

Engendering the Overman: On Woman and Nihilism in Nietzsche

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of woman within Nietzsche's late-middle period, through *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as well as interrogating the more social or political elements of nihilism, in order to conceptualize a novel reading of Nietzsche's figure of the Overman. The motivation for this project is to create an understanding of the Overman that stands in stark contrast to those interpretations of Nietzsche advanced and deployed by those on the far-right of the political spectrum, who historically have used Nietzsche's ideas to justify acts of cruelty and violence through an appeal to preservation of the self and of the same. I begin with the idea that woman is representative of truth for Nietzsche through her embodiment of *difference*, both internal to herself and within her relationship to man. This view of woman within the thesis is led by the work of Luce Irigaray in her work *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, and a reading of her work alongside Nietzsche's *Gay Science* comprise the first chapter. In the second chapter, I chart different typologies of nihilism as advanced by Gilles Deleuze and Alenka Zupančič in order to probe their status as "universal". I also delve into the eternal return as the process through which nihilism is overcome and the Overman emerges, as perhaps an eternal return of the different rather than the same. In the final chapter, the lessons from the beginning of the thesis are applied to a reading of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in order to read difference into that text toward the overcoming of nihilism and the birth of the Overman.

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Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher of nihilism and of its overcoming. His work is deeply concerned with practices of living well, and with diagnosing and describing the impact of nihilism—throughout history indeed, but most urgently in his own time, the end of the 19th century. His rich reflections on nihilism and on its possible overcoming culminate in his concepts of the eternal return (understood largely as a process that allows us to think and experience life without nihilism) and of the Overman (which represents in some respects the *embodiment* of the eternal return). Nietzsche's critical and deconstructive approach to nihilism focuses on structures like religion, statehood, science and philosophy, and looks closely at how those structures make use of and relate to language and life in order to persist or thrive in the world. His critiques of these structures are chiefly levelled here: namely, in the fact that their very operation *negates* life as they are set up and maintained by the living.

Nietzsche's critique largely emerged in response to what he saw to be the natural end point of those structures in his lifetime, to say nothing of what he thought would become of them in the decades to follow. If it is chiefly the turn of the century that would witness unprecedented atrocities, war and destruction at a global level, Nietzsche lived and worked at a time when some the ideas that led to that unprecedented loss were first coming into their own. The emergence of National Socialism, a movement to which Nietzsche's sister was closely allied as is well-known, shaped the 20th century in countless ways, and carried Nietzsche's ideas alongside their own in the process. The details and stakes of this shared history have been addressed extensively over the years—for instance, by authors like Charles Yablon (2002), Ruth Burch (2014), and Jon Wittrock and Mats André (2014).

But well before this scholarship, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argued in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that Nietzsche’s “pre-fascist followers” were particularly keen on grabbing and underscoring in Nietzsche’s thought what gravitated around the problem of nihilism, seeing here a particularly potent way to shape and reinvigorate socio-political life.¹ More specifically, these pre-fascist followers attached particular importance to the will to power as the key concept in Nietzsche’s work (and as a tremendous source of *power*). Certainly, the will to power did come to a place of pre-eminence in Nietzsche’s later work. And that Nietzsche might have seen a fair amount of ‘power’ in nihilism is not surprising. Indeed, Nietzsche’s analysis of power as relational, as existing between individual people but also as constituting the mechanism through which structures persist in language, is co-constitutive with his analysis of nihilism as a human problem.

Nevertheless, to understand the power of nihilism as *the* Nietzschean call to action is profoundly misguided in my view. This thesis views Nietzsche as a philosopher of the *overcoming* of nihilism, and as a prophet of the urgency of that project of overcoming. As such, the body of scholarship that will guide my analysis is above all the work of Nietzsche scholars who prioritize the affirmation of life and overcoming of nihilism in their analysis, and whose views are wholly incommensurable with the proliferation of fascist ideas or politics—and misogynist ones for that matter, as we will see below.²

Nihilism, which Nietzsche saw as rising in response to the realization that structures that once provided meaning can no longer do so, tends to flourish in times of political uncertainty. If

¹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford UP 2009), p. 36

² Here I am referring specifically of the work of Gilles Deleuze on Nietzsche and the subject of nihilism in *Nietzsche & Philosophy* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson. Bloomsbury, 2013), Alenka Zupančič’s book *The Shortest Shadow* (MIT, 2003), as well as the work of Luce Irigaray on Nietzsche, whose work would later move explicitly toward the affirmation of life. More on these authors below.

Nietzsche seems to have felt this uncertainty in his own days, one could argue that our present times are also experiencing a similar loss of faith. What is quite unsettling is that our contemporary political uncertainty is once again accompanied by an increasing normalization of fascist ideology and by the presence of far-right and white nationalist terrorist violence. The recent election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America, aided in part by the group which calls itself the “alt-right,” has given space and visibility to fascist ideas on major news platforms and has led to an increase in public gatherings of the far-right (with a disturbing amount of misogynist discursive violence). These recent gatherings alone have already led to injury and a death among those who sought to challenge the right of fascists to public spaces and public discourse.³ The genesis of the alt-right was largely facilitated by internet communities geared to protecting the voices of (mostly white) men from the criticism voiced by feminists and anti-racists.⁴ In these often tensed and disturbing (non)debates, where the death of God is often invoked (as are other Nietzschean terms),⁵ the concept of man has sometimes been propped up in God’s place as a homogenizing, ‘saving’ force—one that radically rejects difference. But ‘man’ is now being revealed for the imperfect category it, necessarily, is: its conception of ‘life’ is contradictorily grounded on nothing other than the negation of the vital differences that constitute our actual collective life.

To speak about “man” as a discrete and idealized concept, as opposed to a category, does not negate the category but it does require us to ask the question of whether one is speaking about “all men” in these instances. While the concept of ‘man’ may guide the actions or

³ Heather Heyer was killed in August of 2017 while demonstrating against a rally of white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia when a car drove into the crowd of anti-fascist demonstrators.

⁴ Josephine Armistead, "The Silicon Ideology." See – <<https://archive.org/details/the-silicon-ideology>>

⁵ For instance, the contribution of the group known as “new atheists” to the formation of the alt-right is detailed on page 14 of Armistead, op. cit.

behaviours of those who identify with the category, there is certainly more variation in the ways that identification actually manifests itself. Both the concept of man and the concrete historical role of men will be relevant to this project, and the same thing will apply to woman.

In an essay entitled “Who is the *Übermensch*? On Time, Truth, and Woman in Nietzsche”, Keith Ansell-Pearson has analysed closely the way the “concept” itself operates in Nietzsche’s thought. Though Ansell-Pearson is most importantly concerned with the concept of “truth”, his insights are equally relevant to a discussion of the “truth” *of concepts*. He writes:

It is a fundamental tenet of Nietzsche's deconstruction of philosophy that "truth" is not something to be "found" or "discovered," but rather that it is to be "created" and is a "process": introducing truth, as a *processus in infinitum*, an active determining—not a becoming-conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined.⁶

This active determining of the concept is a process which, I believe, ought to apply in equal measure to our understanding of the term “man”. When those on the far right make appeals to some historical myth of greatness, what is nested within them is often an appeal to something “firm and determined.” But viewing “man” as an active *determining* will often reveal that the factual basis of these appeals is not always so iron-clad. In their active determining, these neo-fascist men serve to deny life (nihilism in the most basic Nietzschean sense) insofar as they deny the lives of those other than their own: targeting white women (apart from those fitting the mold of the “traditional” housewife) in addition to targeting all groups that embody difference along various racial, ethnic, and religious axes. This denial of life takes a fairly explicit turn in the case of outright violence and recent events, but it also manifests itself more insidiously in the diminishing of the standards of living of those groups. In our current context, the protections for diverse oppressed groups often rely on a concept of equality that posits sameness before the law

⁶ Keith Ansell-Pearson, “Who is the *Übermensch*? Time, Truth, and Woman in Nietzsche” (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 53.2 1992.) p. 312.

or before bureaucratic bodies. This view of equality is often premised on the same problematic concept of “man,” (as distinct from a notion of equality that could incorporate difference).

As we know, Nietzsche was explicitly critical of equality precisely *for* its erasure of difference.⁷ Thus the Nietzschean disparagement of equality (often hyperbolic and biting) must be contextualized and placed back within a philosophy that is in the service of life (and difference) in a broad, rather than narrow and narrowing, sense. His condemnation of equality is levelled on the basis of what he believes is its tendency to render similar what is different, to deny the differences among diverse groups toward a universal concept of the “human” which is often synonymous with that of “man”. As we will see in this thesis, the Nietzschean approach to diverse co-existence is especially evident in his discussion of woman, conceived as the embodiment of difference whose possibilities lie in her difference from man. This, in my view, is what makes Friedrich Nietzsche’s oeuvre a particularly rich object of study.

Our reading of Nietzsche, then, will orient itself toward the affirmation of life as an affirmation of *difference*. We will see that in addition to being representative of difference in her own right, woman is frequently depicted within Nietzsche’s writing as representative of concepts like truth, life and wisdom. And it is here that one finds the necessary context and distance to challenge man’s perceived universality. This Nietzschean reading of woman will be most useful for our effort to re-read Nietzsche as a philosopher of difference and, as such, as a friend of contemporary feminism.

⁷ Nietzsche’s most notable condemnations of equality occur outside of the texts this thesis will focus on, particularly *Twilight of the Idols* (trans. Judith Norman. Cambridge UP, 2005). In section 37 of “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” he writes: “‘Equality’ (a certain factual increase in similarity that the theory of ‘equal rights’ only gives expression to) essentially belongs to decline: the rift between people, between classes, the myriad number of types, the will to be yourself, to stand out, what I call the *pathos of distance*, that is characteristic of every *strong* age. The tension, the expanse between the extremes is getting smaller and smaller these days – the extremes themselves are ultimately being blurred to the similarity.” What is at stake in this important quotation will be examined in the third chapter.

More specifically, I will put Nietzsche's reflections on woman (particularly those proposed in *The Gay Science*) in direct dialogue with his reflections on nihilism in a few key texts of his so-called 'middle period'. This dialogue will inform our reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, through which I hope to sketch a better understanding of his figure of the Overman⁸--to be understood as a key Nietzschean post-human figure that might thrive after mankind collectively overcomes the problem of nihilism. Indeed, our reading of Nietzsche's Overman requires us to explore the complicity of the categories of 'human' and 'man' in the denial of life, and we will do so with an eye to our current, unsettling political climate.

The Overman has featured heavily in fascist interpretations of Nietzsche, but its role as a positive figure has largely been missing from major feminist interpretations of Nietzsche—despite the fact that the Overman is certainly a crucial Nietzschean concept.⁹ This gap in the literature deserves to be addressed. Not only for the sake of Nietzsche scholarship but also for the sake of responding to current anti-feminist, fascist politics, an exploration of the figure of the Overman from the perspective of a difference-based feminism is very much needed.

Our study will proceed as follows. We will begin with a discussion of the figure of 'woman' in Nietzsche. More specifically, our first chapter will put Nietzsche's *Gay Science* in dialogue with a major interpretation of the feminine in Nietzsche—namely, that proposed by feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray. After this first examination, chapter two will put forward a detailed analysis of the problem of nihilism *in its relation to difference* (a full

⁸ From the German *Übermensch*, also translated as Superman.

⁹ Luce Irigaray's work in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (trans. Gillian C. Gill, Columbia UP, 1993) is critical of the figure of the Overman, accusing it of being a means to reclaim one's own birth in order to separate oneself from the feminine or maternal, but also from life itself (18, 52). Ofelia Schutte's reading of the figure, in *Beyond Nihilism: Nietzsche without masks* (U of Chicago, 1986) connects the figure more strongly to the will to power than the eternal return, and never mentions the figure alongside woman (though she does talk about Nietzsche's misogyny elsewhere). Debra B. Bergoffen posits a "self-spoken woman" as the counterpart to the Overman in her essay "Nietzsche was no feminist" (in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Pennsylvania State UP, 1998), but does not reconcile feminist projects with the bringing about of the Overman.

exploration of nihilism as a whole would be beyond the scope of this thesis). The third chapter will then build on the insights of the first two chapters and work its way towards a re-reading of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (a most pertinent work for us here given that it is in this work that the figure of the Overman is most fully articulated). After this discussion and by way of conclusion, we will propose a re-conceptualization of the Overman as a figure put chiefly in the service of a philosophy of difference.

Notes on feminism, Irigaray and gender essentialism

If it certainly would be imprecise to claim that Nietzsche is a "feminist", it would be equally incorrect to suggest that his writings, or his philosophy *as a whole*, are entirely misogynist. In fact, the role that woman plays within Nietzsche's work is important for our thesis precisely because we can see, in many places across his oeuvre, a much more nuanced understanding of the position of women than that found in most philosophers before him—definitely much more nuanced than that of the philosophers he sees his work as responding to.¹⁰ But once again, despite his nuanced treatment of woman, Nietzsche does not quite deserve the label of "feminist"—if only because he was so exceedingly critical of feminism as it existed within his lifetime. This is not to suggest, however, that Nietzsche's work—specifically his

¹⁰ Beverly Clack's *Misogyny in the Western Philosophical Tradition* (Macmillan, 1999) contains excerpts from many of the philosophers Nietzsche saw himself as either following or writing against, from Plato and Aristotle, through to Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer; each of her chapters is intended to give a survey of mentions of woman as it figures into the thought of each philosopher. It is somewhat puzzling that the chapter on Nietzsche is among the shortest in the book at barely two pages, with most of that chapter consisting of a long passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where Zarathustra speaks with the old woman. Schopenhauer's essay "On Women" is also included, where one can read that women "are big children their whole life long" (182), a position indebted to a long tradition that sees women as merely incomplete men, stemming back to the biology of Aristotle (31-36). Similarly, the chapters on Kant and Hegel view the failings of woman as part of their nature—a nature that is deemed less complete (either in her capacity for morality or in her lack of access to political life). Beyond passing (quasi-biological) remarks in political and ethical treatises, neither Kant nor Hegel make sustained explorations of woman or femininity as philosophical subjects in their own right. This survey of the canon, of course, does not refer to the work done by more contemporary feminist scholars on these figures, though particularly in the cases of the Greeks as well as Kant and Hegel, it is worth noting that this body of scholarship does exist.

reflections on woman, the feminine, and difference—cannot be usefully employed for *feminist purposes today*. It is my contention that within the (male) canon of the history of philosophy, it is the Nietzschean conception of woman and the feminine that can be most effectively mobilized in the service of contemporary feminist life.

But this thesis will not solely turn its gaze towards Nietzsche. I also intend to read Nietzsche in dialogue with the work of Luce Irigaray, one of the New French Feminists of the 1970s, whose work is grounded wholly in the feminine.¹¹ Her intellectual project begins from her own subject position in order to call attention to the problematic way Philosophy has conceived of its own universality. By underscoring these flaws, Irigaray does not wish to completely disregard Philosophy, but instead to situate the “love of wisdom” as *something that requires difference*, and to see universality as something that works against this. Though much of Irigaray’s intellectual output gravitates around this project of difference (or what she calls a “philosophy of the two”), her oeuvre also includes an important and fascinating book that engages directly with Nietzsche’s philosophy. *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* is written in many ways like a love letter (or better put, a series of them), though thoroughly philosophical even in its most poetic utterances.

As is well known, Irigaray’s career began in psychoanalysis, but her attention soon turned to the history of philosophy, which she understood as a history of *men’s* ideas. As a feminist philosopher, Irigaray grounds all feminist aims and projects in the articulation of difference: not only the irreducible difference between subjects (which she views as formative for our

¹¹ “The feminine” refers here to the subject position of woman and the qualities ascribed to that subject position; Irigaray’s philosophy begins from this subject position and challenges philosophical assumptions of universality. This delineation will be further explicated from the categories “woman” and “women” in the first chapter, where the feminine comes to more specifically refer to “a category of epistemological and ontological position(s) associated with both woman and women, but which is not limited to the same delineations made necessary by sociological or political discourses.”

development), but also the difference contained within the subject position of womanhood. This philosophy of difference proposes that there is something to be learned about the (limits of the) self through an encounter with what is irreducible about the other. Irigaray situates this irreducible difference primarily in sexual (or sexuate) difference, a concept born out of psychoanalysis and distinct from sex difference as a biological category. Unlike the latter, sexual difference refers to the way subjects form their identities through the world as a sexed world, that is, a world historically organized on the basis *of* sex difference as a biological category (regardless of whether that difference is seen as natural, innate, or justifiable¹²).

The significance for Nietzsche scholarship of understanding *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* as a work of the primacy of the Two could be lost if we do not underscore the necessity of that text to be read *alongside* (as opposed to being simply a text *on*) Nietzsche's work. The structure of *Marine Lover* explicitly embodies Irigaray's understanding of twoness as irreducible, and it must be read accordingly (an irreducibility vis-à-vis Nietzsche, obviously). Now, *Marine Lover* is no doubt very critical of Nietzsche; Irigaray outright condemns many of the concepts that will be regarded in a positive light in this thesis—particularly the Overman and the eternal return. To put matters most simply, her criticisms of these two concepts stem from her belief that they do not break sufficiently with the history of masculine thought (and we will have the occasion to return to this later).

Now, if we return briefly to Ansell-Pearson's earlier reflection on Nietzschean truth, we might be able to better appreciate the role of Irigaray's critical reading. Her opposition to certain parts of Nietzsche's oeuvre does not bar her text from open dialogue with Nietzsche's. As Ansell-Pearson further explains: "To seek to expose the contradictory nature of his major

¹² Stella Sandford, *Plato and Sex* (Polity, 2010) p. 1.

doctrines, such as the Overman and eternal return, is to mistake them for logical truths when they need to be read as powerful fictions or *metaphors which refer to experiences and processes*.”¹³

Irigaray's condemnation of the Overman and of the eternal return similarly ought to be read, in my view, as containing experiences and processes which can add richness to these concepts, rather than contradict them or attempt to cast them aside completely. Allow me to explain.

