

# TO MISUNDERSTAND NIETZSCHE

## *On the Third Face*

I am a *Doppelgänger*, I have a “second” face in addition to the first. *And* perhaps also a third. — *Ecce Homo*

Some thinkers impact a reader so deeply, with such a painful accuracy, that the standard relationship between text and reader becomes fragmented, the causal lines of influence rendered all but inarticulatable. In such cases, the demarcation point that allows one to utilize the terms “text” and “reader” seems an archaic throwback. This breakdown in the traditional narrative of interpretation becomes even woollier when one considers the wider context that forms the background for the text / reader interaction. The ambiguities and nuances given any reading due to its historical space and time confound not only any particular case of interpretation but the phenomenon of interpretation itself.

Given these commonplaces in the “postmodern” world we inhabit, we still have much to gain through analysis of the texts (and their ensuing interpretations) of one of the progenitors of postmodernity, Friedrich Nietzsche. As Nietzsche himself paid particular attention to the “question of interpretation” and we now possess an almost unassimilable array of conflicting interpretations of the meaning of the Nietzschean texts we are drawn to what perhaps should be considered the “ur-question” of Nietzschean interpretation / interpretation of Nietzsche: is it possible to misunderstand Nietzsche?

The sheer simplicity of posing such a question beguiles the attempt at its most incipient stage. Any reader familiar with Nietzsche or the works of Nietzsche scholars (can one imagine a more oxymoronic phrase?) possesses a firm awareness of Nietzsche’s rejection of static, transcendental truth, his choleric attack on the language of metaphysics as mouthed by priests, ascetics and other life-deniers. Further elaboration of this bears little ripe fruit. But it does lead us closer to the space of our question here. We take Nietzsche’s screed against ahistorical truth as a “gimme,” not a truth itself, but a necessary methodological insight that provides the essential apparatus to question all aspirants to the throne of Truth. Of course, not all interpreters see this aspect of Nietzschean thought in the same manner—some get Nietzsche better than others. Or so it seems to us, those that do understand, those that instinctively *feel*, Nietzsche. It’s just so obvious that a careful reading of Nietzsche will, within reason, arm oneself with certain insightful weapons, if not determine the outcome of the ensuing battles. After all, *it’s all in the text*.

No doubt, these “simple” insights are hard won and not without a price. Therein lies the vast majority of their worth. Nietzsche demands that his reader struggle with his writings and suffer the pains of (re-)birth. For someone who believed the best of oneself should never be condemned to the prison of the written page, both he and his interpreters cling tenaciously to

the therapeutic process of reading a *Zarathustra* or an *Ecce Homo*. So, when we ask after the possibility of understanding Nietzsche, we ask as well: what do we seek?, how will we attain it?, and why do we desire this conclusion?

The pathways taken to answer these (and countless other) questions are as individual as a grain of sand: easily distinguishable as such, yet never to be confused with another. Here is one more. The Nietzschean text will be attended to, both those published with and without Nietzsche's consent. But fidelity will not be a concern. Interpretations of the text will be alluded to, some more than others. But they are not this interpretation. And Nietzsche the human will play a role. But I am not him. The quest to understand (or, perhaps, misunderstand), here will involve the text, the interpretation and the human. But it will most of all involve itself.



In its most common sense form our project here seems quite straightforward. Accepting that ambiguity and contradiction form the heart of the Nietzschean project, and that any interpretation remains formed by its historical context, it indeed appears that Nietzsche can be misunderstood. Of course, by "straightforward" we mean a tangle of thickets that thwarts the most scrupulous interpreter. The conundrums associated with Nietzsche's approach to interpretation, and the interpretations of Nietzsche already on record, are admirably delineated by Alan Schrift (1990), among others. Schrift's close textual analysis probes the towering Heideggerian interpretation (1977, 1979) and the French reaction offered by such diverse thinkers as Deleuze (1983), Derrida (1979), Kofman (1993) and Granier (1966). He also nods toward the Anglo-American interpretations of Kaufmann (1978), Danto (1965), and Nehamas (1985). Moreover, Schrift frames his own interpretation in the interstice between hermeneutics and deconstruction, attempting to maintain a twin respect for what he sees as Nietzsche's requirement that interpretation both philologically read well and creatively play. This "interpretive pluralism" (1990: 168) entails the consciousness of the interpretation as interpretation while still locating some basis for itself in the text. Schrift clearly opines that his methodological version of Nietzschean interpretation should be in no way taken as the "definitive" one, nor should we assume that this is what Nietzsche had in mind.

