no less mind dazzling: "behaving as if recurrence were true entails behaving as if this moment not only will recur again but actually has recurred" (26). The interpreter seems to be trapped here: "One can only act as if recurrence were true if one believes that in a previous recurrence one behaved as if it were true, and so on ad infinitum" (27).

The paradoxical quality of eternal recurrence will be pushed even further: craving for nothing more than the unaltered repetition of everything that has happened in one's life before is nothing more than the acknowledgement of being utterly human, -the desire to be nothing else than what one already is. But this should be desired in the full knowledge that any other alternative could have been possible had the circumstances been different. Significantly enough, the authors ask themselves whether this desire can still be called human: it may very well be *superhuman* in that it is something one can imagine only. In a striking passage, the authors warn that the task of wanting nothing more fervently than the eternal

recurrence of the same may be humanly impossible, and its candid affirmation often all too naive⁸:

(...) imagine or recall for one moment the most entirely satisfactory sexual experience of your life, the moment in which you preferred your beloved to any possible alternative beloveds, a moment in which you also urgently preferred to be the lover you were just then. Imagine further that, upon reflection, you would welcome the eternal recurrence of that experience, just as it is, without addition, subtraction, or remainder. Let us say of this unconditionally cherished sexual ecstasy - real or imagined, it does not matter which - that you desired it for its own sake. Now also imagine, in contrast, the moment of your deepest despair, or the searing pain of your most unfulfilled longing, or the shattering blow of your most ruinous humiliation, or the self-deceptive acid of your most secret envy. Finally, if you can, imagine having just the same attitude toward the catalogued moments of your greatest anguish that you were asked to imagine of your most cherished sexual ecstasy or fantasy. Just *that* is what Nietzsche's eternal recurrence requires of each and every moment wanted for its own sake, it seems to us, and just *that* is what turns this requirement itself into a self-consuming human impossibility, a conceptual and existential oxymoron. It ought to give pause to those who think that Nietzsche's thought of eternal recurrence taught us to "celebrate" each moment: *carpe diem* (29).

We might establish already now that the difficulty of the Nietzschean concept resides in its illogicality. Eternal recurrence, for instance, lacks logical understanding when scrutinized by the analytical eye. As previously indicated, the difficulty of understanding and interpreting the concepts is intensified by the lack of a clear distinction between the concepts themselves: they all too often seem freely interchangeable. Thus eternal recurrence as knowledge is intricately related to Nietzsche's superhuman being, and this notion in its turn to will to power and the Dionysian. The notions do not just consume themselves but also their counterparts in that each of them somehow competes to represent Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole. The Dionysian, in this context, can be said to represent the Übermensch's unconditional affirmation of eternal recurrence in a world ruled by the will to power. Interpreters indicate different points of centrality and generally give priority to one of the concepts. Thus, as previously observed, while Sallis' defines the figure of Dionysus as "different from most, perhaps from almost all, others" (3), Magnus, Stewart and Mileur consider eternal recurrence as "central to his philosophic project (the thought which most divides commentators)"(25). The hyperbole must surely be the characteristic feature of both Nietzsche and his interpreters! The point one should also make, however, is that the distinction between the figure of Dionysus and the concept of eternal recurrence is not at all

8 The authors state: "what sort of creature could live its life under this description? For what sort of creature would this be its defining disposition? What sort of creature would desire the unaltered repetition of its exact life (...) would prefer each and every moment of its life just as it is, and would prefer this to any alternative possibility it could imagine?" (Magnus et al 28-9)

self-evident. Magnus and his colleagues in their introduction on Nietzsche's paradoxical style do not speak of the Dionysian in terms of a self-consuming concept, even though they could have done this in my view with a similar degree of conviction. In one of their Nietzsche quotes (an unpublished entry from the Förster-Nietzsche edition and which for this and others reasons is dismissed by the authors), the Dionysian figures within the range of Nietzsche's most important concepts:

This world (...) a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradiction back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my "beyond good and evil," without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself -do you want a name for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? - *This world is the will to power - and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power -and nothing besides! (41)

This quote here is significant for several reasons, yet for our argument especially in that in it Nietzsche lumps together the key-concepts of his philosophy.⁹ Will to power figures as the all-inclusive and central notion of the quote, yet it remains without any clear distinction from the Dionysian, eternal recurrence, or even the Übermensch. Ultimately, all concepts are equal in a reductive move towards will to power, which, again, as a concept remains largely unintelligible without the support of its counterpart notions.

Thus to conclude this section one can establish that the indeterminacy of the concepts takes place on many different levels: the concepts can be understood in different ways, and the argument here has been that in each of these occasions they defy our logical thinking. One of the implications of this might be that if a logical approach to these concepts is nonetheless forced, the interpretation will be a distorted one. To this logical inconsistency, I have added Nietzsche's confusing blend of his main figures, which leaves the interpreter with the free choice of attributing centrality to either one of them. There can be no agreement as to what the concepts precisely entail. The concepts are thus like mirrors in which one sees

9 Magnus, Stewart and Mileur mainly use this entry as an indication of Nietzsche's discussion of will to power as a cosmology or ontology, but they also point out - and this is their argument - that ultimately Nietzsche chose not to publish it. For their discussion it is important to understand that for them Nietzsche's references to a cosmology (in relation to his concept of will to power) in his published works are scarce. (See 40-6)

reflected, because of the inability to make them consistent, the interpreter's own methodological approach and stance.

And this must also apply then to Magnus, Stewart and Mileur themselves: the self-consuming characteristic of the Nietzschean concept gives way to a Nietzsche who ultimately wishes to convey nothing else than precisely these self-consuming truths. Style and thought fuse for these writers in one, relatively clear message (though the message is one of many voices) that "there is no point in asking about the way the world is in itself apart from what we make of it" (46). The plurality of competing messages cancels out the supremacy of a single one. Nietzsche for them, though perhaps not in so many words, can be "usefully situate[d]" as the "first full-blooded postmodern, nonrepresentational thinker" (37), who "seems (...) to have abandoned the will to power and eternal recurrence as ontological principles," and for whom the "*Übermensch* was perhaps not to be construed as yet another version of the human ideal" (37).

Style and Thought: Jaspers and Derrida: Transcendence and Joke

Nietzsche's style and thought are considered to be as problematic as his concepts. If for some critics his fragmented style has always been an impediment to his real thought, later critics have proposed that the way in which his texts are composed is intricately related to their content. For Magnus, Stewart and Mileur, Nietzsche's case in fact challenges this traditional distinction between the text and the thought it expresses:

The case of Nietzsche may be marshalled to complicate [the traditional philosophical notion that thought and its embodiment mark contrasts that go all the way down], by pointing out features of his style which are not easily detached from the thought they express - perhaps cannot be detached from it. (...) Perhaps it is better to understand 'philosophical' writing as subject to and emerging out of the experience and the exigencies of writing itself rather than to understand graphemes as the vehicle for the expression of antecedent philosophical 'ideas' (34).