Irigaray's *Marine Lover* is styled as a response to Nietzsche's work, a response from the feminine figures (both named and unnamed) closest to Dionysus and Zarathustra, figures which contradict them in order to expand the parameters of their discussion. It is written, as such, as a critique that simultaneously builds upon what it tears down, in a style very similar to Nietzsche's own writing—aphoristic and full of imagery, filled with more meaning in its pithy passages than their length would at first glance suggest. Largely because of its style, but also because of Irigaray's position as a theorist of difference and as a theorist of the feminine as a form of difference which *accommodates* difference, *Marine Lover* is a very rich and pertinent text for our purposes. As such, the first chapter of this project will spend considerable time putting *Marine Lover* in conversation with the objects of its affection (namely, Nietzsche) in order to unearth the complex role of the feminine in Nietzsche's oeuvre.

This is not to say that Irigaray's text will have much more weight in this first chapter than Nietzsche's *Gay Science* (the pivotal source for many of the major concepts studied in my thesis). Rather, *Marine Lover* will be used chiefly to elucidate that which goes unspoken in Nietzsche's oeuvre and work through what has often been left under-analyzed by interpreters, perhaps because the passages dealing with woman are not studied as part of a larger whole. To put it differently, *Marine Lover* will act in this thesis as the “other” necessary and irreducible to

¹³ Ansell-Pearson p. 132. Our emphasis.

Nietzsche's thought. Indeed, it is the wager of this thesis that Irigaray's *Marine Lover* can be, and in fact ought to be, used to fruitfully elicit a fuller (though never "complete") picture of the feminine in Nietzsche. Much attention will be paid, for instance, to the fragmented nature of Irigaray's text, emblematic of the fact that for its author, the feminine is never "simply" one, but rather, as Rachel Jones has noted, is always "plural, fluid, more than one". This, for Jones, "does not mean 'lacking unity', if by this we mean being formless and indistinct. Rather, it means rethinking a notion of unity to allow for the ways in which distinct identities can be shaped by relations between two (or more) who are neither the same nor completely separable."¹⁴ Irigaray's text will provide a framework through which to understand the feminine in Nietzsche, articulated *by* a woman and *as* a woman.¹⁵ This stands in distinction to, for example, Jacques Derrida's own work on Nietzsche and his style (most notably here that put forward in *Spurs*). While *Spurs* is a major formative text on the subject of the feminine in Nietzsche's work, Derrida's own gendered position (like Nietzsche's) limits the degree to which his articulation of the feminine can be understood *as* feminine. In the case of Irigaray's work, the issue of appropriation is largely bypassed. But while Irigaray's work does help us evade that issue, essentialism arises as a distinct problem on the basis of some of the images employed by both Nietzsche and Irigaray.¹⁶ My project will treat the issue of essentialism as a boundary to be overcome and transcended within the understanding of woman and of the feminine it develops.

It is Kelly Oliver, author of *Womanizing Nietzsche* (1995) who articulates the positionality of the speaker as a key site of possible appropriation in philosophical writing on the

¹⁴ Rachel Jones, *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy*. (Polity, 2011) 169.

¹⁵ This distinction is stressed by Kelly Oliver as it pertains to Derrida in the chapter "The Question of Appropriation" from Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche* (Routledge, 1995) 58-82.

¹⁶ The figure of Baubo as used by Nietzsche and the image of the two lips as used by Irigaray, both images factor significantly into the first chapter of the thesis.

feminine.¹⁷ Her articulation of this problem suggests that philosophers who speak *about* woman that cannot speak *as* woman can end up speaking *for* or *over* woman in the process. However, Oliver utilizes this distinction in a way that my project aims to problematize. In my view, her delineation ends up essentializing differing positions as oppositional categories, rather than grasping the fluidifying force that the Nietzschean feminine unleashes upon the immutability of difference, a fixing that is in fact counter to the living affirmation that is difference itself (*qua* woman). In particular, Oliver claims that Irigaray elevates woman to a pre-metaphysical position in exactly the same way Heidegger does with Being.¹⁸ In response to this claim, we will attend to the view of the likes of Simone de Beauvoir, to the effect that "one is not born, but becomes a woman".¹⁹ With an understanding of sex and gender as social categories, and with the help of Irigaray as a theorist of *sexual* (as distinct from sex) difference, it will be possible to understand woman, in and with Nietzsche, as a process of becoming, an articulation of *difference*—and *not as identity before anything else*. Difference is key both to Nietzsche's and to Irigaray's thought, and to suggest that the latter views woman as a fixed category stands in need of greater analytical scrutiny.²⁰ It is this greater scrutiny that will allow me to draw out of Irigaray's reading of Nietzsche something that can be of great relevance for contemporary feminist emancipatory projects. As we will see, Luce Irigaray's relationship to the essence of woman is a strategic one; she invokes essences in order to provide epistemological means *to their overcoming* in much the same way Nietzsche does. This overcoming gestures necessarily toward emancipation, but it can

¹⁷ See n. 15

¹⁸ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the "feminine"*, p. 106.

¹⁹ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. Vintage, 2011.) Book II Ch. 1.

²⁰ Naomi Schor's essay "This Essentialism Which Is Not One" (in *Bad Objects: Essays Popular and Unpopular* (Duke UP, 1995), as well as the introduction to Rachel Jones' *Irigaray: Towards a Sexuate Philosophy* address charges of essentialism in her work.

only do so after having confronted woman's "essence" as an enforced category, and after having played with the limits of that category in order to create new ways of relating to each other and new values therein.

Literature Review and Research Questions

A thesis pursuing the role of woman within Nietzsche's work must necessarily consider the basis on which the concept and 'issue' of woman has been included, or excluded, from Nietzsche scholarship. This thesis must thus begin with an explication of the role of woman in order to situate both nihilism and the Overman relative to it, and to take the 'lessons of woman' beyond the limits of 'woman'. For this purpose, I will draw chiefly on secondary sources that focus on the role of the feminine and of difference. Within Nietzsche scholarship, Ellen Mortensen's *The Feminine and Nihilism* is perhaps the most significant work considering both nihilism and the Overman within Nietzsche's thought, and it does so in explicit relationship to Irigaray's *Marine Lover*. Unfortunately, the heavy imprint of Heidegger's lectures in the content and interpretative lens of the work renders Mortensen's book incommensurable with my own project of interpreting Nietzsche as a philosopher of difference and of the affirmation of life (to put it most simply, I think Heideggerian philosophy is simply irreconcilable with the celebration of difference). Additionally, Mortensen's book falters in uniting Heidegger with the feminine given that the latter's own lectures fail completely to discuss the role of woman in Nietzsche's thought. Indeed, while Heidegger's writings on Nietzsche are plentiful, little of their content deals with the concepts of nihilism or the Overman *as they relate to woman*. As Derrida has rightly noted, Heidegger avoids the question of woman altogether in his discussions of Nietzsche (and perhaps this is no great surprise).²¹ Beyond his omission of woman (and his troubling

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (trans. Barbara Harlow. U of Chicago, 1979), p. 85.

politics), Heidegger's view that Nietzsche's eternal return is a return *of the same* is once again incompatible with this project. In short, this thesis can be seen—if implicitly—as contributing towards moving Nietzsche scholarship away from its persistent, and in my opinion unfruitful, focus on Heideggerian interpretations of Nietzsche. And in its stead, my thesis hopes to revitalize, in modest ways, Nietzsche scholarship by shedding new light on his discussion of womanhood. As such, this project can be understood as a retrieval of his philosophy in the service of a *contemporary* (political) project of affirming *difference*.

Now, just to be clear: interpreters who have worked on nihilism in Nietzsche's work and who have objected to the long shadow left by Heidegger's lectures are not necessarily or uniformly *more* feminist in their orientation. But I will privilege sources that have attempted to tie nihilism to concepts like the Overman or the eternal return (and, in a few rare cases, to woman). Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche & Philosophy* will be offered as a key and most helpful interpretative source that does not depend on Heidegger to understand Nietzsche's work on nihilism and the Overman. Most significantly for our purposes, Deleuze interprets Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return as an eternal return *of difference*.²² As we will see, Deleuze's reading frees up interpretative space or opens up interpretative possibilities regarding the role of woman, both in Nietzsche's work and in other sources that will be important to our thesis.

In addition to Deleuze and Oliver, another important source on which my project will be built needs to be mentioned here. Because Irigaray's *Marine Lover* does not deal explicitly with the problem of nihilism, I propose to 'complement' Irigaray's work with that of Alenka Zupančič's *The Shortest Shadow* in our discussion of nihilism.²³ As I hope to show, Zupančič's

²² For more, see Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 220 n. 32.

²³ Though both Zupančič and Irigaray work within the discipline of psychoanalysis, this project will not attempt to read Nietzsche as commensurable with the history of that discipline. Rather, I affirm that both Nietzsche's work on language and values contains a meaningful similarity to the psychoanalytic concept of the Symbolic realm

rendering of the sites at which dichotomies collapse as fundamentally Nietzschean sites of possibility lends itself quite well to an Irigarayan project that seeks out the limits of dichotomies in order to understand difference.²⁴

One of the important things what I would like to underscore here about the secondary literature is that when the figure of the Overman is connected explicitly to the role of the feminine in Nietzsche scholarship, it is typically not seen as a productive figure in its own right. In fact, Irigaray's work in *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* is critical of the Overman; Irigaray charges it with being a means to reclaim one's own birth in order to *separate* oneself from the feminine or maternal, but also from life itself.²⁵ Similarly, the scholar Ruth Burch proposes a fairly unsympathetic reading of the Overman in her essay on nihilism on the basis of what she sees as its masculine orientation, emblematic in her view of a privileging of the masculine more generally within Nietzsche's thought.²⁶ My thesis will call for a nuancing of these overly critical perspectives on the ties between the Overman and the feminine.

In chapter two, a discussion of difference and of its relationship to nihilism will allow us to question the *universality* of nihilism as a human condition. The main question that will inform much of our discussion here will be: what are the stakes involved in understanding nihilism as something which may affect diverse groups differently, particularly when the group that has historically spent the most time theorizing it has been the most privileged (white, male, European)?

(posited within Lacanian psychoanalysis as existing alongside Real and Imaginary realms), and that Nietzsche's discussion of the aforementioned topics, which eventually culminate in what he hopes to be a "transvaluation of all values" can benefit from a dialogue with the psychoanalytic discussion of that Symbolic realm.

²⁴ In fact, Alenka Zupančič has recently published a book, *What is Sex?* (MIT Press, 2017), that posits sexuality as the point that unites ontology and epistemology at the point of the unconscious, further linking her project to those of an Irigarayan feminism, even if that book lies outside the scope afforded by the size of my own project.

²⁵ Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* pgs. 18, 52.

²⁶ Ruth Burch, "On Nietzsche's European Nihilism" (*European Review* 22.02, 2014: 196-208) p. 204

The third chapter will then take the form of a close interpretation of passages within *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. To link this last chapter up to the previous ones, we will pay particular attention to, first, woman's role in the text and, second, to the connections between man and his relationship to nihilism. Both of these problématiques will be mobilized in order to articulate a reading of the Overman as a positive Nietzschean figure premised on difference. What will become quite clear here is that the Overman (an important figure within Nietzsche's thought, from the middle period onward, alongside the eternal return) cannot be put aside if one wishes to obtain any comprehensive reading of Nietzsche's thought. A key, if modest, contribution of this thesis lies precisely here: in the interpretation of the Overman as a figure linked most closely to a celebration of difference, and as such, a figure that calls into question all fascist and proto-fascist appropriations.

A few words on methodology: Nietzsche's texts, Nietzsche's style

Nietzsche's work has often been broken into three periods both by himself and by various scholars.²⁷ This project's scope falls at the very beginning of what Thomas H. Brobjer identifies as Nietzsche's late period in his intellectual biography, *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context*. Brobjer's text describes Nietzsche's break from positivism as the end of the middle period (which began with Nietzsche's "first" articulation of the eternal return in *The Gay Science*, followed by the more mature version of it that accompanied the figure of the Overman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). The first edition of *The Gay Science* was published in 1882, with the first

²⁷ Thomas H. Brobjer addresses the ubiquity of this periodization in his book *Nietzsche's Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (U of Illinois, 2008.). On page 90, he writes: "Nietzsche's thinking is often divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. Nietzsche himself divided it that way. The break between the middle, more positivistic period and the late period occurred in 1881-82, with the discovery of the idea of eternal recurrence (in August 1881) and came to be publicly expressed in the last section of the fourth book of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882) and then much more intensively in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85)." On the same page he situates Nietzsche's first break as occurring between 1875-76.

two parts of *Zarathustra* coming in 1883, and its four-part completion in 1885. The expanded edition of *The Gay Science*, now standard, was not published until 1887, following *Beyond Good and Evil* and new prefaces to earlier works including *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886), *Daybreak* (1886), and *Human, All Too Human* (1886). Thus, *The Gay Science* can be seen as a text that was carefully thought of and often revisited by Nietzsche. Our decision to focus mostly on works from the late-middle period is partially informed by the fact that it is there that Nietzsche has proposed much of his reflection on woman.

Section 285 of *The Gay Science*, in particular, marks the first mention of the eternal return within Nietzsche's oeuvre, phrasing it at that point merely (and somewhat enigmatically) as "the eternal return of war and peace". Later, in section 341 of the same work, he expands on the notion, phrasing it as a hypothetical question. Most interestingly, it is here described as an exercise that ends ultimately in affirmation: "how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" The next aphorism introduces Zarathustra, and it originally stood at the end of *The Gay Science* until Book Five was added.²⁸ Later in the thesis, we will obviously return to Nietzsche's claims about the eternal return.

But for now, a few words about style are necessary. The aphoristic style of *The Gay Science* could be said to allow the reader to interpret concepts important to Nietzsche in digestible fragments (to 'ruminate' on them indeed), within contexts that elucidate the concepts without limiting (or 'enclosing') them from future rumination. The more literary (or biblical) style of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* presents many of the same ideas as *The Gay Science*, but does so in a more directed way (and in that sense, it could be said to offer us a more limited type of

²⁸ This fact is important because the transition from the end of Book Four to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* marks a sustained investigation within his thought, whereas Book Five departs somewhat from these themes.

reflection, though this limitation is in my view productive). Indeed, the aphoristic style of *The Gay Science* leaves more to interpretation, allowing the reader to enter and exit where they wish, whereas *Zarathustra* is a far less ‘porous’ text. Instead, much like a parable, there is in *Zarathustra* some level of the reader’s own interpretation (the text’s ‘porosity’) preserved, but the text still guides the reader toward certain points alongside its titular prophet (it is worth noting the text’s stylistic peculiarity among Nietzsche’s other texts, which tend less, in many respects, toward actively guiding the reader).

Nietzsche’s earlier texts, though not incommensurate with the middle and later periods, do not make reference to the figure of the Overman nor to nihilism (or at least, do not include anything close to the mature discussions provided in the later writing). The late texts do deal with both nihilism and the Overman; however, their mentions of woman veer far enough into a misogynist polemic that the three concepts no longer carry equal importance and are not looked at with a similar Nietzschean ‘rigour’ (if that term can be used for Nietzsche). Because this project takes the role of woman within Nietzsche’s work as central and especially when read alongside the Overman and the eternal return, I am choosing to largely omit the texts written after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in the interest of remaining as true to the inter-relationality of these concepts as possible (a claim I will better sustain in the thesis itself). By focusing almost exclusively on the later part of the middle period, this project hopes to best articulate the links between woman, the Overman, and the eternal return—since it will employ the writings in which they were most important to his thinking. My twofold aim here will be to underscore both the coherence and richness of his thought in that period: a richness that could be placed in the service (if modestly) of a counter-fascist, feminist politics.

An Overman moves beyond, a Superman stands atop

This thesis picks up on our presently growing unease with the universality of the category “man” and moves towards both feminist and post-human futures. (Insofar as human remains a synonym of man it is vulnerable to the same fragility.) I raise the problem of nihilism and of its universality in order to discover avenues of escape from this problem, wherein those who are without refuge from our current (and often hostile) political climate are left only with the problem of an apparent absence of meaning. The interpretation of nihilism developed within the thesis will be used, in part, to better understand the mechanics of solidarity at the level of accountability and care for others without relying on concepts of human rights or equality in a universalizing sense. Instead, *this thesis will ground its ideas about solidarity and the importance of accountability in the very acknowledgment of difference* and further, posit *difference as the basis for a shared commitment to personal growth*. This overarching argument will emerge primarily towards the end of the thesis, in our concluding section on the Overman.

My choice to translate *Übermensch* as Overman, as opposed to Superman, is thus purposeful here in this thesis, as it recognizes Nietzsche’s figure as one that can occur only after “man”, his history and his self-imposed limits are overcome by men themselves as well as by those excluded from the category. This translation of the prefix “*Über-*” rejects the idea that the Overman could be an attainable goal by a currently-living human being; rather it sees the Overman as a *transcendence of the categories* that render its existence necessary. Still, I maintain throughout this investigation the premise that translating the German *mensch* as referring to men (or to the masculine directly) is both incorrect and misleading. I will rather ask: when Nietzsche makes reference to “humanity”, who is he *really* speaking about? The history of philosophy that Nietzsche repeatedly criticizes, the history of science as a discipline with a set

epistemological method and his own political climate: these were all primarily the products of men, or of their interests.

With this in mind, and as will be further clarified in the body of the thesis, I believe that it is possible to understand many of Nietzsche's criticisms "of women" as criticisms implicitly directed to German *men* of that time. Indeed, Nietzsche's criticisms of gender are more typically meant to be criticisms of the *enforcing* of gender, rather than criticisms of those shaped by its confines. The categories reified in language as universal, natural or inevitable have been articulated as such by a specific subset of people who have subsequently enforced that articulation on the rest of the population. If truth is, for Nietzsche, a creative process, universality and inevitability (as they pertain to nihilism, but also to gender and structures of society more generally) are a *result* of enforcement rather than an intrinsic property of those life- and difference-denying laws or ideas. Thus, a Nietzschean account of the overcoming of nihilism must view Nietzsche's legacy as fundamentally creative, and view it in the interests of the creation of a better world. The deconstruction of the concepts that Nietzsche's difference-fearing fans gravitate towards the most calls for an alternative to be presented; this is the role to be played by 'woman' within the thesis. Woman will act, indeed, as Nietzsche's perceived other.