Nonetheless, Schrift's position indicates an approach favored by the bulk of contemporary interpreters. This approach locates itself primarily in Nietzsche's conception of "ranking," of the questioning of whether a value held leads to the ascent or decline of life. All perspectives are relative, but never absolutely so, for in following Nietzsche we may distinguish and hierarchize those values that lead to the expansion of life and will to power and those that deny this life and world. Whatever perspective interpreters adopt or are, it appears that this insight remains ineluctable as the anchor in the seas of infinite regress or performative contradiction, and in varying forms interpreters from Heidegger to Derrida to Schrift grasp it for dear life. If we may avoid misunderstanding and essentialize any aspect of the Nietzschean text, it is the necessity of ranking for life. Without questioning the specifics of this methodological strategy too directly, we will study the cost for life of this very tact and raise some implications for what Nietzsche does, and can mean, for his interpreters.

First, it is instructive to look at those interpretations of bygone years that linger as either anachronistic curiosities or as hoops for industrious scholars to jump through. Those who have

misunderstood Nietzsche and paid for their sins with almost total obscurity include Bertram (1918), Bäumler (1931), Podach (1931) and Jaspers (1947). All are rejected for different reasons, and outlining specifically what they actually said results in little benefit here, but questioning why they have been deemed misunderstandings helps embellish the frame of the present critique. One reason that crops up immediately is the fixing of Nietzsche as either some mad eugenicist or as the theoretical underpinning for extremist political movements such as National Socialism. Some are accused of reading their own *ressentiment* (moral or ontological) into the text, chaining Nietzsche in a decidedly unplayful manner. Others fall prey to claims of thinly veiled attempts at an apotheosis of Nietzsche. As in any civilized, scholarly discourse the opponents of these interpretations refute in large part by drawing our attention to particular pieces of text and larger themes in the Nietzschean *oeuvre* that plainly show that Nietzsche was *not* an anti-Semite, *not* a fascist, *not* over endowed with a God complex. And, indeed, it is there. But undergirding such claims lies assumptions that need the light of day, if not furthermore to experience the full cycle of dawn, noon and dusk.

We assume in all fairness that every interpreter in question here read the text, and consider this a necessary prerequisite to joining the club of Nietzsche scholars. To write some treatise on, for example, the role of eternal recurrence in Dionysian perspectivism without ever scanning a page of Nietzsche or scholarly criticism would require great audacity or even greater luck (if somehow successful). But few would disagree that all these careful exegetes reach varying, contradictory conclusions while citing the exact same passages as support. Those Nietzschean scholars whose works have remained above ground find no trouble in hierarchizing the respective interpretations (and usually in keeping with the spirit of the game, including their own in the mix) based on a consensus built among similar interpretations or utilizing citations conveniently not noted by their opposition. Many critics dismiss poor readings via citations that support their claim (who doesn't?). For instance, in claiming that Bäumler's reading presents a textbook case of invasive political ideology obscuring the meaning of a text one may cite the following passage from the *Anti-Christ* regarding philology as "the art of reading well—of being able to read off a fact *without* falsifying it by interpretation" (1968b: 52) and thus pointing out Bäumler's obvious lack of caution or subtlety in his virulent prose. One is hard pressed to say just how one would otherwise state one's disagreement than via appeal to the text. Here we already find ourselves dealing with sophisticated questions around the poles of interpretation *per se* and the current interpretive act: Nietzschean-styled interpretation recognizes itself as an interpretation. Hence denigration of Bäumler's interpretation requires an exercising of will to power aimed toward the overcoming of what one deems a restrictive and partial interpretation while equally necessitating a hardness toward oneself, one's potential weakness to make static the interpretive thread currently spun.

Currently accepted interpretations of Nietzsche make no bones of this, and we may certainly admit that Nietzsche himself did not invent this variety of interpretive suspicion. Again, though, why Deleuze and not Bertram? Because one opens up, and helps to keep open, new and unthought of interpretations of Nietzsche, while the other leads only back to itself and abides by no counter-interpretation. So, was Bertram then simply an idiot, or even worse all too cunning, seeing an opportunity to "kill two birds with one stone," undermining possible Nietzschean resistance to his views by utilizing Nietzsche to attack other opponents? Today, we agree that the answer is yes to one or the other. Our hierarchy of interpretations bases

itself on the humble conclusion that Bäumler or Bertram are of little *use* to us, they don't get us where we want to go or where we believe we and others *should* go.