For these critics, Nietzsche's writing demonstrates that thought and ideas do not precede texts, but that they are inscribed within the composition and form of the texts themselves. There is no other thought in Nietzsche than that expressed by the whole body of texts and subtexts.

In this respect, Karl Jaspers in his introduction to his work on Nietzsche draws the comparison between Nietzsche's philosophy and the ruins of a building, one that Nietzsche may

have attempted to erect, yet never fully succeeded in completing.¹⁰ For Jaspers, the one who reconstructs may establish the ‘spirit’ of the possible construction, but never the actual thing itself, precisely because the building as a “complete, single, and unambiguous whole” has never existed. There is only the “structure which fell to pieces,” and Nietzsche’s thought resides in this fallen structure -and not in the potential building. Nietzsche’s thought is nothing else than the tentatively structured pile of rocks of a construction he only attempted to erect:

The appearance which Nietzsche’s work presents can be expressed (...) as though a mountain wall had been dynamited; the rocks, already more or less shaped, convey the idea of a whole. But the building for the sake of which the dynamiting seems to have been done has not been erected. However, the fact that the work lies about like a heap of ruins does not appear to conceal its spirit from the one who happens to have found the key to the possibilities of construction. (...) The task seems to demand a search throughout the ruins for the building, even though the latter will not reveal itself to anybody as a complete, single, and unambiguous whole. The search for what is thus hidden can succeed only if the searcher proceeds as though he himself had to erect the structure which fell to pieces while Nietzsche was working on it. (...) We must (...) understand Nietzsche in his entirety through Nietzsche himself by giving serious attention to each word without allowing any word, considered separately, to limit our vision. (...) [W]e must experience both the systematic possibilities and their collapse (3,4).

For Jaspers, “self-contradiction is the fundamental ingredient in Nietzsche’s thought,” yet, much like Magnus, Stewart and Mileur, he argues that the contradictions are part of his philosophy and not the unhappy side-effect of an otherwise consistent theory. Contradictions for Jaspers reveal a deeper level of being, just the same as focusing on the consistency of the single parts that make up the contradiction remains inevitably superficial. Understanding in terms of establishing consistency by dismissing either one of the contradiction’s alternative parts is breaking down the unfamiliar into familiar components, and, thus, according to Jaspers, a “simplification of being” (10). Jaspers appeals to a different understanding of Nietzsche, focused not on the dismissal of contradictions, but on the acknowledgement that their presence is a necessary outcome of Nietzsche’s quest for truth. The contradictions in fact constitute an integral part of an altogether different truth. For Jaspers, self-contradiction in Nietzsche is a sign of honesty in that it makes the acquisition of the merely conventional and final truth - which after all is a misleading simplification - problematic. Nietzsche’s domain is the inexpressible and the formless, and the contradiction is just simply the means to arrive at these truths: “In the end, the contradictory elements and circles in the movements of Nietzsche’s thought are simply the means to touch indirectly

10 Karl Jaspers: *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1965 (Translated by Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz).

upon what lies beyond form, law, and the expressible. Nothing can be at this boundary, and yet everything must be there” (155).

Nietzsche’s philosophy, while pushing Jasper’s analogy of the exploded wall into rocks, may be compared to this formless, labyrinthine construction: though still somehow a building, it lacks the familiar contours, style and function of one. And yet, again, in its formlessness it is the most direct reflection of being one can obtain. Jaspers’ half-speculative note on contradiction and the unveiling of being reads as follows:

But it could also be that we have [in Nietzsche’s case] to do with contradictions that are necessary and inescapable. Perhaps the contradictories, presented as alternatives and appearing reasonable and familiar to the reader when considered singly, actually are misleading simplifications of being. If the understanding (...) per se is condemned, as it were, to remain on the surface of being, then being may have to become manifest through self-contradiction. This would certainly seem to be true for those who search passionately for the final truth but think only with the understanding and are limited to what is accessible to it. A contradiction arising in this way would be necessitated by the subject-matter; it would be a sign of truthfulness rather than of incompetent thinking (10).

A perfect example of this complexity through contradiction is Nietzsche’s “will to pure this-worldliness,” which as a strategy must culminate in exactly that which Nietzsche most vehemently wishes to reject: transcendence. Jaspers argues that the difficulty with Nietzsche’s metaphysics is that it “never really relates to determinate, specific beings within the world”:

the referent of his thought, insofar as it is not to be confused with any determinate object within the world, actually amounts to transcendence, although verbally it refers to absolutized immanence (431).

For Jaspers, though, “[man’s limited existence] cannot fulfil itself without transcendence”: man must constantly forget “the nature of being and of himself” (430). In this way, then, the contradiction in Nietzsche’s thought is in reality not an inconsistency: it merely demonstrates the human impossibility to focus on a world of pure immanence.

If the regnant directive in Nietzsche’s thought is the attainment in actuality of the highest and best that is possible for man without God, nevertheless, Nietzsche, in spite of himself and without being aware of it, shows decisively that the limited existence of man cannot fulfill itself without transcendence. The negation of transcendence brings about its own reappearance. It appears to thought in falsifying constructions of substitutes and to the authentic self in a still uncomprehended shattering confrontation of true transcendence in opposition to false. Nietzsche’s nobility and honesty, in a time of apparently universal godlessness, produce in him the restive form of godlessness that, so far as we are able to discover, issues in the most extreme falsity of thought as well as the most genuine confrontation with transcendence (430).

Self-deception goes back to the very basics of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Nietzsche’s inconsistency is that ultimately his nihilism remains a “form of transcending” (435). Jaspers

speaks of the “setting up of impossible tasks,” such as the superman and the latter’s ability to choose the “right time” of his own death. The “substance of the purely worldly impulse (...) becomes indefinite and disappears into a void” (432). The desire for immanence results in something that has lost its referent to the world: the attempt to “physically prove eternal recurrence,” “to observe the will to power and life empirically,” “to bring the superman into existence” all spring from this desire to arrive at the essence of our material world, a world which, again, has lost contact with anything determinate. The confusion and ambiguity of Nietzsche’s style and thought are an expression of the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, with which to separate the realm of pure immanence from that of transcendence. Jaspers states:

Confusion of the truth that can be investigated objectively with that which can only be elucidated, or confusion of the always relative knowledge of particular things in the world with transcending, results in ambiguity whenever transcending is expressed by means of the concepts of physical science or of psychology and sociology. (...) So (...) next to the passionate “*excelsior*” which his guiding types of higher men signify, we find neutralizing tendencies in the form of an insipid recognition of *homo natura*, and next to an appeal to overcome the psychological appears psychological leveling. The perverse confusion of fact-finding psychology with hortatory elucidation of *Existenz* derives in the end from a will to pure immanence that cannot but transcend constantly in spite of a determination to reject every kind of transcending (...) (433).