Our first chapter will expand on the concept of woman (and by extension women and the feminine) as it appears in *The Gay Science* and work its way toward an understanding of Nietzsche's use of woman that could eventually be applied in equal measure to his other works (though such a thoroughgoing application is far beyond the scope of my own project). This expansion or broadening of Nietzsche will rely on Irigaray's *Marine Lover* to articulate its parameters, with my own interpretation running between Irigaray and Nietzsche. The next chapter will offer an interpretation of nihilism as it pertains to difference; and here I will link up

our reflections to the figure of woman (as described in the first chapter). More specifically, chapter two will delineate the different forms of nihilism that Nietzsche identifies, and will situate them in relation to the problem of difference. It will also give some context to the problem of nihilism and its link to Nietzsche's eternal return. This mapping out of nihilism is important for the purpose of providing a theoretical basis for the *overcoming* of nihilism, which is necessary for the analysis of the final chapter.

This third and final chapter will consist of a close reading of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, its use of the figure of woman, its criticisms of man, men and their inventions. It will close on a lengthy figuration of the Overman as embodying the overcoming of these human, all too human shortcomings. I maintain that a positive articulation of the Overman within a feminist Nietzschean framework could help us transcend some of the more confounding aspects of Nietzsche scholarship, and that this feminist theorizing remains in the spirit of Nietzsche's idea of truth as a creative process and of his conception of the Overman as a *creative* figure. This may, in turn, offer a few timely insights for feminist and pluralist emancipatory politics.

Chapter 1: Woman in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* through Irigaray's *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*

Speaking about 'the feminine' as a concept in its own right is immensely difficult; in fact, the main truth generally associated with the subject is that it is a concept which cannot be simply reduced to a singular definition. This irreducibility is especially exemplified in Nietzsche's approach to the feminine. Nietzsche's philosophy saw the feminine, or the figure of woman, as important enough to write at some length about, particularly within *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*. The fact that these texts make significant and numerous references to woman, outside of a politico-philosophical reflection on her rights or without a natural-philosophical description on the reasons for her difference(s), makes these texts something of a rarity within the continental philosophical tradition. And it is also certainly what makes them an interesting object of study.

Now, this is not to say that everything Nietzsche has to say about woman, or about the feminine, is *good* (but to expect only "good" things from a Nietzschean account does seem to constitute, at some level, an inappropriate request²⁹). Nietzsche scholarship, perhaps as a result of the variety of statements Nietzsche makes about women, remains fairly divided about the significance of woman. There is one camp that either tends to ignore references to woman altogether or, when writing about woman, draws particularly from the misogynist passages in order to make claims about Nietzsche's sexism.³⁰ There is another camp that speaks almost

²⁹ Nietzsche's moral philosophy can be at least partially summarized by the title of his book *Beyond Good and Evil* as representative of his focus on the reasoning *behind our values* rather than the categories of "good" and "evil" themselves.

³⁰ The sources that ignore woman altogether are not of particular relevance to this project, however Bernard Reginster's *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism* (Harvard UP, 2008.) maintains some relevance despite woman's exclusion. Of those that cite overtly misogynist passages, Ofelia Schutte's *Nietzsche Without Masks* (U of Chicago, 1986.) is significant in its attempt to center a reading of Nietzsche on his use of irony, necessarily including woman without viewing her as a site of theorizing in her own right.

exclusively of the *positive* role of the feminine within Nietzsche's thought.³¹ The former camp is not limited to, but is largely consistent with, Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche, whereas the latter camp tends to build more on Derrida's work (and particularly his work on Nietzsche and style).

Irigaray's text, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, does not really fit well in either of these camps or traditions. Irigaray, in her philosophical works, teases out the ways that philosophers have historically—and individually—read and confused their particular experiences of life for absolute or *universal* human conditions. Irigaray's criticisms of the history of philosophy are grounded in the physical world in order to reaffirm philosophy's relation to the material (and to difference). As such, her criticisms of philosophers are often grounded in the elements—fire, air, water, earth: she sees these forces as subjugated forms of knowledge in relation to Greek thought, a serious omission throughout the history of the discipline. Irigaray's reflections on the history of philosophy begin (as they so often do in other feminist re-readings of the canon) with Plato, who she argues turns the process of pregnancy and birthing on its head.³² Her critical re-reading and critique then proceeds forward in time to reach Nietzsche and Heidegger (via *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* and *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*³³). It is important to note here that she identifies in these two authors a *different* omission or blind spot: Heidegger has forgotten air, whereas Nietzsche, in all his great heights,

³¹ This second camp consists mostly of the body of scholarship centered on Jacques Derrida's work *Spurs*, and whose authors are often explicitly feminist. While authors like Frances Nesbitt-Oppel (in *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*), Kelly Oliver, Ellen Mortensen and Keith Ansell-Pearson focus on the positive role, the troublesome aspects of Nietzsche's writings on woman are not ignored but rather integrated through critique into the greater project.

³² Luce Irigaray, "Hystera" in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (Cornell UP, 1996).

³³ For a survey of Irigaray's criticisms of philosophers through history, see Tina Chanter's *Ethics of Eros*. (Routledge, 1995.)

embodies primarily a fear of water.³⁴ For Irigaray, this fear is reflected in Nietzsche's belief that man is a "bridge" that spans between nature and the Overman, over a body of water that Irigaray identifies with the feminine. (We will return to these ideas toward the end of our discussion of the feminine.)

The early sections of *Marine Lover* situate the position of woman (or of the feminine) against Nietzsche, through what she frames as the speech of the feminine 'other' (which particularly deals with Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*). Now, we know that Nietzsche refers occasionally to specific women in his work: Ariadne is a major example, but also the figures of Baubo, Demeter, and Persephone. Irigaray, in line with the title of her book, tends to use the terms pertaining to woman and the feminine with a certain fluidity. These terms will be used somewhat interchangeably in this thesis as well; though they certainly all have a specific referent, a meaningful conversation about the feminine must be able to move confidently between the 'the feminine', 'woman', and 'women'. I will nevertheless first provide separate definitions of each term, moving us slowly towards a conceptual understanding of their metonymic relation. 'Woman' will refer to the abstracted subject of sexual (or sexuate) difference as discrete from man: the 'other' of man in many instances, but not limited to that role in our study. 'Women', on the other hand, will describe the concrete socio-historical class of people differentiated from men largely on the basis of their reproductive role in an extension to the social sphere. Finally, 'the feminine' will refer to a category of epistemological and ontological position(s) associated with both woman and women, but that is not limited to the same delineations produced by sociological or political discourses. That the contents of "the

³⁴ Irigaray has also identified a forgetting of air in Nietzsche, particularly in her 2016 essay "Overcoming Nihilism Through Nietzsche's Teachings" (*Nietzsche Als Kritiker Und Denker Der Transformation*. By Helmut Heit and Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir. De Gruyter, 2016. pgs. 15-24),

feminine” are so difficult to speak about concretely without reduction to essentialism underscores in my view the need for some fluidity or exchangeability between terms. This fluidity is needed in order to *move between* categories that have historically been bound by a logocentric commitment to essences, and at the same time to highlight the ways in which this category is, nonetheless, not limited by that essentialism. As we will see, Irigaray’s (and Nietzsche’s) choice to place the voice of the feminine in different figures from Greek mythology, binds their respective myths and narratives, in all their complexity, to an ever-expanding category of the feminine.

The chapter “Veiled Lips” in *Marine Lover* builds on the ideas advanced in the amorous supplement of Irigaray’s preceding chapter, “Speaking of Immemorial Waters”. And what it builds toward is a more systematic articulation of the role the feminine plays within Nietzsche’s text: what is actually *said* when Nietzsche talks about woman. “Veiled Lips” limits its analysis primarily to *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (and briefly considers the echoes of those ideas that appear in other texts), likely because Irigaray’s articulation of the feminine is bound so closely to the other concepts Nietzsche develops in those works (e.g. the eternal return and the figure of the Overman). My examination of the discussion between Irigaray’s “Veiled Lips” and *The Gay Science* will posit Irigaray as speaking for woman as a thinker who has spent her lifetime finding ways to *parler femme*.³⁵ What I wish to demonstrate is that *Marine Lover* is written in such a way that that the two texts are able to speak *together* toward a shared conception of the feminine (with differences, though irreducible, not irreconcilable)—a shared conception that bridges the abyss described by both Nietzsche and Irigaray. The use of Irigaray’s

³⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Cornell UP, 1985).

text alongside Nietzsche's can, additionally, help us navigate a problem with Nietzsche's conception of the feminine identified within the secondary literature.

Marine Lover makes no attempt to speak over or for Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*. Instead, it creates a point of reference grounded in woman herself to contextualize the way Nietzsche's passages speak *about* woman, and to reveal the depths of the women Nietzsche writes about, in a voice closer to their own. The concepts Irigaray makes use of are commensurable with Derrida's treatment of the feminine in *Spurs*, and as such, Derrida's touchstone work will implicitly inform some of our discussion in this thesis. Nonetheless, I wish to argue that while both Derrida and Nietzsche make many correct and insightful claims about the feminine, it is only Irigaray's work—a powerful reflection on 'the feminine' and on its irreducible difference proposed *by* a woman who speaks *as* a woman – that can resolve the moments of aporia reached by both of these men (two authors who have attempted to treat the feminine as a philosophical question).

Before the content of both Nietzsche's and Irigaray's works are introduced, a few words on Irigaray and her own methods are necessary, as they concern the methodology employed in this chapter and in the thesis overall. As is well-known, Irigaray's scholarship began in psychoanalysis, specifically in the Lacanian school. Her focus on the feminine in her thesis (*Speculum of the Other Woman*) led to her losing her position at the University of Vincennes at the behest of Lacan. Nevertheless, despite this setback, models of psychoanalysis explicated through sexual (or sexual) difference, with a primary focus on the feminine, would remain central to her work in the decades to follow. Indeed, Irigaray's focus on sexual (or sexual) difference remained central as she moved more boldly from psychoanalysis into philosophy. Her viewing "the history of ideas" as possessing a historically-specific psyche with its own set of

omissions likely informed that shift in her oeuvre. Then, there was a subsequent movement from that critique of strictly philosophical methods towards a broader inquiry into the affirmation of life: a movement that is certainly very evident in Irigaray's most recent works.³⁶

Nietzsche, dying before the turn of the 20th century, managed to just miss the emergence of psychoanalysis as a discipline, largely organized around the figure of Sigmund Freud. While many scholars have proposed to read Nietzsche psychoanalytically over the years³⁷, a strict adherence to traditional psychoanalysis is not the direction this project wishes to take. Part of the reason for this is that though Irigaray is a trained psychoanalyst, her focus on the feminine is deeply unorthodox within that tradition. Thus, in the context of this chapter, the role of psychoanalysis will not so much be to read Nietzsche 'through' a psychoanalytic paradigm. Rather, this chapter will seek to identify the role that the feminine plays in Nietzsche, through a consideration of its role in the symbolic order when he discusses woman in relation to truth and language. The areas of *Marine Lover* this chapter will focus on deal in some detail with issues pertaining to the symbolic order, which will be understood for our purposes as the realm of intelligibility and valuation based in signs. Our understanding of the symbolic order is notably distinct from and placed in opposition to the Lacanian view, which associates the symbolic order more closely with the unconscious. More specifically, the following chapter will investigate the

³⁶ See, most notably, Irigaray & Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (Columbia UP, 2016) and Irigaray, *To be Born* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³⁷ Most importantly for our purposes, Alenka Zupančič's *The Shortest Shadow* (MIT, 2003). Many of the essays in Peter Burgard's *Nietzsche and the Feminine* (U of Virginia, 1994) take a psychoanalytic approach, particularly the essays by Sarah Kofman, Clayton Koelb, and Laurence A. Rickels. Kofman's essay in particular, "A Fantastical Genealogy: Nietzsche's Family Romance" places what I believe to be undue importance on Nietzsche's family relationships in an effort to pathologize his insights--a project incommensurable with my own in this thesis.

symbolic economy—the way particular intelligible signs are given value³⁸ in Nietzsche, as he articulates (or fails to articulate) them.

“If truth is a woman...”

Nietzsche states in his preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science* that if truth is a woman her name is “perhaps—to speak Greek—Baubo”.³⁹ The explanatory footnote added by Walter Kaufmann in his translation describes Baubo, citing here from the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, as “A primitive and obscene female demon [...] originally a personification of the female genitals”.⁴⁰ This definition is, in a sense, more crass than the actions of Baubo herself within the myth, and is certainly incomplete with regard to formulating what Nietzsche means here (and elsewhere) by “truth”. Baubo—also called Iambe, daughter of the god Pan and the mortal Echo—is said to have brought a disguised Demeter out of mourning. She was said to have done this either by joking with the goddess, or by lifting up her skirts at the goddess, who erupted into laughter at the sight of what was underneath.⁴¹ The goddess Demeter, mother of

³⁸ Jean-Joseph Goux speaks about symbolic economies as going beyond the “simple *substitution* of one thing for another [...] There must be an investment of drive and, in addition, the repression of one of the terms of equivalence, the one that unconsciously mobilizes all energy through a transference of investment from one representation to another representation.” He says that the symbol “is a visible substitute that replaces something hidden, something that is not presentable.” Goux argues that in going beyond simple substitution, historical idealist modes of production have moved towards a general equivalent of all forms. It is a rejection and overcoming of this belief (in a general equivalent as natural, necessary, or “good”) through the feminine that this chapter will investigate. *Symbolic Economies* (trans. Jennifer Gage. Cornell UP, 2016.) p. 124-128.

³⁹ *The Gay Science* p. 38

This thesis will generally reference Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* using the numbers of its aphorisms, but as this reference comes at the end of the preface to the second edition, I have provided the page number as it appears in Walter Kaufmann’s translation (Vintage, 1974).

It is also worth noting here that Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* begins with the same supposition, though he does not ascribe a name to truth in that work. He instead remarks in the preface, “Are there not grounds for suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman’s heart? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won--and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. *If* it is left standing at all!” (page 1, Vintage 1989).

⁴⁰ *ibid* n.8

⁴¹ There is little consensus about what the contents beneath Baubo’s skirt actually *are*, some versions of the myth (and most of her artistic portrayals) suggest a face, while others suggest genitalia—but even in these accounts a

Persephone, is a goddess associated with fertility and, by extension, agriculture and harvest. Both Demeter and Persephone are of crucial importance to Irigaray's understanding of Nietzsche, both playing a key role in "Veiled Lips". While Nietzsche's earlier works are more directly philological than *The Gay Science* or *Zarathustra*, his understanding of Greek myth nevertheless permeates and shapes his later work as well. Knowing this, it would be a mistake to assume he meant nothing but crudeness by his reference to Baubo, or at least crudeness *as such*.

Associating the truth of woman with the stories of Baubo, Demeter, and Persephone could perhaps be seen, at first glance, as a reduction of the feminine to the (vulgar) material. While Irigaray does level this type of criticism at Nietzsche elsewhere⁴², here in 'Veiled Lips' she allows the stories of Demeter and Persephone to partially guide her examination, and takes both of these stories seriously in her project of challenging woman's essence. To better understand the relationship between woman and truth in Nietzsche, it may be helpful here to look more closely at Irigaray's complex resort to this myth.

Since Baubo is the figure that brings Demeter out of mourning, we must begin with the story of her loss; and this is precisely Irigaray's focus in her analysis of the figure of Persephone (referred to interchangeably as Kore⁴³). Persephone as a young girl is taken away from her mother through the conspiring of two male gods, Hermes and Hades. Hades rules the underworld and is heavily associated with death, while Hermes is a master of tricks and deception (not far

discrete morphology is not agreed upon. Neoklis A Georgopoulos, George A Vagenaki, and Apostolos L Pierris discuss this debate in "Baubo, A Case of Ambiguous Genitalia in the Eleusinian Mysteries," particularly page 71. (in *HORMONES* 2003, 2(1):72-75). As the main essay on the figure of Baubo in Nietzsche, Sarah Kofman's "Baubo: Theoretical Perversion and Fetishism" identifies the contents of Baubo's skirt as a drawing of the face of Dionysus (see p. 44 in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche* ed. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall).

⁴² "Speaking of Immemorial Waters" takes the form of Irigaray showing the great depths of the feminine which Nietzsche seems to deny in a reading of woman (and her truth) as purely material. This analysis carries through "Veiled Lips", and though the myth of Demeter and Persephone appears at the beginning of our analysis here, it comes toward the end of Irigaray's chapter.

⁴³ In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray speaks of Kore as the girl and Persephone as the woman.

from Dionysus) who presides over the crossing of boundaries, notably between earth and the underworld. For Irigaray, Persephone represents the role woman plays in the exchange between men, and further, between the world of the living and the dead. Woman's role in exchange between men, paradoxically, leaves her otherwise unseen—a *symbolon*.⁴⁴ Persephone, torn from her mother: the bond between women is sacrificed so that men may conduct their business as usual. Irigaray writes,

This is the way with exchanges among man/men. Take possession, make use of, use up. With excess spoiling the object. The bonus that overturns value: virginity. Which—among man/men—is nothing more than the dissimulation of the product and its testing. Really taken away from nature is: the mother's daughter, and the nearness they shared. Man makes his approach, but factitiously, because of this rape and the gap opened up between the women. He transforms the need or the desire of nearness into an exchange-value wrapping.⁴⁵

Persephone's innocence, a virtue ascribed to woman, becomes a curse when paired with curiosity. Innocence is not a virtue granted permanence for most, nor is it in this instance granted to Persephone. But she remains a symbol of it, the narcissus flower and the pomegranate seed representing self-love and fertility—the trap set for her that ensures her downfall. Her downfall and her fate in the myth is to be thrust into another world, another symbolic order. That symbolic order is the order of man/men.

If Irigaray's use of Persephone is seen only as an attempt to draw lessons from a myth that concerns only a short reference to Baubo within the introduction to *The Gay Science*, it may seem like a stretch. But Persephone's relevance to a discussion of valuation, particularly the valuation of woman among men, *is* actually precedented elsewhere within Nietzsche's oeuvre. Nietzsche mentions Persephone directly in his earlier writing (that is, before the explicit mentions of the eternal return that emerged in *Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science*). In *Daybreak*,

⁴⁴ Symbolon were items used to mark a transaction between parties in Ancient Greece, they are defined by H.G. Liddell and Robert Scott's *A Greek English Lexicon* (Oxford UP, 1935) as "halves or corresponding pieces of a coin, which the contracting parties broke between them, each keeping one piece."