I do not want to push this probing too far, as many other considerations lead us into accepting the current hierarchy of interpretations. Our hermeneutical context varies vastly from theirs. The demands of historical situatedness draw our needs to other questions and solutions than those found most pressing in other times. But I do want to try to get clear on whether we can or should say these previous interpretations are incorrect *in toto* or whether we hold them to be insufficient for us, now. Do we believe our interpretation (speaking loosely regarding such a collectivity) would be equally appropriate for 1918 or 1937, or even 2010? Are we stating that there exists certain essential interpretive characteristics that must obtain, regardless of one's historical space? This is a large claim, one at times seemingly supported by Nietzschean text, but also a satisfying and dangerous trap. If we do not want to create a "timeless" Nietzsche or erect a "true" interpretation of Nietzsche we must problematize again the question of whether rejected interpretations understand Nietzsche or not. They definitely are not our *current* interpretations but it may be incautious to dismiss them for any other reason than that.



The problem of how to account for alternative interpretations entangles us in the primary text, the interpretations involved and ourselves. Any (mis-) understanding wants to illuminate the interplay of the three. Moreover, we often find our ability today to demarcate the three concerns drastically reduced. Nonetheless, we still maintain a coherent enough sense of the three to speak of them as separate, no matter how provisionally. This problem has been attended to by Schrift in his construction of perspective vs. interpretation (1990: 145) and genealogy vs. interpretation (1990: Chapters 6 and 7, *passim*). I count myself in accord with much of the nuanced, balanced high wire act Schrift performs in freeing the text, the interpretation and the interpreter from their falsely construed spaces. His admittedly deconstructive reading of Nietzsche strives to outline not so much the correct interpretation in terms of truth but rather to embellish the correct Nietzschean *methodology* one must demonstrate. This comprises the aforementioned combination of philological rigor and letting-be along with the willingness to keep the activity of interpretation open and just.

Schrift, and likewise Derrida and sundry other deconstructionists, adhere to this methodology as the necessary core of Nietzsche's thought—the one insight to free all insights. Here, as in Derrida, we find a striking inability to question the methodology. This results in part from the belief that the methodology itself is not a standalone item that may be criticized in isolation but is more accurately a way of surfacing that which it appends to. That is, the methodology has no ontological status on its own. It simply "presents" itself as the amalgamated interpretation resulting from its application to the spatio-temporal instantiations of text and interpreter. And, of course, one can't criticize what's not there. Leaving the question of deconstruction aside for the moment, we see that Schrift at least views the Nietzschean methodology resisting relativism through a hierarchy of valuation. Does such-and-such interpretation deny life or affirm it? By unpacking the answer to this one is able to keep play alive while providing a framework to judge competing interpretations.

Here we need to explore the implications of making Nietzsche into a methodology. For in trying to set such a methodology up and then be true to it (to in pop sports parlance “be like Mike”) we may be committing a grievous (but necessary?) error for our immediate survival that nonetheless hampers our growth—we may be delimiting our ability to outstrip Nietzsche, to go beyond him in ways he could never imagine. Just as we have found the subject to be an illusion, we may yet find methodology to be one as well. And if this is the case, why try to be Nietzschean?

We assume that because Nietzsche spent so much time outlining his thought, carefully crafting his words for just the right effect, that there exists something there for us to get. We know it is not the Truth and believe rather in the enactment of a certain methodological approach. Much cogent argumentation has been written that if Nietzsche wants anything from his readers it is not that they become his believers, but study his example of becoming what one is in order that they can become what *they* are. So a sensible first step in questioning the existence of a “Nietzschean methodology” entails looking at what Nietzsche says on the topic of understanding himself and his methodology.

In a well known quote, usually used to support the currently accepted notion of Nietzsche, he states:

I *want* no “believers”; I think I am too malicious to believe in myself; I never speak to the masses.—I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced *holy*: you will guess why I publish this book *before*; it shall prevent people from doing mischief with me (1967c: p. 326).