At the root of this inconsistency in Nietzsche, Jaspers indicates the very impossibility to do without transcendence. Nietzsche’s philosophy is based on a very human conflict: “[the] unbeliever’s will to believe,” “[the] thinker[’s] [inability] to live with his own [far-stretching] conclusions,” “the increasing agitation of a search for God that perhaps no longer understands itself.” For Jaspers, there is no peace in Nietzsche: “[h]is nihilistic transcending does not attain to peace within being” (435).¹¹ Nietzsche in this sense is the representative of all humanity:

A man is only himself when he lives in relation to transcendence. Transcendence is the manner of appearance in existence through which alone man can confront the nature of being and of himself. The necessity is inescapable: when one disowns it some surrogate is bound to appear (430).

And this is where Jaspers must inevitably reveal his own ideological stance. As Heidegger’s definition of Nietzsche as embodying the western metaphysical tradition in its most advanced stage, Jaspers defines Nietzsche’s philosophy in terms of a “metaphysical doc-

¹¹ Jaspers gives a compelling example of Nietzsche’s state of mind: “Nietzsche expresses his godlessness in a manner that conveys his unspeakable torment: Having to renounce God means that “you will never again pray (...) never again find peace in boundless trust. You deny yourself the opportunity to come to rest before a final wisdom, a final goodness, and a final power, and to throw off the harness of your thoughts (...) Man of renunciation, do you really choose to deny yourself all this? Who will give you the strength to do so? No one ever had *this* much strength!” (436).

trine” that investigates “being per se,” and subsequently explains it in terms of “eternal recurrence,” “will to power,” “life” and “the superman.” Yet, for Jaspers his philosophy is thus like a sublimated religion, in which “[t]he insight into [eternal] recurrence (...) has taken the place of belief in God,” in which “will to power (...) furnishes the sole propulsion of becoming,” “[life] is designated by the mythical symbol Dionysus” and “[t]he meaning of being is *the superman*” (430-1).¹² For Jaspers, Nietzsche’s philosophy is a quest for the true essence of being, a quest which generates a conception of reality, however, with which he cannot live. The empirical proof Nietzsche so desperately wishes to obtain to authenticate the different notions of his philosophy is indicative not just of Nietzsche’s, but of man’s imperative need for universals and certainties. True being for Jaspers then resides in that which Nietzsche cannot say but which he says nonetheless. The contradiction of his philosophy reveals that the human attempt at immanence must surrender to self-deception. For Jaspers, perceiving the world as pure immanence is impossible.

Jacques Derrida in *Eperons/Spurs* may be said to take the inconsistency in Nietzsche’s text to its logical extremes.¹³ If for Jaspers the essence of Nietzsche’s text resides in contradictions as true manifestations of being, Derrida explicitly poses the problem of the essence of the text itself. For Derrida, the style of Nietzsche’s text is ruled by what he calls the “hymen’s graphic,” which as a protective discursive layer in its undecidable position between the author’s giving and the interpreter’s taking of the text, cannot be properly possessed. Derrida thus defines Nietzsche’s text in terms of “that barely allegorical figure” (51) of woman, which incorporates this playful game of persistent dissimulation. Woman in Nietzsche plays with the metaphysics of truth (“A woman seduces from a distance” (49)). The essence and truth behind the Nietzschean text may be suggested, yet ultimately the text always risks to negate that either truth or essence, either of the text itself or in general, exist. The text must thus disappear into a void, not just because of its multiple contradictions, but rather because of its overall resistance to a deeper meaning. Derrida defines Nietzsche’s writing as inherently heterogeneous, implying that a deeper meaning exists only then when it is read *into* the text. Derrida writes:

For [Nietzsche], truth is like a woman. (...) There is no such thing as the essence of woman because woman averts, she is averted of herself. Out of the

12 The full quote reads: “His metaphysical doctrine tells us what that being per se, conceived as nothing but pure this-worldliness, actually is: Being is *the eternal recurrence of all things*. The insight into this recurrence, with its consequences for our awareness of being, our conduct, and our experiences, has taken the place of belief in God. Being is *will to power*; all that occurs is nothing but a mode of the will to power which in its endless appearances furnishes the sole propulsion of becoming. Being is *life*; it is designated by the mythical symbol, Dionysus. The meaning of being is *the superman*: “The beauty of the superman came to me like shade: what do I now care about -the gods!” (431).

13 Quotes are taken from the French-English version published 1979 (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press).

depths, endless and unfathomable, she engulfs and distorts all vestige of essentiality, of identity, of property. And the philosophical discourse, blinded, founders on these shoals and is hurled down these depthless depths to its ruin. There is no such thing as the truth of woman, but it is because of that abyssal divergence of the truth, because that untruth is “truth” (51) (...) [The hymen’s] graphic, which describes a margin where the control over meaning or code is without recourse, poses the limit to the relevance of the hermeneutic or systematic question (99).

For Derrida, then, not just the concepts, but the text as a whole consumes itself. If for Magnus, Stewart and Mileur (much like Jaspers) the truth of Nietzsche’s text resides in the very fact that his concepts remain at bottom inconceivable (the truth Nietzsche thus means to convey is that there is no use in asking what either the world or his concepts ultimately represent), Derrida moves even beyond this reductive interpretation by arguing that Nietzsche’s text may not say anything at all -in fact, not even that it does not say anything. While focusing on one of the more cryptic “sample[s]” (*prélèvement*) taken from Nietzsche’s unpublished manuscripts, Derrida goes on to say that:

the hypothesis that the totality of Nietzsche’s text, in some monstrous way, might well be of the type [of this cryptic sample with no decidable meaning] cannot be denied (133).¹⁴

For Derrida, Nietzsche’s writing is inherently undecidable in that the text will always offer the possibility to stand in and by itself. It leaves the interpreter without any reassurance that the context will guide one in decisively establishing the text’s meaning. Derrida indicates the haunting possibility of a text without depth: “detached (...) not only from the milieu that produced it, but also from any intention or meaning on Nietzsche’s part”:

[w]hat if Nietzsche himself meant to say nothing, or at least not much of anything, or anything whatever? Then again, what if Nietzsche was only pretending to say something? (127).