⁴⁵ *Marine Lover* p. 113

for instance, within the context of a discussion of the tendency to think of reality in terms of pure chance, Nietzsche mentions Persephone. In this passage, Nietzsche is concerned more specifically with what he identifies as a tendency in men toward explaining *away* their own culpability in their use of discursive patterns like “reason” or “necessity”, which have their own material effects. This tendency, according to Nietzsche, arises in response to a confrontation with the absence of a God to give purpose to the world, and relies on a belief in a universe that functions on the basis of pure chance, as a cold and calculated game of probability. He finishes by positing the escape from this belief; “[t]o get out of this ‘perhaps’ one would have to have been already a guest in the underworld and beyond all surfaces, sat at Persephone’s table and played dice with the goddess herself.”⁴⁶ I mention this passage here because Irigaray addresses it directly in her discussion of Persephone. In her view, to play dice with the goddess herself is to confront the woman torn from her mother’s world as a girl, forced into the underworld by men. Her life, her innocence, irrelevant; covered up by her value in exchange, as decided upon by the economy of men. Irigaray insists that man must confront this woman, who grew and *became* in spite of this rupture—“Persephone knows all the plays”⁴⁷—and be able to defend, to her, the sheer ‘perhaps’ of that game. Though *Daybreak* is not our focus here, the nuance in the reading of this myth implicitly indicates that the truth of woman was one Nietzsche grappled with much earlier than just in the late-middle works. For Nietzsche, respite to that sheer ‘perhaps’ is something men run to for meaning, and something he condemns. For Persephone, on Irigaray’s view, that ‘perhaps’ is a veil that hides all intelligibility. The first step of the ‘truth of woman’ is, then, the acknowledgement of the symbolic order she encounters in the world, as a veil that

⁴⁶ *Daybreak* part 2 s.30

⁴⁷ *Marine Lover* 113-14.

covers her most intimate understanding. This veil separates the young woman from her mother within the myth, and in practice, it separates all women. But the myth, and Nietzsche's use of it, goes further than Persephone.

When Nietzsche makes reference to Baubo, it is *because* Baubo does not revel in the safety of veils (though Nietzsche does write at length about woman's mastery of veils and finery of all sorts⁴⁸). Woman's mastery is not born out of a love for the forms that finery takes. Indeed, I wish to advance instead here the idea that woman's mastery of veils emerges from an understanding of the function of decoration, though obfuscatory, in creating meaning and this first requires an understanding of the value of women themselves as symbolic between the hands of men, rather than women possessing some essential valuation. To put it another way: woman understands the rules of the game because she stands outside of it, and knows how to move indecipherably between the boundaries that constitute it. This is exemplified by Baubo, who acts in defiance of the rules both her and Demeter know so intimately, and who removes that finery—and it is this defiance that causes Demeter to laugh. Baubo reminds Demeter that, ultimately, though she is disconnected from her daughter, it is *only* by a veil.

Adriana Cavarero, an Italian philosopher and feminist theorist whose work, like Irigaray's, orients itself toward feminist critiques of the entire history of Philosophy (and as a result must also go back to "the beginning"), discusses the question of essentialism as it applies to the myth of Persephone, in a chapter of her *In Spite of Plato*. Cavarero argues that the role of the feminine in the myth serves to redirect the focus of life to birth rather than death; this focus

⁴⁸ Nietzsche's use of "finery" in particular to refer to woman occurs throughout *Beyond Good and Evil*, though it builds on many of the same sentiments present in *The Gay Science*. In aphorisms 127 and 130 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche alludes to woman's hatred of science as a fear of her finery being ripped away and then describes talent as a finery in order to suggest that the decrease of one's talents actually represents a decrease in one's being.

requires the category of sex to come into play, but as with Irigaray's strategic essentialism, it is brought about to escape the rigidity of the masculine symbolization, not to remain fixed on the feminine 'alternative'. In fact, Cavarero argues that the focus on birth and death as polar opposites is the *result* of a "masculine symbolic horizon", which feeds on "uneasy" dualisms, particularly between man and woman. These dualisms are forged in "the universalization of one sex reduc[ing] the other to a function, and throw[ing] all the negative categories upon it."⁴⁹ This distribution of attributes is common to many of the dualisms that were the objects of criticism in Nietzsche (e.g. good and bad), and which often get lazily super-imposed into each other along the same arbitrary axis. In the agricultural reading of the myth of Demeter, Persephone is returned to her mother in the spring and summer, and taken from her once again in the fall. While the seasons of spring and fall do bring birth and death respectively, tying the mythology of birth (in an agricultural sense) to woman solely on the basis of reproductive fertility perpetuates a reductive account of woman's essence as prescribed and enforced by man/men. Instead, articulating this cycle in terms of feminine sociality can, in my view, create the space necessary for essentialism to be deconstructed.

Put differently, my claim here is that in the concrete experience of women (more obviously in Nietzsche's time but also relevant in our own), there are few opportunities for women to gain respite from the heavy finery they wear. In becoming a master of the game men play, that is, the symbolic order premised largely on woman's role as 'other' and her exchangeability therein, 'woman' is separated from the lived realities of women. Further, individual women are separated from each other through the necessary ironic distance they must maintain relating to the category of their sex. And there is here a great cost in terms of (feminist)

⁴⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *In Spite of Plato* p. 70

solidarity—a problem we will return to later on in the thesis. The success of women is often predicated on their associations with men, their *willingness* to enter and play along with the symbolic economy, often at the expense of engaging in meaningful social relationships with other women. Moving to occupy this static category *does* move woman away from life and, to employ a Nietzschean dualism, toward death. But the affirmation of life seen in woman ought to be understood in the context of the social-familial relationship women have to one another. It is not the act of birth, but the act of loving and mothering that is significant here. It is not what man ascribes to woman as woman's, but what woman takes *for herself* when those restrictions are removed. Here it may be pertinent to consider Nietzsche's identification of the discrepancy between the will of men and the willingness of women as the "law of the sexes—truly, a hard law for women."⁵⁰ Where will is self-directed in that titular aphorism, willingness directs itself toward an other. Though Nietzsche's aphorism suggests this willingness is an orientation toward men, the myth of Demeter and Persephone shows an alternative that could move woman toward the affirmation of life. The "truth of woman," as such, would lie in her ability to disavow this law and move *beyond* it as it suits *her*. And certainly, it would also lie in her ability to remind other women *of* this truth, regardless of their biology. Herein lies Nietzsche's insight for feminist politics.

"To move *over* existence!"

That woman's success depends on her willingness to go along with the will of men would seem to contradict Nietzsche's idea of "woman and her action at a distance". This idea is explored in an aphorism that bears the same title, which likens woman to a ship sailing in the night. In the aphorism, the ship is seen as comforting in its pure and untouched silence, which

⁵⁰ *The Gay Science* s. 68

allows the man on shore to forget all the “noise” (Lärm) of his own existence.⁵¹ Compare this view with our conclusion from the previous section: namely, that woman’s perceived proximity to man comes through her discursive mastery of his world and of the way values are decided upon as well as a mastery of the veils of language which swaddle those values. This closeness is born out of necessity, not out of some attachment woman feels inherently to man. It could be said that the closeness is felt predominantly on her behalf, as a lack of proximity to oneself to accommodate another who remains self-directed, and this possibility is important to keep in mind.

In *The Gay Science*, what Nietzsche has to say about woman’s *actio in distans* speaks rather about the distance man perceives between himself and woman; this stems from what he knows (or can know) *about* woman, as the other, and how what he knows about woman can be reconciled with what he knows (or *can* know) about himself and about the world. Nietzsche first describes the ship as moving *over* existence (*Über das Dasein hinlaufen*), as it moves silently amidst the waves. He then posits that it is the distance of the ship that creates the *image* of this silence; in reality, a ship is bustling with noise, with the work required to keep the ship in motion. Within the world of men, woman seems peaceful and calm, she seems to move *over* existence as the ship does. Woman’s poise is, like the ship’s calm, an illusion—and a necessary illusion for man. “All great noise leads us to move happiness into some quiet distance.”⁵² Man makes of woman the quiet distance where happiness rests, in decided ignorance of the “much small and petty noise”⁵³ that takes place below her surface. In the previous aphorism, “We Artists,” Nietzsche alludes to man’s reaction to the noise of woman in the following: ““The

⁵¹ *The Gay Science* s. 60

⁵² *The Gay Science* s. 60

⁵³ *ibid*, s.60

human being under the skin” is for all lovers a horror and unthinkable, a blasphemy against God and love.”⁵⁴ “The human being under the skin” appeals here to viscera, blood and sinew, and all else that does not belong to woman’s form in art or in life, only (in the latter case) to what holds it up. Woman’s noise can be understood as that which man has ascribed to her (details more in keeping with biology than with the love or affirmation of life, and certainly with beauty). But in “We Artists,” in distinction to “Woman and Her Action at A Distance,” Nietzsche argues that this treatment, the making-scientific of things which strike man with awe, are unthinkable for “artists” like himself. Woman is, perhaps, the last remaining site of salvation for these men who wish for things to remain as appearance. The series of aphorisms that follow in Book Two deal with woman and with the idea that the cataloguing of “woman as such” is unbearable and undesirable, prefaced by the argument that this cataloguing reveals all the noise inherent in her.⁵⁵

On the surface, much of this reads as undeniably misogynist: it is, for one thing, denying the noise inherent to woman for man’s peace of mind while forcing her to confront, most intimately, the unending noise of man and men. But Nietzsche does not deny woman’s noise elsewhere. In fact, he appeals to this noise as a site of truth in the story of Baubo and subsequently alludes to it positively throughout *The Gay Science*. “Woman and her action at a distance” and “We Artists” do not claim simply that materiality, in its association with woman, is undesirable. They portray, instead, Nietzsche’s distrust of the discourses of the sciences, and of *language* as more violent and life-denying than the representations (and the forms of knowledge) provided by art—despite the latter’s necessary and in-built untruthfulness. It is in the

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, s. 59

⁵⁵ Though this discussion of “woman-as-such” takes place mainly in *Beyond Good and Evil*, sections 231 through 239 in particular, the ideas about woman’s participation in society are echoed from some of what Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, especially the passages that comprise our current discussion. The aphorisms in *Beyond Good and Evil* can therefore be read the same way as the discussion of woman in *The Gay Science*, however in isolation their discussion of woman reads as much more troubling.

untruthfulness of the artist that truths in the service of life are articulated; it is in the untruthfulness of scientific discourses that they are denied.

Now, what are the stakes involved in explaining woman scientifically, what is sacrificed in this account? And how does Nietzsche's "artistic" depiction of woman preserve what is otherwise sacrificed? It is first important to understand what Nietzsche means by artist: in Book Five he defines one as "falseness with a good conscience"⁵⁶ and argues this untruth is found in actors above other forms of artistry, present in lived and living and active art forms above those capturing a moment. The good conscience, in his view, comes from generations living with the necessity of acting. The question of the actor's choice in taking a role, though important, is of less immediate interest than the details of her embodiment of that role and its relation to the actor herself. Irigaray illuminates this idea in the following passage:

She does not set herself up as *one*, as a (single) female unit. She is not closed up or around one single truth or essence. The essence of a truth remains foreign to her. She neither has nor is a being. And she does not oppose a feminine truth to the masculine truth. Because this would once again amount to playing the—man's—game of castration. If the female sex takes place by embracing itself, by endlessly sharing and exchanging its lips, its edges, its borders, and their "content," as it ceaselessly becomes other, no stability of essence is proper to her.⁵⁷

This depicts simultaneously a straightforward account of Irigaray's concept of woman, and of the mode of knowing common to the feminine and to the actor. Woman's creativity, the skill that makes her a good actor, pertains to her ability to move between truths as they become meaningful for her. This skill is not limited to women, nor to one single idea of woman, but the identification of woman with this ability is found in both Nietzsche and Irigaray's oeuvres. Both authors view the abilities they align with the feminine as necessarily extending beyond the

⁵⁶ *Gay Science* s. 361. I will not spend too much time on the subject matter of this section; it is covered by Irigaray in "Veiled Lips", though perhaps insufficiently with regard to the tone Nietzsche takes with regard to women as well as Jews. The definition is important for allowing the explication of the discussion in Book Two alongside Irigaray's analysis, but this chapter will not attempt to salvage this particular section beyond its definition of acting.

⁵⁷ *Marine Lover* p. 86

category of ‘woman’ insofar as they serve life. And Nietzsche, in particular, talks explicitly about the pregnancy and birthing of ideas as a process also pertaining to men⁵⁸. Continuing from the previous quotation, Irigaray writes that “Motherhood is only one specific way to fulfill the operation: giving birth. Which is never one, unique, and definitive. Except from the male standpoint.”⁵⁹ Even ideas themselves, for Irigaray, do not “finish” upon their entrance into the world, but rather begin to engage with it in their own right. If they were to finish, birth would be, in effect, a death.

Now, the ability to move *over* existence is not a function of the ability to block out the noise of the outside world. Rather, it is the ability to move through the petty and small noise of existence without the need to focus or dwell on it, and without the need to listen for patterns in search of some universal Truth (which requires a movement of separation, or pulling apart). In my view, Nietzsche’s use of “noise” in this aphorism seems pertinent here, because of the distinction it posits to terms like “sound” or “music”. The latter terms signify discernible patterns whereas the former does not. But these patterns are only meaningful, however, if one presumes that a (“rational”) subject ought to seek out a pattern in whatever he hears.

To return to the above discussion of women describing themselves *as such*, woman’s effort to provide this ‘catalogued’ version of herself (to make her digestible for man) requires a bracketing-out of what woman “is”. Quite significantly, both Nietzsche and Irigaray point to the impossibility of this operation (woman’s irreducibility) as precisely what is worthwhile in the figure of woman. Science, as a process of separating patterns from the noise of the natural world,

⁵⁸ Nietzsche’s fascination with (male) pregnancy factors less into *The Gay Science* as it does into *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The role of fecundity is crucial to Nietzsche’s concept of the Overman, but its ties to motherhood in a strictly biological-reproductive sense have been criticized in the literature, including in Kelly Oliver’s *Womanizing Nietzsche*. See also Ruth Burch’s essay “On Nietzsche’s Concept of ‘European Nihilism’.” (*European Review* 22.02 (2014): 196-208.)

⁵⁹ *Marine Lover* p. 86

does not give birth to ideas but rather kills them, or castrates them, in order to hold them static. Language itself (at least, as it has hitherto existed) follows this same structure within Nietzsche's own conception, as he examined in his essay "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"⁶⁰ where he likens words to coins that have lost their embossing over time to become only pieces of metal. This Nietzschean understanding of language views it as a "mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms" which, over time, become robbed of their context.⁶¹ In this view, words come into existence on the basis of their utility within a given context, but their popular usage requires that original context to be cut away in an act of castration similar to the scientific operation.

Derrida brings up the issue of castration in his analysis of Nietzsche's woman in *Spurs*. More specifically, Derrida's object of concern is Nietzsche's insistence upon truth as "a veil covering a pudendum—an affair of decency and modesty, and nothing more!"⁶² This Nietzschean view of truth can only be conceived of as a surface; but what kind of surface? For Derrida, the decency of the veil allows for the belief in truth as a "profound, indecent, desirable" object.⁶³ Derrida argues that the suspending of the veil is a suspending of *castration*, considered here alongside the splicing of the world (and the other) that necessarily takes place in logocentric modes of understanding. He writes, "woman knows that castration *does not take place*."⁶⁴ This is not to suggest that scientific knowledge 'does not exist', or serves no purpose, but rather it is a call to be aware of *how* scientific knowledge is used, acknowledging it as the artifice and the veil that it is. Woman's "falseness with a good conscience" is, I believe, precisely this

⁶⁰ This essay was written in 1873, but published by Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth in 1896.

⁶¹ "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense" Published in *The Portable Nietzsche* trans. Walter Kaufmann, p. 46-47.

⁶² *The Gay Science*, s. 64

⁶³ *Spurs* p. 59

⁶⁴ *Ibid* 61

acknowledgement: the atomistic concepts derived from logocentrism can be used as the tools they are, but there is simultaneously an ability in Nietzsche's woman to stand back from that system and view the world in its "noise", as the world so rarely is a clean schematic of causes and effects.

Returning now to "Woman and her Action at a Distance", when man sees the ship moving peacefully along the water, it allows him to briefly forget the noise that surrounds him. This assumption of peace is not the product of any properties of the boat itself. Rather, it is the result of man's ability to create real, profound distance from anything else in his world and to consider the ship's beauty on what he perceives to be *its* own terms (when truly, the terms are *his*). When reminded of the reality that there is "much small and petty noise" on that ship—and surely, Irigaray would agree, there is much noise from the turbulence of the sea—the magic is lost. For Nietzsche, the magic of woman is lost as well. But reading "We Artists" alongside "Women and their action at a distance," and understanding the concepts advanced here, particularly the notion of artists as actors, it is clear that the things between the man and the ship (or man and woman), contribute meaningfully to the magic Nietzsche identifies in woman, even if man is unable to see it. In the tension between the formal representation of the artist and the necessary noise of the ship, and the stakes of that tension, Irigaray is able to explain—and even resolve—the contradiction Nietzsche set up. Nietzsche's focus on the pathos of distance makes him unable to witness the truth of woman he locates within that distance. While man (and Nietzsche) still stumbles when trying to navigate this relation, for Irigaray, woman need not see noise as anathema to art or to thought. Despite the binary set up by man and perpetuated by Nietzsche, woman can, in fact, make sense from noise without annihilating that noise in the process.

“The abyss rises”

The discrepancy between man’s perceived distance from woman and woman’s necessary closeness to man is a theme that recurs in *Marine Lover*. It is a distinction that is difficult to articulate in language in its own right, and to different extents, this shapes the way both Irigaray’s text and Nietzsche’s writings on woman in *The Gay Science* come together. The perception of distance on the one hand and of proximity on the other is, for Irigaray, in no sense a contradiction; it is precisely the workings of philosophy that enforces these positions. While it is certainly true and pertinent that man’s othering of woman places the latter in a position of distance that allows his symbolic order to ultimately return to himself, this operation produces an effect in the world—be it woman’s world, or the natural, physical world—which is regularly confused for a fact of that world (an unchangeable fact). When Nietzsche writes about woman critically, sardonically, in order to make statements *about man*, it is relatively easy to understand both the motivations for this and the productive effects of such a move. To read these statements straightforwardly, at least as a woman, is to laugh at *him*. Nietzsche is able to use the figure of “woman” as the mirror necessary to take a good look at man, to direct our gaze away from man for just long enough to allow us, upon second look, to see flaws we were previously unable to. This is not an understanding of *woman*, or of the feminine, nor is it a positive project (and this could ultimately be regarded as one of the limits of his analysis). It is closer to a self-implosion of the male subject, a caving-in from the outsides (lending some credence to his provocative, hyperbolic claim that he is dynamite rather than a man⁶⁵). Irigaray’s operation serves a contrary

⁶⁵ This famous passage appears in *Ecce Homo*’s chapter “Why I am a Destiny,” in the context of religion but connected to his character Zarathustra.

function: by describing a topology of the feminine (a symbolic order that evades phallogocentrism), the conditions for its own creation are revealed. The epistemic violence becomes bound to its physical consequences, actual and potential.