If Nietzsche means anything by “mischief” it is being misunderstood, or worse, being used intentionally for purposes in opposition to those he espouses. We accept that Nietzsche knows what he means, how one is to properly interpret his works, and what misunderstanding him entails. But as with any topic in Nietzsche this question is not easily resolved. He contradicts himself often and creative interpretation of the text may lead to novel reinscriptions of the meaning of Nietzsche for us today. Along the way we must decide also whether we are simply being “playful” or “mischievous.”

We may consider fruitfully Nietzsche as the first interpreter of Nietzsche so we start with him. It is generally accepted that in the history of critical thought few have achieved the degree of raw, unvarnished self-knowledge that Nietzsche has. But in exploring “Nietzsche on Nietzsche” we should question whether Nietzsche believes he does know himself, and to what degree. The difficulty in choosing any given textual reference to reflect Nietzsche’s views on himself and his work springs from the fact that every word and sentence he commits to the world means to scream his presence. So perhaps we too should move deconstructively, and focus instead on text stressing Nietzsche’s *absence*.

One tact along these lines is to investigate Nietzsche’s beliefs on the pros and cons of misunderstanding or deceiving oneself. Here, there are two types. The first Nietzsche repudiates, that of lying to oneself out of weakness or resentment and it is mostly unimportant to us here. The second, however, suggests necessary forms of self-deception, of absencing oneself. These references are plenty.<sup>1</sup> In *The Gay Science* he questions the will to truth as one-sided and often counter to the affirmation of life, instead asking “But why not deceive? Why not allow oneself to be deceived?” (1974: 344). The positive benefits are numerous,

including I might add, deception regarding correct interpretation. To avoid determining the outcome beforehand in the search to “become what one is” all factors, errors, deceptions, what have you, play a role and “*misunderstanding oneself*” becomes “reason itself” (1967c: p. 254). And as if this were not strong enough in the favor of misunderstanding, Nietzsche asserts: “Self-deception has to exist if a grand *effect* is to be produced” (1986a: 52).

Because he disassembles the subject/object dualism, Nietzsche recognizes self-deception and deception of others as simply different points on a qualitative spectrum. Thus, what is so valuable to Nietzsche in deciphering himself may too have value in interpretation of others. One’s self-deception may in turn lead to the deception of others. But there exist other forms of misunderstanding. We have our bold moments when we shudder with anticipation of the coming recognition of some grand thought we have only then to feel doubt open the door to misunderstanding (of oneself and others) (see 1974: 311). And when deception or doubt do not block one’s path, sheer incomprehension very well might. The opacity of the self (and by extension the text) inhibits the interpretive gesture: “Our personal and profoundest suffering is incomprehensible and inaccessible to almost everyone; here we remain hidden from our neighbor, even if we eat from the same pot” (1974: 338).

This leads back to the host of interpretive quandaries alluded to earlier around what must or should be retained, and what may be allowed to succumb to some form or another of misunderstanding. Nietzsche hints elliptically at the need for resolution, yet, often leaves the guidelines unattended to. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he speaks of Zarathustra’s binds to the human race despite his deeper comprehension of its inadequacies: “And I myself want to sit among you disguised—*misjudging* you and myself: for that is the final instance of my human prudence” (1966a: p. 144). Here one sees Nietzsche’s intuition that there perhaps can be no strict methodology for us to follow because we always desire the mask, and methodology may prove just the most ornate veil to date. Of philosophy and the mask Nietzsche states: “Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout; every word also a mask” (1996b: 289). A methodological approach to grasping Nietzsche may simply hope to blur “getting there” and “there” into one mask, albeit a fearsome one to stare down.

Nietzsche provides further evidence that we cannot have it easy in relying on methodology. Current “methodologists” never presume to say where we are to get by using Nietzschean modes of interpretation, but they don’t have to if they then can provide a closely demarcated set of rules to getting there. Nietzsche gives us cause to pause. He seeks to redouble our concerns around authorial intention by separating himself from his texts. By pronouncing “*non legor, non legar* [I am not read, I will not be read]” (1967c: p. 259) he alludes to the insight that not only is reading him difficult but that we can never be certain what or whom we are reading—the author, the text or ourselves. Moreover, Nietzsche the human may very well be considered a creation of the texts he “authored” and not without a price to that author: “everything great—a work, a deed—is no sooner accomplished than it turns *against* the man who did it” (1967c: p. 303). Even further: “the ‘work,’ whether of the artist or the philosopher, invents the man who has created it” (1966b: 269). If we do not know what we are interpreting, how can we be sure what we are misinterpreting?