The truth about Nietzsche is clear: “(...) there is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche’s text” (103). The secret of Nietzsche’s writing “is (...) the possibility that indeed it might have no secret, that it might only be pretending to be simulating some hidden truth within its folds” (133). As said, Derrida considers Nietzsche’s texts as fractured: “there is no ‘totality to Nietzsche’s text,’ not even a fragmentary or aphoristic one” (135). It should be noted that Derrida abstains from using the word “fragment” to indicate the example that he holds as being representative for the whole of Nietzsche’s writing. He states: “[t]he concept of fragment (...), since its fracturedness is itself an appeal to

14 Derrida focuses on the following fragment: “I have forgotten my umbrella.” Derrida’s quote reads: “For it is always possible that the “I have forgotten my umbrella,” detached as it is, not only from the milieu that produced it, but also from any intention or meaning on Nietzsche’s part, should remain so, whole and intact, once and for all, without any other context. The meaning and the signature that appropriates it remain in principle inaccessible... That inaccessibility though is not necessarily one of some hidden secret. It might just as easily be an inconsistency, or of no significance at all” (125).

some totalizing complement, is no longer sufficient“ (125). Instead, Derrida refers to words such as “prélèvement,” “non-fragment” and “simulacre” to describe the isolated excerpt, and, since the excerpt represents the text itself, the text as a whole. “Prélèvement” refers to a sample (much like a blood sample), which is a small amount taken from a substance, the nature of which is still to be determined. Yet, as observed, the sample, as a non-fragment and simulacrum, resists identification.

Derrida holds that if the text and Nietzsche escape metaphysics, this happens more by default than through intent: “[the] inability to assimilate (...) the aphorisms and the rest - perhaps it must simply be admitted that Nietzsche himself did not see his way too clearly there.” The text surpasses the author: “Nietzsche might well be a little lost in the web of his text, lost much as a spider who finds he is unequal to the web he has spun” (101).

No less with Derrida, however, Nietzsche has a place in the interpreter’s attempt to make his own partisan point: Derrida’s text itself escapes the traditional interpretive approach of hermeneutics in that it lays no claims to either the meaning of Nietzsche or of itself. Just as Nietzsche’s (and in fact any text), Derrida’s own disappears into a void, a chaos of meanings in which Nietzsche’s words constantly fuse with those of Derrida (*Spurs* is sometimes confusing as far as the identity of the speaker is concerned). What for Derrida remains valid for both Nietzsche and himself, is the disquieting possibility of text as a parodic and silly joke, followed (and to be followed) by nothing but “[this] enormous clap of laughter”:

And still the text (*Spurs*) will remain, if it is really cryptic and parodying (and I tell you that it is so through and through. I might as well tell you since it won’t be of any help to you. Even my admission can very well be a lie because there is dissimulation only if one tells the truth, only if one tells that one is telling the truth), still the text will remain indefinitely open, cryptic and parodying (137).

Less disquieting, in this context, is a type of Nietzsche interpretation which leaves Nietzsche still in control of what he says (it is yet another approach to the inconsistency of Nietzsche’s style, but in its attempt to leave the creative authority in Nietzsche’s own hands, different from Jaspers and Derrida). Babette Babich in her article on “Post-Nietzschean Postmodernism” (Koelb 250-66), for instance, speaks of Nietzsche’s inconsistency in terms of a “precociously postmodern compositional technique” in that the text expresses a “smooth harmony of disparate or dissonant themes” (252). She speaks of an ironic quality in Nietzsche’s writing which both wants to cover and uncover, -both to ‘say’ and ‘unsay’: “The ironic trope is nothing less than what Nietzsche named the artistic truth of illusion in its subsistent unsaying of what it says.” Babich relates what she calls at other times Nietzsche’s ‘concinnity’ to Charles Jencks ‘double coding’ or Umberto Eco’s ‘post-modern attitude’ (as elaborated in his “Post-script to the Name of the Rose”): Nietzsche’s final embrace of that which he has previously dissected and rejected finds its resonance in

Eco's ironic recovery of the stereotype. Babich calls it the "coded coding" or the "having it both ways":

Both Nietzschean concinnity and what Jencks has called double coding name the same thing. Both testify to the *doomed* reflective attempt to both do/say something and not to do/say that thing. This coded coding, this having it both ways or, better, this knowing better but going along anyway, embodies the only style of life-election remaining for the postmodern times Eco names the "age of lost innocence." The ironic tactic of affirming/subverting one's circumstantial sophistication by exposing its inadequacy while yet trading on its inevitable necessity operates in both Nietzsche's style and what Lyotard, Eco, Jameson, Jencks, and others name the (commercially Las Vegas) postmodern (Koelb 257).

Babich's reference to Eco and Jencks clearly shows that for her this inconsistency is intended, in fact, that it is part of a new, postmodern or ironic type of philosophy based on the premise of acknowledging the impossibility of that which is stated nonetheless. Nietzsche's message is thus transformed (reduced or elevated depends on the stand one takes) into this ironic wink which expresses the possibility of truth only while stating its impossibility at the same time. Nietzsche ultimately creates his own grand narrative, but this can only take place after him having previously subverted the validity of metanarratives in general. Nietzsche does not believe in the illusion of truth, but believes in truth which is illusory. Thus, Nietzsche's technique resounds in Eco's observation that the "past is to be revisited with irony, not with innocence" (253). Nietzsche's inconsistency may then be paradoxical for Babich, it is not necessarily contradictory. The wink is that which she calls the 'concinnity' of his style in that it "describes syn-phony, that is, the smooth harmony of disparate or dissonant themes," an ultimately unified message resulting from a philosophy that exposes its own limitations. For Babich, everything, ultimately, must be message, even the message that disclaims its own status as a message.

And with Babich's resolving paradox, we may attempt a short synthesis of the different approaches to Nietzsche's style: as already observed, if Jaspers and Derrida consider Nietzsche's style and composition as the necessary outcome of something (to the order of a text, web, system, or philosophy) over which he has little control, Babich (yet also interpreters such as Magnus, Stewart and Mileur) defines inconsistency as orchestrated and only apparent. The interesting paradox here is that although for Babich, Magnus, Stewart and Mileur Nietzsche constitutes the first representative of the postmodern tradition ("the Nietzsche who speaks with many voices" (Magnus 46)), they still hold on to a Nietzsche who conveys a unified message, even if the message is one of plurality. For Magnus, Stewart and Mileur Nietzsche stands at the head of "that philosophical genealogy which says

that there is no ultimate contrast to mark genealogy off from ontology, no point in asking about the way the world is in itself apart from what we make of it” (46).¹⁵

Jaspers speaks more explicitly of the essence in Nietzsche, though the essence for Jaspers resides in that which Nietzsche knows but does not realize, in what he may think but cannot say. Derrida’s interpretation distinguishes itself precisely in its attempt to preclude any essence whatsoever in Nietzsche’s texts (there may exist a plurality of essence and truth in Nietzsche, yet ultimately none can be said to have prevalence over the other). The presence of the ‘hymen’s graphic’ implies that neither Nietzsche (as woman), nor the text or the interpreter have the possibility to decisively establish meaning.