The previous section on “Woman and her Action at a Distance” pays careful attention to the way Nietzsche refers to what concretely comprises the “distance” required for woman’s charms. It is difficult to tell whether this appeal to distance is tinged with the same irony he uses when he discusses woman herself, but for Irigaray, it must be understood that way. She refers to “that ceaseless to-ing and fro-ing that upsets any opposition between here and there,”⁶⁶ and while the previous section likened this splicing process to a complication belonging to Science and language, Irigaray makes the argument here that the same act of splicing is built into philosophical inquiry, and particularly into speculative thought itself. This is fairly consistent with the approach Nietzsche took, and with the overlapping history of Philosophy and Science. While Nietzsche was willing to criticize both Science and Philosophy as disciplines, Irigaray grounds her criticism—in response to Nietzsche’s own—in *woman*, and particularly in her own theory of the two lips.⁶⁷ The shared Truth of Science and Philosophy, produced through language as a process that works against life and toward stasis, have their connection to the world in flux revealed in their contrast to the truth of woman.

We should now recall my earlier claim concerning the separation of Demeter and Persephone, namely, that Baubo is a figure who allows them to see the triviality of that separation. My account can be contrasted with those that base Baubo’s essence in the vulva and

⁶⁶ *Marine Lover* p. 105

⁶⁷ Irigaray addresses charges of essentialism in this concept by referring to it as a “strategic essentialism,” one that inverts the terms of a dominant discourse in order to overcome its limitations, but not to enforce the limitations of its own paradigm. Her fragments in “*Ecce Mulier?*” deal with this explanation, as well as Naomi Schor’s essay, “This Essentialism Which Is Not One”

leave her significance in that vulgarity. In the case of the latter account, we can see that this essentializing is once again imposed from the dominant discourse, and that the figure of Baubo is only invoked to be ridiculed, or referenced on the basis of her absurdity. Both Baubo and Irigaray work to redirect, and ultimately escape, that limiting discourse by appealing to its parameters. Irigaray's use of the two lips serves to address the incoherence of 'the feminine' as a category as Philosophy, Science, or Language might understand them, but speaks about that flux or categorical incoherence nonetheless as something that understands its own contours and can speak from various positions therein. She writes: "from that endless embrace, from that 'in the self' and at the same time and same place in the other, and neither the one nor the other, neither the same and its other, how is an idea to be had?"⁶⁸ Irigaray is, in this section, mocking the (male) philosopher's gaze upon woman. There is no mystery, for women, in how their ideas are had—even their ideas that seem incomprehensible to men. But similarly, it is not a problem for woman, and for individuals who are used to having their knowledge treated as specialty or niche in relation to Truth, to acknowledge that there are ways of knowing outside of their own: approaches and views that are equally valid.

The philosophical operation, understanding itself as universal, cannot comprehend this fact by appearances alone. The philosopher, when confronted with something that confounds him, believes "he must crack this thing open," and he does this "by forcing her/it beyond the present appearances". Indeed, Irigaray continues, "man arms himself with some pointed object—probe, stiletto, sometimes a pen—so he can get inside her/it. Pressing with all his strength to force her out of her retreat. Whereas she always remains open."⁶⁹ While Nietzsche's analysis of truth in

⁶⁸ *Marine Lover* p.105.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

woman ends at “an affair of decency and modesty,” the operation for Irigaray is much more invasive, much more violent. Though Nietzsche may try to evade this operation in his own examination of woman, choosing instead to perform the operation on himself, this does not explain the operation *as such* in a way that is digestible for those who have become so used to it that they do not recognize what they are always moving out of their own way (and how they are doing it). Within Nietzsche’s writing, woman *does* become split between a metaphor for truth, for artistry, for mastery of the game, and simultaneously becomes the ‘self-described’ woman-as-such. The former is “soul and form, and nothing else,”⁷⁰ the latter composed entirely of the “small and petty noise,” the minutiae and viscera Nietzsche seems to resent. That he directs the operation at himself does not, naturally, absolve him of doing a certain epistemic violence to woman—this is indeed the impetus for Irigaray’s response. The truth of woman is that she knows she is both sides of every split, and in them, is unlimited. Irigaray continues further:

But once he has driven a wedge into her like this, split her into two, he doesn’t know how to bring these/her edges back together again. How is the gap thus created to be overcome, how is he to pass over what runs between. Whereas she springs inexhaustibly from the touching together (of her lips), he must now leap from one bank to another.⁷¹

The contradictions that arise in Nietzsche’s account of woman, the aspects he is unable to reconcile, are not a product of woman. That woman is a site of possibility and of its foreclosure, as well as being both and neither “in herself” is not novel; it is a basic aspect of understanding oneself as an existential subject. Woman’s mastery of man’s game ensures that women will play, or perhaps that women are *willing* to play. Nietzsche nonetheless writes about this as something that must be resisted and avoided at all costs. At some level it seems that the operation he performed, in seeking truth, has created the same destruction he sought to stop. In Nietzsche’s

⁷⁰ *Gay Science* s. 60.

⁷¹ *Marine Lover* p. 105.

use of woman as an embodiment of truth, one finds a split between that woman and the woman “as such” who tries to play into man’s symbolic economy. This split situates woman-as-truth as ultimately unknowable for man, once more creating the distance that Nietzsche catalogues in his effort to overcome.

Of course, prior to the impact of the philosophical operation on man, this cutting of woman in order to make her (partially) knowable to man is a violence done *to woman*. Irigaray does not allow Nietzsche to leave woman behind so easily after this damage has been done. She connects it to a deeper, more existential problem that is commonly ascribed to Nietzsche’s work, but that in fact permeates much philosophical thought from the late 19th century onward: the abyss. A concept often tied to the deepest lows of the existential condition, the abyss could be described only as terrifying in its indeterminacy—though of course being terrifying and indeterminate are not qualities unique to the abyss given our discussion thus far. Further, the abyss is thought to become an issue for the existential subject primarily in solitude. Following Nietzsche’s description of the abyss, Irigaray puts forward the idea that the abyss has some level of agency (insofar as it can gaze back), “Attributing its own project to him, the abyss rises (*l’abîme* ou *l’abyrne*).”⁷² In tearing the object of speculation apart, the void left by the operation becomes a problem for the philosopher. She writes:

The distance does not come from [woman], even if, for him, it is at a distance that her seductive charm works. Even if, in the present, he lends her that element of authority. Because he does not wish to see the effect of his operation: the abyss enters.⁷³

This gap, this distance, is often attributed to woman, as we saw in the previous section. For Nietzsche to talk about the abyss at all, on Irigaray’s reading of the concept, suggests either an intimate awareness of the caverns Philosophy has left in its wake, or a troubled relationship to

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

his own thought as philosophical, and therefore resulting in some level of violence.⁷⁴ Irigaray alludes to the truth of castration (namely, that it does not occur) when she attributes the abyss to woman. The truth of castration is that no ‘lack’ can be understood as a property of woman’s. The abyss is not hers, she has nothing to hide nor to show off. Both acts are equally irrelevant to her.⁷⁵ And in her view, this truth is terrifying to man.

“Towards New Seas”

The role that great heights play in Nietzsche’s thought has not yet been discussed, nor the relevance (for Irigaray) of the sea. Though it plays less of an obvious role in *The Gay Science*, altitude is at the heart of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, whose titular prophet moves between his home in the mountains and the people living below. Irigaray argues that Nietzsche’s great heights are an attempt to escape confrontation of the sea, and while this is not completely true,⁷⁶ it is absolutely a site of preoccupation for him. This preoccupation is most obvious in Zarathustra’s movement, as an image referring to how Nietzsche conceives of introspection—a space conducive to thought in self-directed meditation. The abyss, in this equation, is not quite the sea. For Irigaray, the sea is the feminine: not eternal, but without fixed edges or borders, fluid but with depth, reflective but suffocating. Though Nietzsche states that he would like to build his home into the sea, the way he conceptualizes his own thought is always with reference to great heights; if he is not avoiding the sea, what is it that he is avoiding, or that he is unable to

⁷⁴ It is worth noting, also, that Nietzsche’s most quoted aphorism on the abyss (“Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you.”, from s. 146 of Book 1 of *Beyond Good and Evil*) is nestled between a series of aphorisms on woman--particularly sections 144, 145, 147 (which will be of interest in the third chapter of this thesis) and 148.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche writes, “I would not build a house for myself, and I count it part of my good fortune that I do not own a house. But if I had to, then I should build it as some of the Romans did—right into the sea. I should not mind sharing a few secrets with this beautiful monster.” *Gay Science* s. 240.

confront? What keeps him from meeting the water at its edges and allowing it to wash over him?

Again, Irigaray points us to the workings of the philosophical operation:

... if, for him, consciousness endlessly swallows everything up, this is because, if it had a bottom to it, he would read there the mark of his crime. Far better to forget it. The bottom of his being would be like this, a nihilation upon which he would erect himself.⁷⁷

Nietzsche's recourse to heights is, for Irigaray, born of a tendency (which is above ascribed to men in general) to want to escape this bottom of being; but to move away from it is not to overcome it. Irigaray criticizes this tendency to seek escape by making reference to the "modest and decent" conception of truth as a veil: namely, that to build structures upon a nihilation is only to, at every turn, move further and further away from possible positive construction. The act of speculation here is always building away from the actual. While this move has a certain usefulness, to value speculative thought in and of itself without a return to the world that created that need is to raise the stakes on one's inevitable fall. The "higher" consciousness moves, and society along with it, and the further it moves from its surroundings, the more lethal that crash will become—despite any avowed awareness that what lies at the bottom is ultimately just a yes placed to escape a no, a veil covering a pudendum.

While there is much (both true and untrue) about woman that Nietzsche integrates into his ideas in *The Gay Science*, his work on the subject leaves gaps and contradictions, whereas Irigaray's account manages to evade—and perhaps overcome—them. The abyss in particular (that is, the perceived impossibility or absence of truth) remains a site that Nietzsche stumbles over in his attempts to leap. The issue of nihilism becomes increasingly pertinent when the truth of woman, as nontruth, is unveiled. This is not quite the same as saying that woman does not exist, nor is it quite the same as saying that there are no truths to be found. Nietzsche does

⁷⁷ *Marine Lover* p. 106.

identify a truth in woman, but the operation of that truth evades him insofar as he attempts to jump from peak to peak, speaking from his own subject position without integrating the 'toing and froing' explicitly in his own references to her. Throughout the examination this chapter has provided, the truth of woman is understood as multiple through the necessary inclusion of generations of Greek goddesses and feminine sociality and family, as well as the metonymy of non-phallic anatomy and its symbolic representations. This multiplicity, however, resists chaos and disorganization for woman. In both Greek feminine sociality and Irigaray's morphological metonymy, the *necessity of difference* for woman to be able to articulate her truths is made explicit alongside a sense of the relationship between two being a process grounded in the external world rather than in introspective thought. Nietzsche's own symbolic order remains incapable of thoroughly articulating its reliance on difference as he senses woman is able to, but he is always speaking from the edge, shouting from what he perceives to be a peak, across to the other; trying to create a surface he can glide along. To continue examining this process, *The Gay Science* alone becomes insufficient as the sole site of inquiry. The discussion of great heights and bodies of water leads the discussion toward *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a text whose format moves from the quick (im)pulses of joy the aphoristic style provides, toward a more guided meditation closer to the parable form. Some of the rough edges examined here may become smooth, but the role of woman is also heavily diminished. As such, before moving on to our examination of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, this thesis must explore another of Nietzsche's concepts. Building on what has been discussed in our reading of the feminine, we will probe that "impenetrable abyss" known as nihilism.

Chapter 2: Nihilism and the role of difference in Nietzsche's diagnosis of the human

If woman is able to run from peak to peak, can she still fall into the pit of nihilism? And, if she trips, and if such tripping is different from man's stumbling, or perhaps is not a fall at all in a traditional sense, what would it mean for nihilism to be something other than a human universal with respect to its overcoming? Also, if nihilism is not lying in wait on the peripheries of each and every human psyche, could its overcoming not affect those who were not afflicted with the condition?

These questions will guide our discussion of nihilism and its different types in this chapter, and will allow us to proceed toward an understanding of nihilism as a phenomenon bound to difference—or perhaps, better put, bound to the *absence* of difference. While there does exist substantial Nietzsche scholarship that considers the feminine in relation to nihilism,⁷⁸ it does not deal with the role of the feminine as a representation of difference. Instead of acknowledging woman's becoming as central to her identity (which as such resists fixity), this existing scholarship tends to reify the feminine by focusing exclusively on the being of woman. This often results in the same sort of essentializing that led Kelly Oliver to criticize Irigaray, claiming that Irigaray elevated woman to a pre-ontological status in a philosophical move no different from Heidegger's.⁷⁹

It is the task of this chapter to show that, contrary to Oliver's claim, the manner in which Irigaray and Deleuze proceed *is* different from Heidegger, and, as such, might be particularly helpful for theorizing a Nietzschean feminism of difference. Having established this, we will

⁷⁸ Ellen Mortensen, *The Feminine and Nihilism*; Peter Burgard. *Nietzsche and the feminine*

⁷⁹ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche* p 106.

then be able to explore how difference itself works toward the overcoming of nihilism. This chapter, guided by the main questions formulated above, will consider closely the different forms of nihilism Nietzsche diagnoses in his work, paying particular attention to their distinct relations to the problem of difference found in the form of woman. Once we have a better understanding of these distinct relations to difference, we will then consider the possibility of the overcoming of nihilism through the eternal return as a return of that difference. Before we proceed with these tasks, however, I believe that it will be helpful for me to introduce the reader to the ways in which I will approach and utilize the work of the key scholars at play in this chapter: Deleuze, Župančič and, of course, Irigaray.

Now, Nietzsche's analysis of nihilism forms the basis of what is sometimes referred to as the existential reading of his thought.⁸⁰ This reading typically takes for granted that nihilism is something that can be avoided or overcome if one abides by "noble values" or, more relevant to this project, if one embraces the idea of the eternal return. Whereas Nietzsche first mentioned the eternal return in *The Gay Science* (a work that is typically said to belong to the late-middle period), much of his discussion of nihilism takes place chiefly in his later works. In an effort to situate the problem of nihilism more directly next to that of its overcoming, this chapter aims to develop a reading of nihilism within Nietzsche's later middle works *alongside* an interpretation of the eternal return as he first articulated it. Our reading here of nihilism in Nietzsche will build on and be guided by Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, for this text affords us a thorough

⁸⁰ Bernard Reginster associates the project of nihilism's overcoming chiefly to an existential one in his *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. Reginster brings the association to light in reference to the decidedly existential question of whether life has meaning, and articulates this existential problem as pertaining to human life in general, rather than individual human lives (p. 22-23). Additionally, Walter Kaufmann who has provided the translations for the majority of the Nietzsche texts used within the thesis includes Nietzsche's work on nihilism in his survey text, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* (Plume, 1975).

and insightful interpretation of Nietzsche's investigations of both nihilism and the eternal return. However, Deleuze's book has been notable not only for having provided a new grounding for both concepts, but also for having provided a reading that departed from earlier interpretations of Nietzsche, particularly those based on Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche.⁸¹ What was perhaps most distinct from previous readings (and most pertinent for our project) was Deleuze's idea that the eternal return is not a return of the same, but rather, a return of *difference*. Deleuze's account of the return of difference was intimately tied to his reflections on the active and reactive in Nietzsche, and especially as the latter notions relate to nihilism and to Nietzsche's account of morality. His account of the eternal return as a return of difference has been repeatedly criticized (most notably by Paolo D'Iorio and Joseph Ward, as well as by Ashley Woodward⁸²). One of the problems with Deleuze's account, according to Woodward, is its reliance on one passage from *The Will to Power* which, beyond being questionable in terms of its textual integrity,⁸³ contains a mis-translation⁸⁴—one that, in her view, matters greatly for the reading he develops in *Nietzsche & Philosophy*. More specifically, Deleuze quotes the *Will to Power* as saying the following: “The victorious concept ‘force’, by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as ‘will to power.’”⁸⁵ D'Iorio notes that the original text does not refer to an “inner will” (*Wille*), but

⁸¹ Heidegger's lectures on, and his interest in, Nietzsche have been tied to his time spent explicitly endorsing the Nazi party. Charles Yablon writes, “What appears beyond dispute, however, is that for Heidegger, his position on national socialism was inextricably tied to his acceptance or rejection of Nietzscheanism.” (“Nietzsche and the Nazis p. 745). Jon Wittrock and Mats Andrén take up this issue further in “The Critique of European Nihilism: Interpretation, Responsibility, and Action”.

⁸² Ashley Woodward, “Deleuze, Nietzsche, and the overcoming of Nihilism” 2013.

⁸³ *The Will to Power*, as a book, is a publication of Nietzsche's notes compiled by his sister Elisabeth and friend Peter Gast which occurred after Nietzsche's breakdown in 1889. I have tried within this thesis to avoid citing texts by Nietzsche which were published by his sister, though my citation of “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” in the first chapter of this thesis marks an exception to that rule.

⁸⁴ Woodward p. 142.

⁸⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 49

rather to an “inner world” (*Welt*).⁸⁶ We here propose to revisit and rehabilitate Deleuze’s reading of the eternal return of difference, but without relying on textual evidence from *The Will to Power*. Instead, I propose to shed light on Nietzsche’s concept by turning to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *The Gay Science*—the works at the heart of my project. We will also build on the analysis provided in the previous chapter concerning the centrality of difference to Nietzsche’s thought enriched by Irigaray’s discussion of difference and Nietzsche.