The chimera-like quality of understanding Nietzsche installs him at the precipice of schizophrenic interpretation wherein intentionality gains complete ascendancy at the price of

complete diffusion. This, if anything, is the magic of Nietzsche—to be able to say with all swagger and circumspection: “One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood” (1974: 381). It remains the lot of “we incomprehensible ones” to be “misidentified—because we ourselves keep growing, keep changing” (1974: 371). This misidentification would be infinite<sup>2</sup> if not for the “trace” of a method that allows interpreters to retrace the pathway of Nietzsche in a strange twist to the eternal recurrence of the same: always the same method, never the same result.



Nietzsche’s ability to at once own up to the claim of eternal flux on him and still preserve some conception of selfhood, albeit in the radically altered state of the will to power, leads him into an increasingly skeptical position regarding the veracity of his own self-understanding. Here, he comes closest to being the Nietzsche contemporary interpreters desire as he discards the defining of self through the accumulation of predicates in favor of a more process-dependent accretion of verbal and adverbial descriptors loosely gathered around a locus of ever expanding will. As a result, Nietzsche refuses to interpret himself as simply “thus and thus,” instead focusing on the interactional relations the will called Nietzsche establishes in its search for dominance and growth. Furthermore, Nietzsche observes the same structure in his texts: they indeed are *not* him but are themselves instances of will to power exercising their inclination toward ever greater expansion through interaction with readers.

So what we witness throughout the Nietzschean corpus is first a glimpse of Nietzsche the human’s will to power in the form of texts he creates, then, second, the immediate betrayal of these texts as they resist Nietzsche’s will. Hence, we find *Ecce Homo* to be a last ditch effort at indirectly mastering the texts by exposing their will to power for all future interpreters to perceive. By stating boldly “I am one thing, my writings are another matter” (1967c: p. 259) Nietzsche exercises his will under the melancholic awareness that it is already too late: as soon as the ink dries one’s will becomes untimely. With rueful sarcasm he admits to the power of the will its rightful due but never without trying to snatch the admission back at the last moment: “What does it matter that I am proved right! I *am* too much in the right.—And he who laughs best today will also laugh last” (1968a: p. 27). The centering of the will in a process and not a body accords with the methodologist interpretation of Nietzsche, yet we need to explore resistance to the temptation it provides of doing away with the human subject’s will and emplacing in its stead the text’s.

As Nietzsche’s will to power wrestles with his texts for dominance, he also defends his texts against their interpreters. Better put, he arms his texts for war and lets them do the fighting. The text becomes the time and space in which multiple wars “play out”: Nietzsche versus the text, Nietzsche versus the reader, the text versus the reader. To say which battle occurs where is to take up sides concurrently in all three wars. To construct a narrative of the clash of wills becomes the will to victory for itself (even in the face of this narrative’s inevitable betrayal of its source). This leaves us asking *how* we are to resist the reification of the process-text as such, counter balanced by the questions of *what* we indeed resist and *what* we are.

To begin we need to provide a retort to the methodologist’s cry of: “back to the text-in-itself!” Nietzsche (or is it the text?) speaks of interpretation and its status regarding itself. Here,

he decidedly plays up the deontological nature of interpretation by stressing the process of interpreting the interpretation. In outlining how interpretation often can seek to obscure its interpretive status, Nietzsche ridicules the inability to see the opposing wills of text and interpretation and how the two can never be brought into full agreement. Because the most achievable is the appearance of concord, Nietzsche favors the opening of vision onto the battle itself rather than over the makeup of the contestants. This prevents the false conclusion that text and interpretation may seek the same goal. While, they in a sense do, as they both desire ascendance over the other, this cannot be taken for ontological convergence. The text remains opaque—interpretation, to be interpretation, uses the text by never is the text. Proud interpretation does not hide itself in the text and Nietzsche welcomes the accusation of interpreting both texts and other interpretations: “Supposing that this also is only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—well, so much the better” (1966b: 22).