The structure and composition: split versus lump

It is clear that nothing more has fuelled the controversy over Nietzsche’s writing than the complexity of its structure and composition. To define his writing in terms of a ‘structure’ or ‘composition’ might already be saying too much, since the question among his interpreters is often precisely whether Nietzsche did in fact structure or compose his texts in the traditional sense. With Nietzsche, the questions of interpretation have a rigorous tendency to fall back upon themselves in that they expose the assumptions underlying the very question itself. Some things, however, stand undisputed. It has been observed by many interpreters many times before: his work consists of a large number of texts which are very different in nature. The corpus is divided into a published and an unpublished section, and in its totality it resists categorization according to genre and style. Yet, what is less known is that Nietzsche himself provides us with a perfectly clear (and even physiological) explanation of this heterogeneous quality of his work: he states himself that his philosophy is nothing more (or nothing less) than the result of alternating drives inevitably driven to acquire a temporary supremacy. Philosophy for Nietzsche is a far cry from the search for objective truth or unity: the philosopher’s quest, as merely an expression of the temporarily prevalent drive within the philosopher him- or herself, thus equals autobiography more than anything else:

es giebt auch bei den großen Philosophen diese Unschuld: sie sind sich nicht bewußt, *daß sie von sich reden* -sie meinen, es handle sich ‘um die Wahrheit’ - aber es handelt sich im Grunde um sie. Oder vielmehr: der in ihnen gewaltigste

15 Perhaps that this is making of Nietzsche a descendant of Voltaire: his philosophy defined in terms of this rather extreme pragmatism must inspire one to hold on to the ‘cultivating of one’s garden’ as the only solution to life that remains after all is said and done. And defining Nietzsche in terms of someone who holds these truths (even if it is the truth of non-truth) is implying that the essence of his philosophy must reside in this piece of practical wisdom.

Trieb bringt sie an's Licht, mit der größten Schamlosigkeit und Unschuld eines Grundtriebes - *er* will Herr sein und womöglich der Zweck aller Dinge, alles Geschehens! Der Philosoph ist nur eine Art Gelegenheit und Ermöglichung dafür, daß der *Trieb einmal zum Reden kommt*.¹⁶

About the reasons behind the many “detours” of his own philosophy, Nietzsche states that it too is nothing more than the translation into words of a strong, prevailing drive:

Auf Umwegen. -Wohin will diese ganze Philosophie mit allen ihren Umwegen? Tut sie mehr, als einen steten und starken Trieb gleichsam in Vernunft zu übersetzen, einen Trieb nach milder Sonne, heller und bewegter Luft, südlichen Pflanzen, Meeres-Atem, flüchtiger Fleisch-, Eier- und Früchtenahrung, heißem Wasser zum Getränke, tagelangen stillen Wanderungen, wenigem Sprechen, seltenem und vorsichtigem Lesen, einsamen Wohnen, reinlichen, schlichten und fast soldatischen Gewohnheiten, kurz, nach allen Dingen, die gerade mir am besten schmecken, gerade mir am zuträglichsten sind? Eine Philosophie, welche im Grunde der Instinkt für eine persönliche Diät ist? Ein Instinkt, welcher nach meiner Luft, meiner Höhe, meiner Witterung, meiner Art Gesundheit durch den Umweg meines Kopfes sucht?¹⁷

Though one understands (and to some extent can even agree with) Nietzsche's claim of philosophy as the ambiguous result of alternating drives driven to gain a temporary supremacy in the philosopher him- or herself, it should be acknowledged that Nietzsche's writing is definitely more cryptical than that of the average philosopher. One of the more intricate difficulties in Nietzsche criticism, for instance, is that of his split corpus. The controversy among many of his interpreters has been in the past, and still is today over the question of the real Nietzsche and the body of texts in which this Nietzsche is to be found. If for some his published works should have the final say, others indicate that what he left behind contains his real preoccupations and intentions. Some maintain that these unpublished notes add nothing new to what is already said in the published works, while others argue that only these notes reflect the true development of his thought.

An additional problem is the fraud compilation of notes on the will to power, which, as a fully coherent philosophy, was issued at the turn of the century under Nietzsche's name. The problem here according to some is that because of the fact that the falsification had been early identified, a number of critics dismissed Nietzsche's literary legacy as consisting of nothing else than speculative notes and hypotheses. Others, in their turn, have argued against this while insisting on the philosophical importance of these notes. At stake in this debate is often whether Nietzsche's concept of will to power stands at the centre of his philosophy. And if it does, whether he planned on writing a comprehensive and fully developed theory and book on the will to power. At stake is also then the question of Nietzsche as a systematic philosopher, since acknowledging the importance of Nietzsche's *Nachlaß*

16 *KSA* 10, 7[62], 262/3

17 *Morgenröte*, 553.

has often implied the equal acknowledging of the will to power as central to his philosophy (and this, in its turn, the perception of Nietzsche as a systematic and metaphysical thinker). As said, the controversy is well known, even though the (possible) methodological implications of each stance much less. In the following, I will briefly indicate two different approaches to the question of Nietzsche's unpublished material. I will attempt to also indicate for each of these cases the more general implications that their choices have for the status and value of Nietzsche.

Dohmen, as an example of what Magnus, Stewart and Mileur in their study somewhat pejoratively call 'lumpers,' considers Nietzsche's posthumous work of vital importance to the understanding of the way in which Nietzsche develops and arrives at his views on mankind and his notion of will to power. As said, Dohmen speaks of Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of a concealed anthropological theory, thus indicating that a consistently developed theory on the will to power and human nature operates behind the surface of a much more fragmented, and generally much less informing, published text. Dohmen argues that the difference between the published and unpublished material is that the latter develops more fully what the former often leaves unsaid. In this way, then, both bodies of texts deal with the same issues and are not necessarily contradictory. The difference generally lies in the way in which the material is presented. Dohmen states:

Wanneer ik hier spreek over Nietzsches verborgen antropologie, doel ik op twee zaken: ten eerste op het feit dat Nietzsche belangrijke aspecten van zijn positieve visie op de mens in het gepubliceerde werk zo terloops en schijnbaar achteloos, op onverwachte plaatsen (bijvoorbeeld niet aan het begin van een boek of zelfs van een hoofdstuk) poneert, dat de lezer wel erg attent moet zijn om er niet aan voorbij te gaan. Zakelijk gezien belangrijke opmerkingen over wil, drift, bewustzijn, handeling, wil tot macht etc. worden bij Nietzsche zelden of nooit goed aangekondigd, vervolgens breedvoerig aan de orde gesteld en ten slotte, wat misschien het belangrijkste is, na poning ook ruimschoots toegelicht. Daarmee kom ik op het tweede punt, het feit dat Nietzsche in zijn nagelaten werk veel uitvoeriger zijn visie op de mens uiteenzet en commentarieert en in die zin zijn ideeën over de mens dus ook letterlijk heeft achtergehouden. Zijn visie op de mens is verborgen in die zin dat ze in het gepubliceerde werk alleen voor de ervaren lezer herkenbaar is, en dat zelfs aan hem de feitelijke uitwerking ervan in het gepubliceerde werk letterlijk onthouden wordt! (19)