In addition to the work of Deleuze, our discussion of Nietzsche’s nihilism will also make use of Alenka Zupančič’s reflections on Nietzsche in her book, *The Shortest Shadow*. Zupančič is a philosopher whose work draws largely from Lacanian psychoanalysis. Her work on Nietzsche’s nihilism takes the role of value into account in a manner consistent with the work of Irigaray; as such, my use of Zupančič’s work here aims to be a development of the previous chapter, especially with regard to Irigaray’s reflections on valuation. The basis for this development is the use of duality in the works of both Irigaray and Zupančič, that is, the role of difference between two as both irreducible and inexplicably bound.

Many of the concepts Nietzsche deals with, as dualisms, contain an internal tension; the most straightforward example of this tension is Nietzsche’s treatment of good and evil and the movement “beyond” them, which is in fact located *between* them. Light and shadow are also common metaphors in Nietzsche’s thought that contain a similar internal tension for him. Within *The Shortest Shadow*, Zupančič considers at length the point of tension from which Nietzsche attempted to speak from: more specifically, she argues that the noon—as the time of day with the shortest shadow—plays a particular role as the site of a possible ‘event’ wherein boundaries are

⁸⁶ Paolo D’Iorio, “The eternal return: Genesis and Interpretation”, trans. Frank Chouraqui. 2011. p. 3 n. 7. D’Iorio notes, further, that this change may have been made consciously by Peter Gast in his editing of the text.

both (col)lapsed and maintained, like when a coin rolls and balances precariously on its edge, with its two faces vying for prominence in a state of heightened tension.⁸⁷ The (col)lapse of boundaries is said to occur at the site of the tension between the two extremes; the tension is never wholly resolved but is instead transformed into something productive—that is to say, it produces an event. Zupančič maps this project onto nihilism within Nietzsche’s own work, but does so in a way that is perhaps more psychoanalytic than this project can account for—this issue will be addressed next. Nonetheless, *The Shortest Shadow* remains a useful text for my project because of its focus on these dualisms. As such, the typology of nihilism advanced within this thesis will see some of Deleuze’s categories mapped onto the Nietzschean landscape Zupančič sets up within her book.

To conclude this introductory section of the chapter, the reader should note that this chapter, like the last, will refrain from reading Nietzsche through a psychoanalytic lens. The rationale behind such a decision is that Nietzsche deals with many problems that seem to best fit within a traditionally existential framework (nihilism being a major example). This framework addresses a host of issues or areas of thought that were not contained within a singular disciplinary discourse before psychoanalysis became a discipline in its own right. Now, where the last chapter required the forging of a more explicit link between Nietzsche’s use of woman and her relation to symbolic economies of language than there was in his texts, here Nietzsche’s own analysis of nihilism will speak for itself. Nietzsche, indeed, refers explicitly to systems of value and to how the individual is able to reconcile his own existence with those values. For our purposes, some of the language specific to psychoanalysis will lend theoretical shortcuts to an investigation of concepts that exist somewhere *between* the existential, the moral, and the

⁸⁷ Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, pgs. 17-18, 27, 87, 136

ontological. This is not to say that the problems Nietzsche deals with are limited to the individual; often the opposite is the case, as his work deals in equal part with critiques of systems and structures themselves. But insofar as the symptoms of these otherwise “existential” problems are tangible, they are tangible within the mind of the individual as the chief site where values are articulated in language and find their place of belonging within that system of linguistic (re-)valuation.

Putting a finger on “nothing”: typologies of the self-directed will

Now, Nietzsche considered the problem of nihilism to be both a *human* problem (i.e. a problem that characterized the entirety of humanity’s struggle in the world), and a problem that manifests itself in different forms relative to different groups of people. A discussion of Nietzsche’s work on nihilism must then begin with and be sensitive to this issue and to the distinctions Nietzsche makes when he seeks to propose a sort of typology of nihilism. The first thing to note is that nihilism, for Nietzsche, operates largely within a space of tension. And it is from this very vantage point that Zupančič’s work attempts to better understand Nietzsche’s nihilism. Like other interpreters, she first describes how active nihilism is to be regarded as radically distinct from passive nihilism⁸⁸: where the active form can be seen as “life interpret[ing] life against life” (against representations and illusions), passive nihilism is to be regarded as “an expression of [life’s] impotence.”⁸⁹ In the case of active nihilism, the lack of meaning one finds in the world is taken as license to further destroy all categories that had provided meaning. Drawing a parallel to the figure of woman, Zupančič describes this nihilistic

⁸⁸ Nietzsche alludes to a distinction between passive and active forms of nihilism in *Beyond Good and Evil*, specifically in s. 10 of Book 1.

⁸⁹ *The Shortest Shadow* p. 63

tendency as involving “the power always to go forward, to remove one veil after another.”⁹⁰ Nietzsche fairly frequently uses the “removal of veils” as a metaphor to speak about the search for truth. This metaphor is particularly explicit in Nietzsche’s discussion of old women as the greatest sceptics of all, who see truth *as* a veil, placed “over a pudendum.”⁹¹ In this account, the old women conceptualize truth as an issue of etiquette and social necessity incommensurable with an idea of truth as something that must be uncovered. This issue of etiquette could further be understood as a theory of truth as a *creative* process when connected to woman’s mastery of veils and finery, as I proposed in the first chapter.⁹² The veils exist in order that there be a role to be played, and a certain set of meanings to be conveyed. And as such, the stripping away of veils, in the same move, strips away meaning. We have seen earlier in the thesis, within the context of in our critique of scientific modes of knowing, the violence of this unveiling operation. Now, in what follows, this violence will be chiefly considered within the context of what Nietzsche determines to be our contemporary nihilistic tendencies.

Passive nihilism does not manifest itself in the removal of veils; in fact, one could say that the passive nihilist would be wholly uninterested in what lies behind these veils. In his own work, Nietzsche associates passive nihilism with the work of Arthur Schopenhauer as well as with forms of faith like Buddhism, as distinct from Judeo-Christianity.⁹³ In this type of nihilism, man is confronted with the choice between willing nothing and not willing—and he is said to choose banality: he chooses to direct his own energy at stifling his will, hoping this might allow him to escape his misery. However, this is never truly possible for Nietzsche: denying one’s own

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See pages 34, 41 and 49 of chapter 1.

⁹² See note 48.

⁹³ *The Gay Science* s 346.

will simply allows the wills of others to be affirmed and seen in the world in lieu of one's own. Zupančič correctly notes that the passive nihilist uses his nihilism as a sedative, believing that “no great idea is really worthwhile; there is nothing fundamental that one can do or change”—in this way, one simply accepts the world ‘as it is’ in order to avoid struggling with negativity.⁹⁴ Passive nihilism dreads passion and especially passionate engagement with a cause; the individual unable to understand a justification for a cause grows disdainful of all others—and yet never works up the will to do anything about it! For Zupančič, passive nihilism raises a particularly thorny problem insofar as it seems to completely lack the ‘nothing’ at the heart of nihilism—this ‘productive’ nothing is, in her view, what persists *in between* the active and the passive manifestations of nihilism. And it is precisely the weight of *nothingness* that creates the tension between the two.⁹⁵ If one were really to will nothingness, in Zupančič's view, one would not slip into *either* the passive or active tendency.

The complicity between active and passive nihilism must be underscored if we are to comprehend the role that “nothing” plays. Deleuze believes that the role of the “nothing” in nihilism is that of a fiction that moves one between the living material world and the world of ideas. The site of struggle for man lies in the fictive background of his nihilism. Deleuze writes that:

In the word nihilism *nihil* does not signify non-being but primarily a value of nil. Life takes on a value of nil insofar as it is denied and depreciated. Depreciation always presupposes a fiction: it is by means of fiction that one falsifies and depreciates, it is by means of fiction that something is opposed to life.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *The Shortest Shadow* p. 65

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 147.

The value of nil ascribed to life presumes something alternative to life which could, in contrast, have a positive value—though this alternative is necessarily fictitious. According to Deleuze, this devaluing of life on the basis of a fiction applies to both active and passive nihilisms.

In the case of *active nihilism*, however, life itself is devalued on behalf of a search for a higher truth—a truth supposed to be located outside of life, no doubt fictitious. Moreover, though this ‘truth’ is supposedly located outside of an idea of God, in its place is supplanted the even more elusive Idea itself. This faith in the Idea is fictitious insofar as it is located outside of the material world, thought to be waiting potentially behind each step of the philosophical (or scientific) operation. The hope here is that if only enough veils are pulled away, this Truth will present itself. However, each veil torn here is an act of violence (epistemic as well as physical) against the material world, perpetrated for the sake of attaining a Truth that resides in the realm of ideas.

With regard to passive nihilism, the fiction that inheres there is, first, the idea that the will itself can ultimately be shut down or denied and, second, that ‘nothing’ is present in this form of nihilism at all.⁹⁷ In contrast to the implicit denial of life in active nihilism, the fiction of passive nihilism is directly and completely life-denying: though it cuts out the figure of God, passive nihilism still operates under its shadow, for it acts under the assumption that, with the ‘death of God’, the present world has nothing to offer the individual because Truth cannot be realized, but only and merely anticipated.

For Deleuze, the fact that passive nihilism is based in a fundamentally negative relation to the Other means that the passive nihilist displaces the site of negativity outside of themselves.

⁹⁷ This is in line with Alenka Zupančič’s reading. See *The Shortest Shadow* p. 66

For our purposes, it is important to note that this displacement is consistent with the formation of ‘woman’ as a symbolic function that simply serves to create a path for man to return back to himself and to his own introspection. On this view, if woman seems to have found a reason to live and man (as nihilist) nonetheless holds the universal belief that no such reason exists, man persists in the belief he has nothing to learn from woman and remains in a relationship to her wherein he seeks only to return to himself. The stakes of this relationship between man and woman may be better explicated through another significant aspect of Deleuze’s reflection on nihilism, that is, his distinction between the active and the reactive. It is important to note first, for clarity, that Deleuze’s active/reactive distinction does not map onto active and passive nihilism along the same axis. Instead of describing man’s relationship to “nothing(ness)”, the active/reactive distinction in Deleuze pertains to discrete ways of existing in the world.

Deleuze’s reflection on activity and passivity in Nietzsche eventually leads him to ask the question: “Is man essentially reactive?”⁹⁸ The stakes of this question will become clearer shortly. For now, it will suffice to say that Deleuze’s work on this question suggests that, in contrast to the displacement of negativity that occurs with passive nihilism, an overcoming of (man’s) nihilism must, according to Deleuze, see man move from a reactive way of being toward a becoming-active. The key to understanding how this move from reactivity/being to activity/becoming is possible lies for Deleuze in conceiving activity as a movement towards what is external to oneself, as opposed to reactivity where movement occurs as a return to oneself. Such an account of activity will be central to our reading of Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return as a return of difference, presented below. For now, we must continue our

⁹⁸ The section on page 166 of Deleuze’s *Nietzsche & Philosophy* bears this very title, and is dedicated to that examination, though it does not belong to the chapter “Active and Reactive”. Instead, it comes in “The Overman: Against the Dialectic”.

exploration of the distinction between activity and reactivity, a distinction that is absolutely central to the Nietzschean eternal return.

As we noted above, active nihilism removes veils whereas passive nihilism attempts to remove the will. However, Deleuze believes that “active” nihilism in a sense still operates reactively because it similarly fails to move beyond itself. Both Deleuze and Zupančič struggle first with negative nihilism in the hopes that a nihilism that truly focuses on nothing can in some sense ‘complete’ itself through a kind of negation of negation, then move toward activity as the most likely escape. But what is important to underscore here is that even a purely negative nihilism cannot complete the movement beyond itself. For Zupančič, this is because of the different stakes that are inherent to affirmation and negation:

[N]ihilism is not simply a reactive state; it still involves a struggle between active and reactive forces, but this struggle is one wherein the “active” is strictly on the side of negation, while the only form of affirmation is a reactive one.⁹⁹

There is the hope, in the case of negative nihilism, that the nihilistic tendency can overcome itself through its self-negation. However, the basis of nihilism in reactivity is ultimately the lapsing of each of its forms into each other. As Zupančič correctly observes, “*negative nihilism* is replaced by *reactive nihilism*, reactive nihilism ends in *passive nihilism*. From God to God’s murderer, from God’s murderer to the last man.”¹⁰⁰ Nihilism manifests differently within different historical periods with different historical conditions, but ultimately all forms of nihilism can lapse into each other within man’s retreat to the realm of ideas (and the subsequent lack of concrete reassurance attained therein). In spite of this, each discrete form of nihilism

⁹⁹ *The Shortest Shadow* p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid* p. 151

persists, as individuals still exist in multiple positions relative to theories of truth. Deleuze characterizes this relationship with regard to the death of God as follows:

Previously, essence was opposed to appearance, life was turned into an appearance. Now essence is denied but appearance is retained: everything is merely appearance, life which is left to us remains for itself an appearance... The first sense of nihilism found its remains for itself an appearance. The second sense, ‘the pessimism of weakness’, finds its principle in the reactive life completely solitary and naked, in reactive force reduced to themselves.¹⁰¹

The first sense Deleuze refers to in this passage is negative (active) nihilism, while the second sense is passive nihilism. For Deleuze, these categories do not limit themselves to individuals. It is, however, in the individual that the particular *existential* symptoms of nihilism manifest themselves.

But even in the case of active nihilism, where the will becomes a will to nothingness or self-annihilation, its move to *affirm* nothing takes the form of a simple negation, and its actions result merely in death or the moving away from life—for its ‘affirmation’ comes from that same place of reaction that underlies passive nihilism. While Deleuze also considers the unequal relationship between affirmation and negation, he treats them as varying ‘qualities’ of the will to power: “negation is *opposed* to affirmation,” while “affirmation *differs* from negation.”¹⁰² In this typology, negation’s relation to affirmation is reactive, but affirmation’s relation to negation is active, and this activity is based in *difference*. We will return to this unequal relationship between negation and affirmation later, when we get to the question of man and woman’s respective relations to activity and passivity.

By drawing on Zupančič’s and Deleuze’s accounts of the tensions that arise in nihilism, our goal is to continue developing our account of the abyss rising, which began towards the end

¹⁰¹ *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 148.

¹⁰² *Ibid* p.188

of the previous chapter. To revisit that discussion briefly, recall that Irigaray argues that the abyss rises as a result of the philosophical operation of speculative thought, particularly as it splits woman open in an attempt to know her. The rising of the abyss, for Irigaray, happens as a result of the epistemic operation itself, an operation that paradoxically renders doubly difficult the possibility of knowing the object of study by tearing it into two. This is not to say, in the case of nihilism, that there is no utility in knowing the function of the two halves that have been split, but rather, that a focus on only those halves fails to speak to the role of that which divides them. Here the tension, seen as a chasm, is not the philosophical operation *as such*; rather, it is nothing itself. Deleuze argues that there are systems of thought that are, in their essence, life-denying either through passive, reactive, or negative means to that denial. The thought patterns Deleuze refers to are primarily scientific disciplines (language itself included), which is consistent with Nietzsche's own outlook on these matters. Deleuze further articulates the Nietzschean critique of the sciences and of philosophy with his claim that "the taste for replacing real relations between forces by an abstract relation which is supposed to express them all, as a measure, seems to be an integral part of science and also philosophy."¹⁰³ Such an assessment brings together our current discussion with the discussion in the previous chapter on Irigaray's reading of the philosophical operation as a violent and intrusive one—one that forces the flux of the living world out of the way so that an idea may persist through it. Deleuze echoes Irigaray's criticism of this operation:

[I]n this abstract relation, whatever it is, we always end up replacing real activities (creating, speaking, loving, etc.) by the third party's perspective on these activities: the essence of the activity is confused with the gains of a third party, which [that third party] claims that he ought to profit from, whose benefits he claims the right to reap (whether he is God, objective spirit, humanity, culture, or even the proletariat...)¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 74

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Deleuze argues here that in the forms of thought that perpetuate man's becoming-reactive, what could be called more material creative ways of interacting with others are reduced, again, to simply *symbolon*. The material action of existing in the world is only important insofar as it is proof that something has been gained for the greater good of that abstract and ideal third party. This ideal third party (i.e. one that exists only in an ideal realm) allows man to return to himself through these actions, but the actions themselves are reified on the basis of maintaining a relation to static and ideal categories, rather than integrating them as parts of life or the process of becoming.

This process of reifying an abstract relation to real activities is not what generally comes to mind when one thinks about nihilism from an existential perspective. Deleuze's reading appears then to oppose the more existential call to the overcoming of nihilism: that one ought to simply find a cause worth fighting for. I contend, however, that Deleuze's interpretation sees the Nietzschean overcoming of nihilism as one that takes place primarily in the *way* we come to value things and in the way this happens between individuals in language. This overcoming is not in a 'cause', which can quickly become a static, idealized good in the same way that 'God' has, but is rather located in a *relation to* and an *experience of* the world as active and living.

What Deleuze ultimately calls for is "a truly active science", one that takes three forms: a symptomology, a typology, and a genealogy that must be employed toward *active* means, toward linking knowledge to positive (not 'positivist', but life-affirming) change in the world.¹⁰⁵ The object of concern and analysis is thus located, for Deleuze, somewhere between the psychological, the social, the linguistic and the moral. Before the question of the 'feasibility of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 75.

this active science can be tackled (which we will do below in our analysis of the eternal return as a means to overcoming nihilism), we must first interrogate the question of nihilism as a human universal.

Is woman essentially reactive?

Though Deleuze's reflections on nihilism in Nietzsche are detailed and useful for those hoping to find a remedy for nihilism that is distinct from what one finds in more traditional interpretations, *Nietzsche & Philosophy* does not directly link the problem of nihilism to the question of woman within Nietzsche's thought. Deleuze does, however, link the problem of nihilism to *difference*, a concept at the very heart of Irigaray's feminism as well as at the heart of her reading of the figure of woman in Nietzsche (it is obviously also a concept that is critical for our purposes in this thesis). The potential links between Irigaray and Deleuze (the extent to which they share similar readings of particular concepts and of the means to overcoming nihilism) are perhaps not immediately clear, although some secondary literature has taken up the comparison. For instance, Tamsin Lorraine, author of *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy*, has connected the two thinkers on the basis of their radical materialism and their philosophies of the body. While the book does not deal specifically with Nietzsche as the primary site of shared theorizing, one could argue that Nietzsche's thought is certainly pertinent for thinking the material world and the body in the pursuit of life. What can be concluded from Lorraine's analysis of Irigaray and Deleuze, though, is that both share the pursuit of a 'gay science' directly in keeping with Nietzsche's project. It is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge, as Lorraine does, the different approaches that Irigaray and Deleuze take towards developing their 'gay science':

Irigaray's notion of feminine subjectivity attempts to symbolize a standard for personal identity that is an open-ended system without specific content. Just as Deleuze calls for a Nietzschean becoming-active that would bring about a subject with a "completely different will," a different way of feeling, and another sensibility, so does Irigaray's notion attempt to support a new kind of subjectivity at the same time that it recognizes a need and desire for personal identity. In addition, it provides a model that conceives of personal identity as mutually constitutive and continually transforming in interdependent relationships with others.¹⁰⁶

The explicitly open-ended conception of feminine subjectivity that Lorraine ascribes to Irigaray is consistent with what I proposed in our previous chapter. Recall our argument—namely, that woman represents truth in Nietzsche insofar as she represents the absence (and subsequently the superfluity) of Truth in a positivist or ideal sense, and that this position is premised on her ability to move between the dominant symbolic economy as a symbolic economy of men and a second symbolic economy premised on birth and a return to one's own mother or daughter. Deleuze's call for becoming-active is intimately tied to the particularities of his typology of nihilism and more specifically, to the links he sees between each form of nihilism and thought patterns. These links, I argue, resonate with the symbolic economies described in our previous chapter as means of attributing value to things in the world.