Of course, Nietzsche reigns in interpretation. In its battles with the text it must shape itself to fit the enemy’s contours and thus cannot present itself according to whim, for some war maneuvers are better than others. His theme of loving one’s enemy transposes itself into these battles—good, interesting interpretation will not spoil the text by silencing or twisting it, but will instead open the windows to a fresh spring air and allow the text to sing with the invigoration of rebirth and growth. By challenging the text the interpretation increases the strength of both combatants, and growth does not pay the price of shadowy subterfuge: “He who explains a passage in an author ‘more deeply’ than the passage was meant has not explained the author but *obscured* him” (1986c: 27). Interpretation that strays too far from the text should present itself as a powerful thought in its own right rather than an elaboration of some other text.

This “code of battle” appeals to Nietzsche’s sense of virtue while avoiding any lapse into a morality of weakness. It guides the process of interpretation and acts as a quality control to help avoid misunderstanding, willful or otherwise. Adherents of Nietzsche as methodology highlight this aspect of Nietzschean thought and take it up for their own. On the face of things, it seems Nietzsche desires this and would not take it for an obfuscation of his meaning. But perhaps we are not meant to linger here too long. A good reading of Nietzsche may be meant to be useful only for a time and Nietzsche seems to want us to, if not stop at the stage of adopting other, “deeper” interpretations, then stop interpreting him altogether. Perhaps in regards to interpreting Nietzsche we should listen to some parting words before bidding *adieu*, for instance take the following as a goodbye rather than an exhortation to further study: “That which one individual needs for his health is to another a cause of sickness, and many ways and means to freedom of spirit to more highly developed natures count as ways and means to unfreedom” (1986a: 286).

As strange and ungrateful as it may seem at first, there is a way of reading Nietzsche that advocates a forgetting of him. It parallels the methodologist reading in most ways, but replaces a reverence for its origins with one for the future. It takes risks, and trusts, perhaps foolishly, in its strength not to relapse. It casts some old illusions aside, clings to new ones, and lies to itself where necessary. And it finds in the absence of Nietzsche the most fitting manner of honoring him. We cite him now as we have throughout, with careful respect and camaraderie. But now also as we might recall the memory of a departed loved one: with increasingly less

passion for her alone, with distance, and finally with the sigh of forgetfulness that senses in one's confident sinews the blood of one's forbears.

This way of reading allows for a wider variety of styles of belief in Nietzsche than strict methodological readings, including the forgetting of belief in Nietzsche. The tracing, and it continues, of Nietzsche here already stands as proof of this interpretation's current shortcoming of this goal. Any attempt to absence Nietzsche purely will fail and this is not our goal. We call for instead the "womanizing" of the opening, the holding in abeyance of the decisionability of methodology itself. Thus, we (the most common form of the scholar's will to power) make methodology serve our purposes even at the risk of the appearance of resenting methodology and the limits it imposes on us. We will be hard on our playfulness without giving up ourselves to the will of another. But we will question whether we need to *believe* in methodology in order to become what we are.

We try to present Nietzsche as sympathetic to our cause. If the interpreter is not so much a unitary subject but moreso a methodological unfolding, one's experiences should be seen as one possible example of the methodology's application and not a transcendental edict. Yet, one's understanding of Nietzschean methodology hinges upon one's particular, self-aware instantiation of it. While certainly beyond reproach for itself, and necessary to itself internally for any acts of ranking, there exists some risk of doing interpretive violence to the other. Nietzsche and his believers agree on this. But, Nietzsche sees some danger here, not for the other, but for the interpreter herself and her will to power:

For it is selfish to experience one's own judgment as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty, and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own, your very own—for that could never be somebody else's and much less that of all, all! (1974: 333).

The great danger lies in clinging to a certain method at the risk of hampering one's creative growth. Such belief becomes a prison of conviction and not a means for grand passion—the will to power loses its sovereignty over the means to its expansion (see 1968b: 54). Such belief in a method replaces belief in a human will and "we 'men of knowledge' have gradually come to mistrust believers of all kinds" (1967b: p. 148). For Nietzsche "no *faith* is demanded here" (1967c: p. 219), whether in him, his text or his methods. The ways they represent are fascinating in their own right, and fruitful for leading to other yet to be experienced paths, but they remain few among many.