[Nietzsche [postulates] important aspects of his more constructive outlook on human beings in his published works at unexpected places. And he does this in such a casual and seemingly thoughtless way (for example, not at the beginning of a book or even a chapter), that the reader has to be really very attentive in order to not just skip over them. Important observations as regards to content on issues such as the human will, the drives, consciousness, the human act, will to power, etc., almost consistently remain without a proper introduction or explanation. (...) In his posthumous writings, Nietzsche develops and comments much more fully on his views of mankind, and in this sense, then, [he can be said to have] literally withheld his ideas on humanity. His outlook on humanity

is concealed in the sense that only the experienced reader is able to recognize it in his published works, and in that the actual elaboration of this outlook in these published works is withheld even to this reader!]

It should be emphasized here perhaps that Dohmen does not necessarily express a preference for Nietzsche's literary estate. Both bodies of texts are obviously important. What he does say, however, once again, is that Nietzsche's posthumous writings are much more explicit than the main texts, that they testify to a consistent development of the key concept in his philosophy (which is that of the "will to power"), and that, together with the published works, they contain a fully elaborated theory of the human drives and the forces that animate the universe in general. Dohmen, once again, speaks of a "concealed" theory, precisely because the presentation of this theory in Nietzsche is never systematic. Interesting with Dohmen is that he attempts to avoid the methodological implications of his own interpretation: attributing centrality to the concept of the will to power (Dohmen consistently speaks of a plurality of 'wills'¹⁸) might situate him in the Heideggerian league of Nietzsche critics, something Dohmen explicitly wishes to avoid.¹⁹ For Dohmen, the theory Nietzsche elaborates, in whichever form and at whichever place, is not a metaphysical theory in that it attempts to arrive at the essence of an everlasting reality. The theory (*leer*²⁰) may be systematic, yet the system itself is not metaphysical. Will to power as a non-reducible entity does not exist, according to Dohmen's Nietzsche. There is merely a plurality of wills, which in themselves do not exist apart from each other. The relationships between the different wills may be established and re-established without end, yet the nature of the relationships themselves (and thus the identity of the different wills) is something that will always change. Dohmen states:

Nietzsches 'ontologie' betreft een interpretatie van de veranderende werkelijkheid, op grond waarvan de wereld als een eeuwige, dynamische chaos wordt voorgesteld, die resulteert uit onderling per se samenhangende, tot tijdelijke, complexe eenheden verenigde veelheden van machtswillen (344).

[Nietzsche's 'ontology' is an interpretation of an ever-changing reality, on the basis of which the world is defined in terms of an eternal and dynamic chaos re-

18 Dohmen, among other passages, refers to *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (entry: *Von der Selbst-Überwindung*) where Nietzsche speaks of will in the plural. Dohmen maintains the plural designation throughout the entire study to counteract an 'essentialist' interpretation of the notion of will to power.

19 It should be noted, however, that Dohmen's point of departure is Heideggerian (though Dohmen acknowledges this): "Deze studie over Nietzsches wijsgerige antropologie vertrekt van twee nauw samenhangende uitgangspunten: van de erkenning van de relevantie van het begrip 'wil tot macht'; en van het belang van een bepaalde onderzoekstraditie op dit punt. Nietzsche hoort tot de echte denkers en die hebben, aldus Heidegger in een pregnante formulering, slechts een *enkele* gedachte: 'Wie Nietzsche *is* en vooral: wie hij *zal zijn*, weten wij zodra wij in staat zijn om die gedachte te denken die hij in het samenstel van woorden "de wil tot macht" heeft uitgedrukt' (quote from Heidegger's *Nietzsche I*, 473) (16)."

20 Dohmen uses the Dutch 'leer' (in German: 'die Lehre'), which is a 'teaching,' 'doctrine,' 'system,' etc. He also uses the words 'procesleer' and 'ontologie,' though the latter always in quotation marks (17).

sulting from pluralities of wills to power which are inevitably inter-connected and [only] temporarily united into complex wills unities]

Dohmen, though to a large degree focusing on what Nietzsche did not publish, argues that Nietzsche's *Nachlaß* is not necessarily motivated by a stronger desire for metaphysics and essence. As said, Dohmen defines Nietzsche's 'ontology' (a designation he consistently writes between quotation marks) in terms of a plurality of wills to power, while indicating at the same time that Nietzsche himself speaks of his theory in terms of image and interpretation only. Dohmen's interpretation itself, then, is a middle road (*een tussenweg*) between the what he calls 'sceptical' Nietzsche readings, in which, on the one hand, Nietzsche is presented as opposed to any constructive theory of mankind, and, on the other, the more 'metaphysical' readings of Nietzsche, which describe his theory of will to power in terms of a desire to arrive at the essence of our reality.

It is interesting at this point to contrast Dohmen's methodological stance to that of Magnus, Stewart and Mileur, especially from the perspective of their differing attitude towards the status of Nietzsche's literary legacy. Whereas Dohmen speaks of the more explicit quality of the *Nachlaß* as opposed to a more esoteric main body of work, Magnus, Stewart and Mileur emphasize the legacy's problematic nature: "[s]ubstituting *Nachlaß* for published materials confuses an explanation with that which requires one" (43). In other words: the *Nachlaß* poses more problems than it solves.²¹ An additional point of interest here is that Magnus and his colleagues establish a methodological difference in their approach to the published and the unpublished works. As interpreters of Nietzsche that 'split' his writing into two sharply distinctive sections (as opposed to 'lumpers,' who in their view "regard the use of Nietzsche's *Nachlaß* as unproblematic," and thus consider the unpublished work equal or even superior to the main body (35)), Magnus, Stewart and Mileur indicate that in the *Nachlaß* Nietzsche is much more concerned with cosmological or ontological certainty. It is for this reason that they focus on Nietzsche's published work, in which there "is very little support (...) when it comes to will to power as a first-order conception" (41). They state:

Most commentators who treasure the *Nachlaß*, most lumpers, do so because it is there that the representational, foundationalist Nietzsche is to be found, the Nietzsche who does *not* conflate art and philosophy, the Nietzsche who worries about the way the world's intelligible character is itself to be characterized, the

21 The authors compare a section from the unpublished material to its recurrence in the published works (in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), and indicate that nowhere the instances from the unpublished work indicate how to decisively interpret its equivalent in the published work. The full quote reads: "What is unclear, however, is how or why any of these *Nachlaß* fragments may be said to shed *any* light on the published *Zarathustra* remark. And our sense is that the remainder of the *Nachlaß* bears much the same relationship to the published works, a thesis we cannot hope to demonstrate here, of course. The methodological point suggested should be clear, however: Substituting *Nachlaß* for published materials confuses an explanation with that which requires one" (43).