Indeed, when Nietzsche exclaimed that "God is dead!"¹⁰⁷, he was alluding to the tension within our contemporary world where our modes of valuation have outlived their usefulness for life. While it is true that at every instance of this tension the issue is one of power *as will to power*, I contend that rushing to explain the will to power in isolation, as a self-standing concept, can hide or erase many of the nuances (and emancipatory possibilities) in valuation and becoming-active. And it is these nuances that Deleuze's work explain in a much more adequate way than has been attempted by previous Heideggerian scholars. In contrast to the latter, we

¹⁰⁶ Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* p. 188

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche's famous claim that "God is dead" appears in both *The Gay Science* (in s. 108 "New Battles, s. 125 "The madman," and s. 343 "How to understand our cheerfulness") and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (first in section 2 of "Zarathustra's Prologue," then again in in "On the Pitying").

ought to understand the will to power side by side with the eternal return as its conceptual foundation.

We have seen that difference is at the heart of both Irigaray's and Deleuze's accounts of overcoming nihilism. But in order to fully appreciate this very important role of difference, we must first understand how it sits in relation to the attribution of value and to Deleuze's becoming-active. After having done this, we will revisit the concept of the eternal return and then, finally, the will to power.

To return to Deleuze's question "Is man essentially reactive?", an overly-attentive reading to its formulation betrays what is at stake here: it is not a question of man's essence as being, but rather a question of the possibility of his becoming. In other words, man is not *essentially* reactive, but is rather constituted by "the becoming-reactive of all forces".¹⁰⁸ It is in man, and even in man's activity, that forces become reactive: it is when active forces are turned against themselves that they become reactive¹⁰⁹ (recall here the active form of nihilism in which "life interprets life against life"). In this instance, we have nihilism as a distinctly *human* condition, where it uses life against its own devices. But is a distinctly *human* condition necessarily *universal*? If we are to understand man as fundamentally constituted by his becoming-reactive, what then constitutes "man" in this statement? Deleuze speaks of such a conception of man's becoming-reactive as some form of becoming-sick, becoming-old, becoming-*less* because becoming is here, for man, a movement toward death; it is a movement against life. Deleuze writes further, that "[t]he strong man can oppose the weak, but not his own becoming-weak, which is bound to him by a subtle attraction. Each time that Nietzsche speaks of active men, he

¹⁰⁸ *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 167.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*-p. 68.

does so with the sadness of seeing the destiny to which they are predetermined as their essential becoming.”¹¹⁰

This becoming-weak is applied to the downfall of societies Nietzsche calls attention to in his own writings—most notably the classical societies he had such a fondness for, but also later European societies, particularly his own. In being *constituted* by forces becoming reactive, the very category of “man”, even a great one, can only preserve its identity through a return to itself according to Deleuze. I would go further to argue that man’s activity is always deployed toward the continuation of the category “man,” rather than the continuation of “men” as a living population. For Deleuze, there is an important connection here between the individual man (and his life cycle) and the societies created by men *in the plural*. This concept of man is then, in my view, limited to those men allowed to participate in the creation of those societies that decay as inevitably as the men who build them. Deleuze’s critique then applies to ‘great men’ in the Zarathustran sense of the higher man (to be of importance in our third chapter), and additionally, to concrete historical figures like Napoleon. But it also applies to common men insofar as they subscribe to the same ideas as those ‘great men’ and perpetuate the dominance of those ideas through their beliefs and actions.

By contrast, Nietzsche’s account of *woman* and Irigaray’s work on the subject both underscore a distinctive and interesting form of becoming, insofar as the *being* of woman is dictated entirely by man. Irigaray takes an interesting approach to the discrepancy between the “being” of woman and the truth her own work reveals: that is, a “strategic essentialism” through

¹¹⁰ Ibid p.167.

which opposites are appealed to in order only to expose and overcome their limits.¹¹¹ This formulation resonates with the way woman functions in Nietzsche's work; but, a notable difference in their work lies in the fact that Nietzsche often uses the concept of woman as an essence that can reveal truths about man. The reason that I believe Nietzsche's operation is nonetheless potentially productive is because his invocation of the "essence" of woman serves to articulate the symbolic role of woman within man's economy of language and, furthermore, demonstrates precisely why essence is an insufficient conceptual tool for speaking about woman. Though Irigaray begins from Nietzsche's position, she develops it by enriching his concept of woman through a fuller account (or extension) of womanhood, proceeding outward from these starting points, towards the conception of a system that operates without the values of the previous system that insists on woman's 'pure' essence. Irigaray's more developed Nietzscheanism is one that refuses a relationship to the other that exists merely so that one can return to oneself. It is also one that refuses any history that is premised on such a solipsistic relation.

Irigaray departs from the depiction of woman-as-essence in order to speak about woman as a partner in a creative active form of becoming that reflects the conception of truth Nietzsche posits woman as embodying. Lorraine writes of this creative becoming:

Irigaray suggests representing our origins with an image of difference. We could, for example, refer our origins to a woman and man come together in a process of mutual engenderment in which both were active subjects and each manifested both creative becoming and the material limits of corporeality.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Her explanation of this position is detailed in the fragments titled "Ecce Mulier?" compiled in Peter Burgard's *Nietzsche and the Feminine*.

¹¹² *Irigaray and Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* p. 224.

Where explanations of woman's essence within existing systems of value negate the other—foreclosing the possibility of an equal relationship—in order to affirm the self, they also foreclose creativity and a healthy connection to life's beginning. Man's becoming, as an individual, can be only death when woman is reduced to that sex which gives, and therefore owns, birth. In speaking from the position of woman from the starting point of her given essence and moving beyond it, Irigaray's conception of woman necessarily includes and *affirms* a relationship to her other rather than simply opposing or reacting to that other.

Zupančič offers a similar depiction of the relationship between gendered subjects and their essences in her account of the unequal relationship between them. It is an account that harks back to Deleuze's own account of the difference in the ways affirmation and negation relate to each other. Zupančič describes this relation between gendered subjects as: “the irreducible difference *of (or to)* the Other (the “masculine” position), and the irreducible difference *within* the Other (the “feminine” position).”¹¹³ While man forecloses the possibilities for activity inherent to the irreducible difference between man and woman, woman's self-contained (yet still irreducible) difference has the potential to realize a freeing (and an extension) of becoming-active. Woman's difference has inherent within itself the desire to move out of itself to share that possibility with her other. In distinction, man's position *next to*, but willfully ignorant of, irreducible difference leaves him without a clear exit.

Recalling what was alluded to in the first section of the chapter, we know that Deleuze's typology of activity and passivity forecloses the possibility of a negation of the negation.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *The Shortest Shadow* p. 137

¹¹⁴ He notes on page 68 of *Nietzsche & Philosophy* that “we cannot conclude that a reactive force becomes active by coming to the limit of what it can do.”

While this idea is most obvious in the case of negative nihilism, it is true of all forms of nihilism; it is symptomatic of nihilism in general that its limit does not connect to an Other, but only to that which is ideal and therefore does not exist in the world. Activity, on the other hand, requires the world as grounding for the overcoming of a limit. While the paradigms Nietzsche criticizes either for outright nihilism or for their reactive nature can never lead men beyond their becoming-reactive, the account of woman proposed by Irigaray considered alongside *The Gay Science* can help us theorize woman as becoming-active. But because of the nature of this activity, the possibility is not and cannot be limited *to* woman. Indeed, if Nietzsche's passages on woman in *The Gay Science* point back to man primarily in order to call attention to the limitations of man's system of knowledge, Irigaray's articulation from the position of that woman stretches a hand out to man. Put differently, Nietzsche's account of woman remains ultimately reactive, and limited in its usefulness in isolation, because it is merely oriented to man (perhaps because of his own gendered position in writing). But on the contrary, Irigaray's account of woman, in affirming an essence to move beyond it, truly opens up active becoming. Our analysis here follows Deleuze's model for becoming-active, which dictates that "in order to become active it is not sufficient for a force to go to the limit of what it can do, it must make what it can do *an object of affirmation*."¹¹⁵ When woman makes birth, or creation, an affirmation, that process is not something she "attains" as though it were her highest good. Rather, birth represents a starting point grounded in the affirmation of life—and that affirmation is necessarily connected to another on the *basis of* their difference. Thus woman says "yes" to birth, or to the creative process, and "yes" to that which emerges from it in the form of a literal or a figurative child. As we will see below, these affirmations transcend a relationship of mere

¹¹⁵ Ibid; our emphasis.

negation, and rather embrace a view of woman as having an affirmative and creative relation to her so-called “limits”.

**Finishing with Nihilism:
Activity, Affirmation, and the Eternal Return of Difference**

Nietzsche’s first mention of the eternal return takes place at the end of Book Four of *The Gay Science* (the end of the first edition), just before a final aphorism presenting Zarathustra’s down-going, or “going under”. The penultimate aphorism begins with a thought experiment: let us say that a demon finds readers in their deepest loneliness and tells them that they must now live their life “innumerable times more” in all its highs, lows, and most insignificant moments. Nietzsche asks readers if they would curse or worship this demon. He then writes:

If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to *crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate confirmation and seal? ¹¹⁶

On the surface, this formulation of the eternal return seems to be phrased as a return of the same, each thing must be desired “innumerable times more” and therefore one’s life runs through over and over, the same each time. It is easy to view this aphorism as existential, particularly as Nietzsche is speaking directly to the reader. Viewing the eternal return this way, it becomes something like a thought experiment whereby we are confronted with an instantaneous, and yet never ending, self-assessment. This more existential formulation of the eternal return requires the subject to affirm or deny their own life, to say yes to their life as it is, for all there is, or to say no to their life in favour of non-being. In this formulation, the problem of nihilism could be avoided or overcome simply on the basis of one’s virtue or, to draw on earlier discussion, simply on the

¹¹⁶ *The Gay Science* s. 341

basis of having chosen the ‘right’ cause. We have seen that this, on its own, is not sufficient because these ways of proceeding do not ensure an *active* way of being; they can still be premised on a relationship to the world resting on a mere fiction (as long as that fiction is historically timely). It is my view that this formulation of the eternal return does not get to the core of what Nietzsche wanted to propose, though it does introduce an important element that lays the groundwork for that core.

If we accept Deleuze’s claim that negation opposes affirmation (creating once again a chasm of “nothing”) while affirmation merely differs from negation, the role of affirmation becomes central here to assessing whether something can truly escape nihilism. Deleuze writes regarding this distinction: “Opposition is not the only relation of negation with affirmation but the essence of the negative as such. Affirmation is the enjoyment and play of its own difference, just as negation is the suffering and labour of the opposition that belongs to it.”¹¹⁷ To state things differently: it is through affirmation that the issue of difference comes to the forefront.

Now, difference seems to pose a problem to the eternal return, particularly in the formulation (proposed above) that is so focused on the individual subject. But it is through specific locations of difference that the eternal return makes *affirmation* possible. Deleuze explains, “Affirmation is posited for the first time as multiplicity, becoming, and chance. For multiplicity is the difference of one thing from another, becoming is difference from self and chance is difference “between all” or distributive difference.”¹¹⁸ Each distinct, though non-negating, form of difference applies to a different area of thought that the eternal return must draw from and move through. Thus, there is here a metaphysical and spatial/temporal aspect of

¹¹⁷ *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 189

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

the eternal return, an ontological or meta-psychological aspect, and a more straightforwardly ethical aspect, all of which are shaped by and relate to a system based in affirmation. Moreover, Deleuze argues that each of these aspects of the eternal return (becoming, multiplicity, and chance) do not contain any negation at all.¹¹⁹ Instead, each of them allows for a *selection* within their movements.

This Deleuzian process is, in my view, quite similar to Irigaray's account of woman's running effortlessly from peak to peak while man is not able to. Here, woman's difference is located in her relationship to herself while man's is located between himself and his other. In other words, according to Irigaray, the gap is navigable for woman in her movement along its borders (though still irreducible), while for man the gap proves a negation of the other and creates a chasm he cannot leap across. Selection, in the cases of becoming, multiplicity, and chance, contain their difference(s) within themselves. One possibility chosen does not have a negative effect on the alternate possibilities. My point here is that it is *this* internal difference that is the condition of possibility for the eternal return, and it is through *difference*, in allowing for selection, that the negative need not return because it remains identical to itself over time.

The role of affirmation in the process of selection within the eternal return goes even further: the affirmation itself must be doubled, the first "yes" must be affirmed by a second,¹²⁰ in order to differentiate itself from merely reactive values. The double affirmation is of great

¹¹⁹ Ibid-p. 136.

¹²⁰ Zupančič describes this double affirmation as the first "yes" affirming something in the world, with the second affirming our feeling about or relation to that thing, rather than the thing itself. But she warns "Yet—and this is Nietzsche's crucial emphasis—this second "yes" alone, if it were completely independent (i.e. if satisfaction were to become the sole object of affirmation), can lead only to nihilism" (p. 144). Nietzsche criticizes the isolated second "yes" in the section "Of the Spirit of Gravity" in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Also of relevance here is Zupančič's remark later on the same page, likening this reading of affirmation to truth (and woman) in possessing a structure of duplicity and therefore being "not-whole"

significance to Zupančič's *The Shortest Shadow*, a book whose title refers to the figure of the noon as the time of the "shortest shadow": the event wherein the distinctions between yes and no are redirected toward activity as selection, rather than negation. She writes:

Double affirmation [...] is precisely the creation of a minimal difference. This minimal difference or hiatus between two affirmations, this "crack" created by the very redoubling of affirmation, is what activates negation/negativity without transforming it into something that one could take for a direct object of one's will. This is because negation exists only in and as this hiatus; it exists only as the minimal difference between the two—as, to use Nietzsche's terms, the "shortest shadow." In this configuration, negativity is not the opposite, obverse side of every positive entity, neither does it function itself as a singular entity.¹²¹

Now, Zupančič makes reference to negation whereas Deleuze's account does not; however, she also speaks of it in terms of a negativity, that can exist in relation to another object without the violent operation of negation taking place. This relationship between the first "yes" and the second, and between the affirmation and the negation between them (possibly a formulation of the two options at hand in the process of selection), runs parallel to the relation seen between man's becoming-reactive and woman's becoming-active. Man's nihilism is redirected through woman's articulation of difference (an active articulation) in his relation to woman as an active and changeable materiality and site of possibility located in the world. This redirection positions his unfinished denial of life between woman's first "yes" and an indeterminate future, which allows for man's becoming-reactive to be deployed in the interest of his own active "yes." This is distinct from a system in which man's (reactive) articulation of woman creates a condition in the world whereby woman must react to or simply oppose that account of her essence. Zupančič insists that this positioning of affirmation and negativity is not pre-symbolic, but rather that these positions allow the power of the symbolic realm (the way we give value to things in the world)

¹²¹ *The Shortest Shadow* p. 136

and the products of that realm (whether real or imaginary) to be distinguishable from each other and thus comprehensible in their own respective function.¹²²

Conclusion

Knowing that Nietzsche considers the eternal return to be “the fundamental creation of [*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*],” and “the highest formula of affirmation that could ever be attained,”¹²³ and given that this formula is founded at its core upon difference, the extent of the contribution of difference to Nietzsche’s thought obviously goes far beyond what has been mentioned in this chapter. Nevertheless, tracing the figure of woman through Nietzsche’s work on nihilism and the eternal return might still have modestly helped to make the ‘reality’ of difference more tangible, and through Irigaray’s work on the subject, more digestible. Though nihilism is not a pattern of thought *limited* to men, I maintain that it is one made possible by them alone. This is not to say that there are two distinct groups in which one half experiences nihilism and the other does not; in the man/woman distinction taken up by Nietzsche and Irigaray, it is entirely possible for woman to experience nihilism as a result of the dominant system of values she must operate within. But my point here is that what the man/woman distinction brings to light are the axes along which individuals’ bodies are made problems for them (in this case, woman’s through her assigned role as possessing the capacity to give birth). More importantly, these diverse axes might have their liberatory potential revealed once they are

¹²² Ibid, 136-137.

¹²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* p. 67

recast as creative and active *in relation to that which differs from them*, rather than remaining infertile and negating as the dominant category of “man” has done.

There are many power dynamics in our current political climate that do not allow for this creative relation (to difference), but understanding this form of creativity remains essential to overcoming the limits of mere opposition in the Deleuzian sense, and in turn, to overcoming nihilism. It is pertinent to mention here that Zupančič defines liberation in the context of the eternal return as engagement with necessity¹²⁴ (specifically for our purposes in historical situations where even a lack of action *becomes* an action, or a reaction, in a material sense). For her, it is of utmost necessity for individuals to grapple with these situations in such a way that one will be able to look back on them (and the deeds performed) and understand themselves as *active* participants. I would go even further than Zupančič, in this conception, to argue that the failure or refusal to act, or to take a side, becomes an action and a side taken in its own right.

While the overcoming of nihilism through the eternal return necessitates the overcoming of the *human* form itself (and this necessity will inform our movement into the next chapter), the final section of our thesis will also be informed by the view that man’s overcoming cannot take place without recognition and affirmation of the *irreducible difference between individuals*—one that allows them to become creative or productive beings. Now that some of the concepts central to Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* have been discussed in their relation to woman and to their origin in difference, and a reading of woman (understood on her own terms) has been proposed, a close reading of *Zarathustra* informed by these ideas is now in order.