Nietzsche hopes, almost inexpressibly so, that one day the last men will perish and usher in the epoch of the *Übermenschen*, if only to one day return again. Moreover, Nietzsche made no claim to being himself an *Übermensch*. His skepticism regarding when, and if, the epoch would come touches almost every word of his thought. In over 100 years of interpretation we scholars believe we have come closer to a correct interpretation of Nietzsche (if more often through process of elimination than galvanizing insight) and to leaping over the last men. Humility bids us to take leave there. And there we will remain unless we learn to love the abyss just a little bit more each time, learn to scoff at accepted truths *and* methodologies, learn to listen to ourselves more attentively. For, as the man says, "Ultimately, nobody can get more out of things, including books, than he already knows. For what one lacks access to from experience one will have no ear" (1967c: p. 261). Nietzsche expects us to abandon him at some point, although his will to power forbids his helping us except by providing texts that may

provide some small, necessary impetus to bounding over them. He loves his good readers best, for in anticipation of them he has to become the strongest he can. But make no mistake, Nietzsche's untimeliness comes on both sides of the moment and this unpleasant fact he knows, even if we still learn it now: "People who comprehend a thing to its very depths rarely stay faithful to it for ever. For they have brought its depths into the light of day: and in the depths there is always much that is unpleasant to see" (1986a: 489).



Earlier we asked why certain interpretations of Nietzsche have been shunted aside and we ended the previous section speaking of Nietzsche's "good" readers. Have we then ended up agreeing with the "methodologists" after all? To a degree, the answer is yes. This interpretation finds more points of intersection with a Schrift or Derrida than a Podach or Simmel. But while questioning the existence of an essentialized Nietzschean methodology follows the postmodern or deconstructive reading of Nietzsche, it also strives in some ways to enlarge and outstrip it, and a consequence of this remains the possibility that, among countless permutations, these forgotten interpreters may reemerge or rise in standing. We also spoke of absencing Nietzsche and this thread needs to be tied into this overcoming.

We begin concluding by returning to the distinction between play and mischief. Play, for Nietzschean methodologists, involves the establishment of justice via a "meta-interpretive standard" (Schrift, 1990: 186) whereby the dynamics of interpretation preclude hierarchically favoring either the subject or object. By grounding itself in the "between" interpretation achieves a pluralistic approach that still allows for judgment criteria. Mischief would then be that which passes itself off as play while masking its true ulterior motive of delimiting play. It needs to now be ventured that mischief may not be the opposite of play but a form of it out of vogue, untimely, if you will. The utilization of Nietzschean methodology aims to overcome the worn out binary of "one truth or anything goes" and replace it with a new conceptual model of the continuum in which any set of antipodes are not separated from each other in opposition, but serve as poles at either end of our current normative spectrum. Neither is absolute nor can we hope to achieve either absolutely—for instance, life affirming and life denying are various shades of each other, not distinct entities or qualities.

Our simple task here is to push the envelope a bit further, expand the scope of play by being mischievous. It is not that the methodologist approaches Nietzsche incorrectly or misunderstands Nietzsche, we just need to be braver in being Nietzschean,<sup>3</sup> in being so Nietzschean it stops recognizing itself as such so as to better become itself. This is the heresy of mischief. No longer satisfied with the false construct of "one truth or anything goes" we become dissatisfied as well with the new binary of (a) the old binary and (b) Nietzschean methodology / "interpretive pluralism." Let us be clear: we are not chasing a borderless frontier, an absolute free play without limits. Such quasi-transcendental dreaming has its appeal, but we can't think of getting there (yet?). Our job entails strengthening our ability to "reverse perspectives" (1967c: p. 223) on a grander scale. Methodologists (and to a large extent Nietzsche as well) are hard on themselves by tethering their interpretations to the text to provide the slimmest solace for their attempts at scholarly redemption of the word. We will be hard on ourselves by sacrificing this comfort.

This is the Nietzschean “third face”—not merely a reversal of perspectives but a new perspective on perspectives, on the event of interpretation. Surely, Nietzsche’s first and second faces get us here and they may still rest just underneath the mask of the third face. We will not speak too prematurely of justice, though our bravery may indicate to us when the time is proper.<sup>4</sup> We will be brave enough to venture misunderstanding Nietzsche, if this allows us to become what we are. In reevaluating the meaning of misunderstanding we may gain not a warm and misty vapor of freedom that allows us to repose in the playground of the text, but face a harsh and biting wind that requires a digging in of our heels to proceed.