Nietzsche who worries about facts and perspectives, truth and reference, the Nietzsche who worries about which virtues we should value and what we ought to strive for. And it is there that Nietzsche writes relatively straightforward declarative sentences, rather than endless hypotheticals and subjunctive conditionals (45-6).

And the lumpers stand opposed to the splitters:

Splitters (...) need not be seduced by this picture. They may instead honor Nietzsche by placing his published work at the head of that philosophical genealogy which says that there is no ultimate contrast to mark genealogy off from ontology, no point in asking about the way the world is in itself apart from what we make of it. That is the Nietzsche who speaks with many voices in his many published texts, not with a single voice governing every concern. This “post-modern” Nietzsche does not merely reject the view that “philosophy” is a natural kind term; rather, he is the thinker who also gave us a genealogical account of how we came to believe that “philosophy” must name a natural kind, that it must have a transcendental standpoint and a metahistorical agenda. (He is, in short, the philosopher who showed in his own published writings what philosophy is, has been and perhaps can only be -its own time written in thought and thought by writing) (46).

And thus the methodology reveals their conception of the status and value of Nietzsche: they state: “[w]e shall suggest that a splitter’s Nietzsche (...) may usefully situate him as the first full-blooded postmodern, nonrepresentational thinker, the fountainhead of a tradition which flows from him to Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Rorty and much recent literary history” (37).

In this particular section, I have focused on only one difficulty inherent in the structure of Nietzsche’s work: that of his split corpus. There are more, obviously, such as the difficulty of categorizing Nietzsche’s work according to existing genre definitions, or that of the very specific composition of the individual texts themselves. Yet, as previously indicated, the continuing indeterminacy about the very status of Nietzsche’s oeuvre as a whole (some texts are considered to be more Nietzschean than others) seems to me quite unique. There is no general agreement about the real Nietzsche and on the question in which particular corpus of texts he is to be found. Speaking of the ‘mature’ Nietzsche in this sense (as some commentators do) is a rather questionable thing in Nietzsche’s case, since, if anything, his philosophy compels us to interrogate the very (metaphysical) assumptions underlying such an assertion (as if true thought resides in maturity!). The Nietzsche interpreter seems to be condemned to make a choice (even if he or she should wish to make none), a choice in which the slightest move if not reveals than at least compels one to be acutely aware of its methodological implications.

Conclusion

In this analysis I have focused on inconsistency and the question of interpretation. One may conclude that inconsistency is ubiquitous in Nietzsche's oeuvre, yet one has to conclude that it also, somehow, serves a purpose. It is hardly appropriate to dismiss Nietzsche's writing on the basis of its inconsistency (although some critics do). At least one should investigate whether inconsistency is not part of the message. Nietzsche's message may thus be the end of interpretation in the traditional sense (Magnus, Stewart and Mileur), or the shimmering awareness that interpretation is steeped in metaphysics (Jaspers), or perhaps the end of interpretation *tout court* (Derrida). The self-consuming concept, elaborated by Magnus, Stewart and Mileur²², represents the unintelligible quality of Nietzsche's main concepts, yet also, because of this quality, a higher reality in which the relevance of the concepts themselves has disappeared: Nietzsche is not looking for the actual realization of his conceptual ideas. Inconsistency for Jaspers may be inevitable: the premise on which his philosophy is predicated is not so much the resolving paradox of the ironic wink (Babich) as the full relapse into silence. A fair representation of Jaspers' Nietzsche would be to argue that the rhetorical movement or structure of Nietzsche's philosophy is cyclic in that it seems to return to its own starting point, square one: the act of transcendence and the desire to do without. For Derrida, then, finally, inconsistency is the text (any text, but especially Nietzsche's), which means that the text anticipates the claim of inconsistency and exposes it (beyond Nietzsche's authority itself) as a claim based on the false metaphysical assumption of stability and consistency (as if consistency (the opposite of inconsistency) should exist in its pure form).

The difficulty with Nietzsche's philosophy is also to a large extent the question of resolution. If the philosophy itself does not resolve, at least this conclusion of a suspension of resolution could still be defined in terms of a resolution. It seems an ontological impossibility to deny truth in Nietzsche, since even the very statement implies a truth, even if the truth is one of untruth. Derrida's attempt to preclude meaning (to empty the text of all unified meaning) seems very difficult to do (even Derrida's presentation of his own text as a meaningless joke (or the possibility thereof) has not precluded a rather unified interpretation of his work on Nietzsche). To seek resolution is perhaps as basically human as the air we breathe.

Perhaps the most basic inconsistency in Nietzsche (should one say of the 'early' or 'other' Nietzsche?) is that the forgetting of the truth (even if this is the truth of untruth) which has been so eagerly obtained, cannot be justified in and by itself, but in fact only by something

22 Jaspers also speaks of the self-consuming quality of Nietzsche's concepts.

else, that is, an artificial set of values (the quest for truth as justified on the basis of ‘life’ is still imposing a ‘morality’ of life, and the question why one should do so remains unanswered). Nietzsche remains incapable of justifying the acquisition of a truth he subsequently wants to forget. From a logical perspective (the logic that a circular movement, *per se*, is no progress), it is impossible to uphold the necessity that illusion be destroyed just for the sake of having it restored or replaced afterwards. Nietzsche’s answer or resolution (as well as that of many of his critics) is of course that one has to act as if truth exists, while - and this is the crux of the matter- being fully aware that the act is artifice or illusion. In this sense, then, the circular movement is not a full circle: the illusion has become at the same time truth, or, to be more precise, the truth of untruth. One deludes oneself into believing truth, yet, while knowing at the same time that this truth remains also somehow delusion.²³ The difficulty here is that there is no conclusive answer in Nietzsche on how this ambivalent state of concurrent belief and disbelief should be acquired on a very practical basis. No soul has yet fully dared to tread in that intricate space beyond metaphysical certainty, and no soul really knows how this should be done. The difficulty is also that Nietzsche may have given indications (for instance by cultivating a sense of play), yet the indications often remain tentative and at least apparently inconsistent. The definition of his most important concepts also evolve over time, yet the evolution is never treated as such, or explicitly commented upon. The Dionysian, for instance, as indicative of this type of complexity, resists a clear-cut interpretation, also just simply because its content, without any obvious reason or commentary, changes over time.