To intentionally misunderstand Nietzsche smacks of the cunning deceit of *ressentiment* to the virtuous Nietzschean. It evinces a weak will to power that cannot face wholeheartedly the Nietzschean abyss. But, as we see via current interpretations, Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power admits of grades not distinctions. All is will to power, but some are grander than others. Hence, to stray from the necessity of reading well and playing creatively is to forsake Nietzsche. On the other hand, though, to preclude such forsaking may result in the abdication of responsibility for self because as the subject is replaced by the text, and by the interstice between text and interpreter, we note the increasing inability to create illusions, a necessary element of survival for Nietzsche. To take Nietzsche as a methodology may not make him into a “Truth” but it does substitute another fateful necessity in its stead: we must be Nietzschean. His utility for interpretation becomes inexhaustible while also exhausting any attempt at absencing him, at erasing via forgetting. Or perhaps we have already forgot: may not deconstructive, hermeneutic textual analysis be our latest illusion for survival? May not our understanding of Nietzsche, our lauding of the courage of the text to forever smolder be yet another veil shrouding new, joyfully ripe playgrounds? If we are Nietzsche via the text and its interpretation, must not our self-overcoming entail an overcoming of Nietzsche as well?

I call for a new bravery that will allow us to learn earnestly from Nietzsche and then forget our serious reverence for him. This is not a denial of self, of his role in the conditions of what we are. It is a cry to mischievous play, to stop taking Nietzsche so seriously. For “does not everything we take *seriously* betray us?” (1974: p. 144). In keeping with the methodologists we take Nietzsche “at his word” and follow his lead. We are fated to be what we are and we should love this—but we have experienced being Nietzschean and “To be unable to have done with an experience is already a sign of decadence” (1967d: 233). Now, to call oneself Nietzschean may be just as well as admitting one’s incompleteness as a Nietzschean: we are not Nietzsche, and if we have any respect for his dream for humanity, we must locate the courage to abandon him, to reduce our remembrance of him to the tense spring of our well-exercised muscles propelling us toward our destiny with fateful bounds.

We are now Nietzsche and he is now us, his interpreters. Dare we remember this, in order to then forget something else and grow? Has our understanding, our choice in forgetting become too “tolerant,” has it forgotten that “it would rather say No, most of all it prefers to say nothing at all” (1968a: p. 105)? Should we now say nothing of Nietzsche, tolerate no more our too comfortable illusions, live hard again? Is not the lesson of eternal recurrence that total presence or absence remains both impossible and yet horribly true? If Nietzsche’s “intentions” recur eternally, if so do all interpretations, and all coalesce in an infinite text, why fear misunderstanding Nietzsche? It may prove the best path to oneself. Let us play! Let us frolic mischievously! We cannot escape being Nietzsche, but if it suits our will to power we may

forget our bloody origin in the pulp of the text and see only vast vistas of the future, bringing with them, unbeknownst to us, the Nietzschean part of ourselves we have forgotten.

In the “final” analysis “methodology” may be seen as the best resistance to the text’s will to power. Or Bäumler may have been right. Or some unknown interpretation may best will our fateful self. How can we be certain? By being Nietzschean? Was this essay “Nietzschean”? Was it meant to be? Am I Nietzschean? Or am I... myself... a fourth face?

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## Endnotes

*Note:* All references from the works of Nietzsche cite section numbers except where inappropriate. There page numbers are indicated with the addition of a “p”. All other references cite page numbers.

<sup>1</sup> A powerfully related theme in both Nietzsche and this interpretation, we will not explicate directly Nietzsche’s conception of active forgetfulness, although it would be beneficial to remain mindful of it (for now?).

<sup>2</sup> In what can be taken for one of the many prototypical statements of deconstruction, Nietzsche says regarding the excessive interpretation of a historical event: “*the text finally disappeared under the interpretation*” (1966b: 38). But even there Nietzsche hedges just what we are to make out of such insights and what ramifications the realization of it holds for the future.

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche believes that such bravery must ensue *prior* to any time of justice, that the virtues must be sequenced to achieve full transvaluation: “In the first era of higher humanity bravery is accounted the noblest of the virtues, in the second justice, in the third moderation, in the fourth wisdom. In which era do we live? In which do you live?” (1986c: 64). Hence, our bravery must demand strict hardness for it to deliver us to the threshold of justice.

<sup>4</sup> Note the recent turn toward ethics in deconstructive circles. Is this indicative of a belief that the “era of justice” is upon us? Or moreso a *krisis* of faith in the methodology’s capacity to fulfill its promise? See Derrida (1992a, 1992b) and Caputo (1987, 1993), among others.