The final interpretive difficulty I will indicate is related to this underlying tension in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Interpreting Nietzsche’s writing is not just problematic because of its inconsistency in content, style and structure, but also just simply because it is sometimes hard to take what he says at face value. Nietzsche’s writing, sometimes for obvious reasons, often provokes an emotional response. The Nietzschean text is struggled with instead

23 Babich, for instance, speaks of Nietzsche’s style as a fusion of that which is stated and negated at the same time. The resolution which is proposed here, however, is not without difficulty: the acts of forgetting and knowing may be said to occur only on a linear and mutually exclusive level on which the one is preferred after, and ultimately over the other. Either the past is revisited (even with irony), or it is not, but to do both seems (ontologically) impossible. From a Nietzschean perspective, it is appropriate to ask how to forget and know at the same time (Nietzschean affirmation is this constant interplay between knowing and concealing, truth and self-deception). One may also have to question the concept of truth itself, and define it as something one does not really know but perhaps tells oneself *that* one knows. Nietzsche himself speaks of truth as something which can never be experienced in itself, since all understanding presupposes a certain appropriation. Illusion, in this sense, does not need to be established because it always already *is*. Illusion may be the condition of possibility for life itself. A sense of the true (even though ‘the’ real truth as a metaphysical certainty for Nietzsche may not exist), in whichever way one defines this (even as its own absence), is perhaps unobtainable or inconceivable. One should turn the question of whether a sense of absurdity can truly be experienced into a problematics.

of just being read. There is often a need to either aggressively dismiss, passionately praise or domesticate his writing. A striking example of this type of impatience with Nietzschean paradox is Robert Solomon, a critic who bluntly states in one of his articles: “how can one reject philosophical dogmatism and then hold some more than merely subjective opinion about how it is that one (not just I) ought to live?”²⁴ Solomon adds:

Nietzsche often wrote without paying much attention to what he had said a decade, a book, or even a page earlier. Nietzsche clearly did not always mean to be taken literally, given his sense of irony and hyperbole, not to mention the Nietzschean/Straussian/postmodernist strategies of “reading between the lines” and in the margins (where other readers usually perceive nothing but empty page). There are different styles, there is refracting rhetoric, there are alternative perspectives, contrasting interpretative frameworks, indeed several different Nietzsches, depending on the book, the period, and the mood (270).

Solomon’s criticism itself is not the issue here: it is obvious that the difficulty of interpreting Nietzsche for Solomon has a lot to do with the failures of an inconsistent philosopher.²⁵ Yet, what is interesting here is the aggressive nature of the attack itself and the desire to outdo Nietzsche on his own terms. Solomon, too, speaks of a paradox in Nietzsche, though for him the paradox is indicative of failure. About the feeling of Ressentiment, Solomon states:

Insofar as language and insight, ruthless criticism, and genealogy are skills worth praising - Nietzsche is willing to build an entire self from them - then resentment would seem to be one of the most accomplished emotions as well, more articulate than even the most righteous anger, more clever than the most covetous envy, more critical than the indifferent spirit of reason would ever care to be (279).

What is interesting here, once again, is not so much the criticism itself, as that it is indicative of a general tendency among Nietzsche interpreters: the desire to outdo Nietzsche on his own terms. As Nietzsche, Solomon too expresses his admiration for passion and

24 Robert C. Solomon: “Nietzsche, Postmodernism, and Resentment.” In: Koelb: 267-293. Solomon states about Nietzsche: “Unlike the other great thinkers of Germany who preceded him, Nietzsche had no system, condemned systematization (“a lack of integrity”), and could not reach any grand synthesis (though he tried periodically) concerning the ultimate nature of significance of his own philosophy. His philosophy remained in fragments, his notes in fragments, his ideas and opinions in fragments, his life in fragments. If there is a postmodern philosophy, Nietzsche is clearly its exemplar, if not its prophet or father, but rather as a kind of failing rather than by intent” (276).

25 Solomon criticizes postmodern attempts to herald Nietzsche as the first postmodernist. Nietzsche may hide behind the “relativistic, historical, and psychological terminology,” but he is a modernist and seeker after truth at heart nonetheless (273). Solomon, too, defines Nietzsche as unable to fully comprehend the complexity of his own message. Nietzsche indicates more than he explains, touches more than he truly reveals. Solomon speaks of Nietzsche’s concept of resentment in terms of an ‘existentialist paradox’ (an attempt to push Nietzsche’s theory and arguments to their logical extreme). Solomon states that while “[r]esentment is treated by Nietzsche and by most of his commentators as a despicable emotion that poisons anyone it enters,” it is at the same time “among the most creative, perhaps even more so than inspirational love” (279).

strength, yet in contrast to Nietzsche it is the ‘furious’ passion and strength of resentment.²⁶ Nietzsche’s theory is pushed to its logical extremes, and thus, in some sense, made to dissolve into air. In Solomon’s case: that which is rejected has to be acknowledged too, because of the very rigour of the criterion itself. Nietzsche’s move beyond morality cannot safeguard his own philosophy.

One of the more interesting things with Nietzsche is that apparently his philosophy cannot just stand by itself (if ever that is possible): it has to be appropriated, either as something which does not make sense (and is invalidated for this reason), or as something which does, but then the interpreter is somehow required to make a selection. Nietzsche has a tendency to put forward the more indigestible truths that must either be ignored or rather extensively justified. Let me just simply conclude here with a quote from *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* to illustrate this point:

Leben selbst ist *wesentlich* Aneignung, Verletzung, Überwältigung des Fremden and Schwächeren, Unterdrückung, Härte, Aufzwingung eigener Formen, Einverleibung und mindestens, mildestens, Ausbeutung (...) Leben [*ist*] eben Wille zur Macht (...) Die “Ausbeutung” gehört nicht einer verderbten oder unvollkommenen und primitiven Gesellschaft an: sie gehört in’s *Wesen* des Lebendigen, als organische Grundfunktion, sie ist eine Folge des eigentlichen Willens zur Macht, der eben der Wille des Lebens ist. -Gesetzt, dies ist als Theorie eine Neuerung, -als Realität ist es das *Ur-Faktum* aller Geschichte: man sei doch so weit gegen sich ehrlich!- (*JGB*, 259).

The question here in fact is very simple: how can one leave this section, in which he speaks not just of life as “essentially” but also ideally (!) inscribed in appropriation, violation, oppression, hardship, annexation, and exploitation, stand in and by itself, without either justifying or dismissing it?

26 Solomon states: “The man of resentment is hardly devoid of passion -even intense passion; his is the ultimate passion, which burns furiously without burning itself out” (281). The admiration felt despite oneself for the human capacity to adapt and survive is Nietzschean in nature.

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