¹²⁴ *The Shortest Shadow* p. 163

Chapter 3: Woman and Difference in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Throughout this thesis, our interrogation of the roles of both nihilism and woman in Nietzsche's thought has been oriented towards obtaining a better understanding of the concept Nietzsche believed to be the pinnacle of his work: namely, the Overman. The steps this thesis has taken to get to the Overman may not seem intuitive or typical. After all, we know that many feminist Nietzsche scholars (Irigaray included) do not see great emancipatory potential in the figure of the Overman, largely on the basis of the portrayal of woman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.¹²⁵ In fact, the Overman tends to be invoked chiefly by those who wish to *erase difference* for (unpalatable) political reasons (e.g. fascist and alt-right readers today).

Now, Nietzsche's ties to National Socialism (or, perhaps better put, National Socialism's ties to Nietzsche) pose a problem to anyone seriously investigating his works. But despite the difficulty, avoiding this aspect of Nietzsche scholarship completely only allows those dangerous appropriations of his thought to proliferate. Charles M. Yablon (2002) has offered a helpful discussion on the extent of National Socialism's use and treatment of Nietzsche, as well as of the dominant schools of Nietzsche interpretation following the fall of the Third Reich. He notes that those authors who attempt to rescue Nietzsche from far-right interpretations often do so by either avoiding major themes or concepts like the Overman, or by reading Nietzsche as self-contradicting and therefore politically incoherent (Yablon places Walter Kaufmann in the former camp, and Karl Jaspers and Jacques Derrida in the latter).¹²⁶ In my own investigation of

¹²⁵ Ellen Mortensen and Ruth Burch express great uneasiness about woman's role in *Zarathustra* and the utility of the Overman therein. See: *The Feminine and Nihilism: Luce Irigaray with Nietzsche and Heidegger*. Scandinavian UP, 1994; Ruth Burch, "On Nietzsche's Concept of European Nihilism." *European Review* 22.02 (2014): 196-208.

¹²⁶ Charles M. Yablon, "Nietzsche and the Nazis: The impact of National Socialism on the philosophy of Nietzsche". *Cardozo Law Review* vol. 24:2. (pp. 739-755) pgs. 749-751

Nietzsche's thought, and in grappling with these issues, I have found both of these positions inadequate, and have therefore chosen a different approach. Indeed, I will try to reclaim the Overman and confront fascist (and more generally, 'anti-difference') interpretations with an alternative mapping of the concept and of its ties to the rest of Nietzsche's thought. In my view, it is highly problematic for feminist interpretations to avoid the Overman entirely. Also, to disparage the figure on the basis of those interpretations that we, *as feminists*, should try to avoid reproducing might end up cutting us short of a major Nietzschean 'tool' for thinking of means to overcome nihilism and thus to build better politics. Both moves might also leave us with a great 'gap', an incoherence within Nietzsche's thought. I believe, on the contrary, that there is much coherence to Nietzsche's thought and that to overlook the Overman regrettably diminishes the possibility of any call to action inspired by his works.

But to affirm this coherence does require a great deal more work, and obviously calls for a detailed, positive account of what Nietzsche considered one of his most important concepts, namely the Overman.¹²⁷ Rather than attempt to debunk each argument made toward far-right appropriations of the Overman and the will-to-power, which would be much more work than a project of this length, methodology and scope could allow, this thesis will advance an interpretation of the Overman built from Nietzsche's own theorizing of woman and of nihilism. I take this direction in order to ground the Overman, as a figure that represents something akin to a goal, and I ground it firmly in Nietzsche's theorizing of difference. Understanding woman as representing truth, life, wisdom and difference for Nietzsche will be crucial in what follows, as

¹²⁷ I do believe that the will to power deserves similar attention, though as a concept its body of interpretation is much broader in scope such that it would not fit within this project. It is my hope that discussion on both the Overman and the eternal return point to a coherent interpretation of the will to power as a theory which follows from these two concepts, and which takes precedence in Nietzsche's later texts.

will considering the eternal return as a return of *difference* (in the tradition of Deleuze), and as a return of both the same *and* the different (following in the footsteps of Kelly Oliver¹²⁸).

In order to construct the conditions of possibility for the Overman as a figure that embodies an overcoming of man through a reconciling with the irreducibly different, we will first have to situate woman in the text where the Overman is described most thoroughly: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.¹²⁹ Nietzsche wrote—quite hyperbolically--in *Ecce Homo* that he believed *Zarathustra* to be “the greatest gift [humanity] was ever given,” and that, among all his works, it stood alone.¹³⁰ Thus, similarly in this chapter, the book that brought the Overman into the world will, for the most part, stand on its own two feet.

As is well-known, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a work that follows the prophet Zarathustra—a name adapted from an early translation of Zoroaster, the prophet of the Zoroastrian faith—through a series of his “down-goings” into the world from his secluded home, a cave in the woods. Zarathustra, the prophet, seems to typically represent or express Nietzsche’s own positions and beliefs, though to view the two as one-in-the-same would not afford the book the nuance and complexity it deserves. Moreover, there are passages in the text where Zarathustra interacts with others who take up positions that Nietzsche has taken elsewhere, as will be seen shortly.

That Nietzsche could articulate multiple (and sometimes slightly *contradictory*) positions within the same text but keep them in dialogue with each other is in itself fascinating and relevant for a thesis which seeks to understand how the self (or the categories it belongs to) is to

¹²⁸ “The eternal return is both the return of the difference and the return of the same simultaneously; what is the same about life is difference itself. The principle of return both denies and affirms difference.” *Womanizing Nietzsche*, 116.

¹²⁹ Nietzsche also discusses the Overman in *Ecce Homo*, though most of that discussion is in reference to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

¹³⁰ *Ecce Homo*, Foreword, s. 4

be found and deconstructed. As distinct from his other works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* takes the style of a series of parables as it follows the prophet in his teachings and in his own lessons. This in some respects makes it somewhat easier to see the threads of themes and concepts that run across the work. One of these threads is its discussion of the role of woman—even if this role is not seen, on the whole, in a favourable light. But once we scratch the surface of the text, we will nevertheless be in a good position to appreciate the nuances of Nietzsche's position and the complexity of the text. As will become clear in the following pages, I intend to depart from interpretations of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that view woman's role as either insignificant or as *limiting* for woman.

Situating woman's role in *Zarathustra* will call for a discussion of some of the more troubling passages concerning marriage, and more specifically, a discussion of woman in her relation to man, notably in the sections "Of Old and Young Women" and "Of Marriage and Children." The discussion of these sections will be focused on considering their pertinence for a reflection on the overcoming of man, and woman's relation to this overcoming. This discussion will then lead to a consideration of difference more generally as it manifests in the text, particularly in the accounts of Zarathustra's down-goings and of his subsequent returns to isolation. Zarathustra's own movement from isolation to the public within the text will be linked to my reflections on nihilism presented in the previous chapter. Finally, with all this in mind, we will turn to a discussion of the actuality of the Overman, as well as to the conditions of its possibility.

Do not forget your whip!

Thus Spoke Zarathustra contains one of the most famous passages associated with Nietzsche's misogyny; in his encounter with an old woman, Zarathustra tells her what he knows to be true of woman, and, in return, the old woman gives him a piece of wisdom she possesses about her own kind: "Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!"¹³¹ This adage is repeated in *Beyond Good and Evil* where it is attributed to Franco Sacchetti. There Nietzsche writes: "From old Florentine novellas: but also—from life: *buona femmina e mala femmina vuol bastone.*"¹³² (It may be more troubling to some feminist readers to know that the one piece of wisdom given to Zarathustra by a woman actually originated from a man than it is to know that this may be an opinion of Nietzsche's). Central to Nietzsche's strategy to invoke the figure of woman to call attention to the failings of men is the view that it is man's distaste for woman that makes her damnable in essence—a "good" woman deserves punishment on the basis of her adherence to a damnable category, a "bad" woman rather deserves punishment because she has defied her 'orders'. But in both cases, the outcomes are the result of man's disdain for the category of woman; it is this very reaction, this very disdain, which maintains and enforces the category of woman. What precedes the comment about the whip is frustrating for the same reason as the comment itself; what Zarathustra tells to the old woman about woman is curious because although he is speaking to a woman about women, he still grounds his statements in woman's relation to man. While the woman's retort at the end of the section can be understood as an ironic subversion of what is said to her, this does not absolve Nietzsche of the questionable

¹³¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 93

¹³² *Beyond Good and Evil* s. 147.

contents of Zarathustra's speech. But absolution hardly seems appropriate as a 'goal' or a strategy in our attempt to better understand the function and significance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Instead, an understanding of what the imagery of love, union, and fecundity come to mean within the text may situate the irony of this exchange as something simultaneously comprehensible for woman from the scope of her own subject position, and as something worth discussing for what the imagery reveals about that very scope.

Let us begin with a consideration of the section titled "Of Marriage and Children", which is very clearly (and unsurprisingly perhaps) directed at men seeking marriage and children, rather than at women. When we look closely, we can see here that in this address to men, Zarathustra criticizes man's approach to marriage. Central to marriage, per Zarathustra's guidance, is communion with another—here woman is obviously that particular 'other', but it need not be only (or essentially) her. What we learn in this important section of the book is that Zarathustra's vitriol is directed most particularly at what the "many-too-many, the superfluous call marriage" which really should be called, according to him, not marriage but a "poverty of soul in partnership."¹³³ Though Zarathustra's disdain for the masses (the 'many-too-many') ought to be noted here and cannot simply be swept under the carpet, it is marriage as an institution rooted in religious and property-based histories that is chiefly under criticism here rather than 'the masses' themselves in their practices and values.

Now, Zarathustra's depiction of marriage as a social and historical institution can be understood as yet another vehicle for the perpetuation and voicing of man's existing prejudices about woman. That is to say, it is the *way* marriage is entered into by men, what they *seek* in a marriage, that reveals something about those men. Nietzsche writes, "This man seemed to me

¹³³ "Of Marriage and Children", *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 95

worthy and ripe for the meaning of the earth: but when I saw his wife the earth seemed to me a house for the nonsensical.”¹³⁴ Even the best men in Zarathustra’s eyes are shown to be unworthy or not ready for his teaching by the very contemptible or “low” sort of marriage they entered into. Rather than seek out a wife who could be a challenging and enriching partner, for example, the married man Nietzsche criticizes here would wed a woman who precisely did *not* challenge him and who he would *not* consider his equal—but why would this be something man sought? This particular claim is less a statement about “good” wives versus “bad” wives, but instead about the foundation of a marriage itself and about what man tends to seek in it—and, by extension, what women have to *be* in order to find a husband. It can also be understood as a critique of the state, which alongside religion, perpetuates these categories for its own ease of operation.

This relationship between the condition of woman and the larger structures of power is addressed in much of what Nietzsche writes on women elsewhere, particularly in *Beyond Good and Evil* in the section “Our Virtues” in which he writes quite strongly *against* the women of the 19th century.¹³⁵ This section focuses chiefly on the education of women (and Nietzsche’s position *against* it), as well as on woman’s domestic role. Nietzsche’s vitriol here, as elsewhere, is two-pronged. On the one hand, he is critical of the woman ‘*an-sich*’ (“woman-as-such”), whom he criticizes for her desire to be integrated into man’s societal order more fully. These women see the value system created by men in language, understand it as Truth, and seek full integration into it. This move to integration by the woman-as-such is an endorsement of that very (pathetic, nihilistic) society which Nietzsche believes must be overcome, and whose overthrowing will

¹³⁴ Ibid-p. 96.

¹³⁵ See sections 231, 232, 233, 234, 237, 238, 239 of *Beyond Good and Evil* for Nietzsche’s more critical passages on woman.

result in the birth of the Overman. The woman-as-such coincides in my view with an early, and still prevalent, form of feminism that seeks primarily inclusion (into a patriarchal system) and which, in Nietzsche's view, forfeits much of what is emancipatory *about* woman. Nietzsche is, of course, equally critical of woman understood as a simple construct of man—as a good wife in a “poverty of soul in partnership” who does not aspire to anything beyond her marriage (assuming that this marriage is seen as an end and not a means to some greater creative process—something we will return to below).

As we saw in the first chapter, often what is praiseworthy or emancipatory in woman according to Nietzsche is located outside of the scope of man's experience. As such, this might leave Zarathustra little to preach about her to the men he directs his speeches to. But Zarathustra *does* preach or speak highly positively about a certain form of marriage, a marriage that is rooted not only in the creative, but also in a shared will to build forward and upward. Consider this very important passage: “Marriage: that I call *the will of two to create the one who is more than those who created it*. Reverence before one another, as before the willers of such a will – that I call marriage.”¹³⁶ Marriage then, as Zarathustra preaches, ought to be a foundation that one builds upon, and ought to be geared toward something greater than the sum of its parts. This requires, amongst other things, an acknowledgment of one's own limitations as well as of the limitations of one's partner. As Nietzsche writes elsewhere about woman in order to reveal truths about men, it is through a commitment to interacting with difference, with that which is different from oneself irreducibly, that one can learn about one's own limits.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Ibid 95; our emphasis.

¹³⁷ Now, to be fair, the role of difference in the romantic relationship as a means to understanding one's own limits is not made explicit in Nietzsche's works, but is central to the project of Irigaray's *To be Two*.

This epistemological starting point is central to the feminism of Luce Irigaray, and although it is not a work that directly responds to Nietzsche, her book *To be Two* directly addresses this topic. Her conception of the irreducibility of two, of its status as a starting place for knowledge of the world through understanding life itself as a creative process, mirrors much of the content of *Zarathustra*, taking on a positive character not seen in *Marine Lover*:

To be two means to help each other to be, to discover and to cultivate happiness, to take care of the difference between us, not merely because of its role in generation, because it represents the means of humanity's production and reproduction, but in order to achieve happiness and make it blossom.¹³⁸

Irigaray gestures toward a relationship founded on difference and its creative and life-giving possibilities with much the same language as Nietzsche's sections on marriage in *Zarathustra*. It is in relation to marriage that the concrete steps toward the overcoming of man are articulated most clearly within that text. Although *Zarathustra* speaks on many topics, and while there is much to be learned from his journey itself (as we will see shortly), the basis for self-growth and self-overcoming can be found in one's ability to relate to the person one chooses to enter into life-long, *loving* covenants with.

While *Zarathustra* preaches the merits of friendship, he claims that "woman is not yet capable of friendship: she knows only love."¹³⁹ *Zarathustra*'s idea of friendship may in some respects seem comparable to his views on marriage, though an important difference in the required commitment cannot be overlooked. Friendship serves as a form of release and a site of understanding for Nietzsche, one in which difference plays somewhat less of a necessary role than it does in a 'healthy' or noble marriage. But there is also an emphasis on self-improvement within friendships. Nietzsche writes: "You cannot adorn yourself too well for your friend: for

¹³⁸ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Two* (Routledge, 2001) p. 57

¹³⁹ "Of the Friend" *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 83. He contradicts this in *Human, All Too Human* s. 390.

you should be to him an arrow and a longing for the Superman.”¹⁴⁰ In the arrow metaphor we see chiefly a relation between men; Zarathustra’s first speech to the masses urges them to think of man as a rope between animal and the Superman; an arrow ought to be a force directing that rope to its end goal. But while an arrow can be a guide, it cannot ensure that you follow. By contrast, Zarathustra’s highest praise of marriage is this:

There is bitterness in the cup of even the best love: thus it arouses longing for the Superman, thus it arouses thirst in you, the creator!
A creator’s thirst, arrow, and longing for the Superman: speak, my brother, is this your will to marriage?
I call holy such a will and such a marriage.¹⁴¹

The difference, then, could be said to lie in the particular commitment inherent to marriage (*contra* that in friendship): namely, a commitment to working through and with ‘bitterness’ or unpleasantness, but also a commitment to the reciprocity of certain forms of emotional labour and the sharing of a goal *as well as* a journey. Friendship sees two people set examples for each other; and this relationship, as such, requires some amount of similarity between the friends since one must be able to see oneself in the other. In marriage as a creative process, *difference* between partners creates a greater sphere of possible outcomes, of possible sites of creation, particularly in pursuit of the creation of something larger than its two parts. In a friendship you can see the best in yourself reproduced in another; in marriage you are (sometimes) confronted with the worst and forced to work through it for the betterment of both yourself and another.¹⁴² My claim here is that Nietzsche bases the former relationship in relative ease, and the latter (marriage) in worthy hardship; both are necessary ways of being with another, and both are necessary in

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ “Of Marriage and Children” p. 96.

¹⁴² *Human, All Too Human*, though outside the scope of my thesis, deals extensively with the role of the friend and with the role of woman. The most important passages that reflect on the distinction I raise here in Volume One are sections 376 and 378 (where he writes of one’s best friend having the best wife) as well as 499 (where he defines friendship as “fellow rejoicing not fellow suffering”), and in Volume Two sections 241 (on the lack of intimacy, or distance, required for friendship) & 242 (on friendship and self-development).

pursuit of the birth of the Overman, though one is more directly (re)productive in its orientation in my view.

Now, the role of Overman as it pertains to this positive depiction of woman's role is a matter of controversy within the secondary literature. Irigaray is quite critical of the Overman within the pages of *Marine Lover*, though she makes this criticism very explicit only once:

Overcome, overpower, overman, isn't this flying over life? Life is what matters to me, not the beyond that snatched food from the man still struggling to live. He who needs to drink the blood of earthly creatures does not fly on his own wings. He is merely a rapacious specter beating back the depths of the air with his dreams.
And you will pitch yourself to a higher creation not by devouring the other so it is reduced to your own substance, but rather by letting different bodies be and their fortune multiply.¹⁴³

The criticism of putting all of one's eggs in the future's basket is a valid one; and it is a critique Irigaray makes of Nietzsche himself elsewhere, including in a 2016 essay "On Overcoming Nihilism Through Nietzsche's Teaching."¹⁴⁴ But to think of the Overman solely this way is perhaps unwise and unwarranted, and may serve to further reify the categories of man as well as woman (as some articulations of her theory of sexual difference can tend toward¹⁴⁵). While it is important to overcome these categories, the process of overcoming described within *Zarathustra* could be said to be concurrent with abiding by the earth and by life, and in fact by "letting different bodies be and their fortune multiply" (if the reading I have proposed above should be at all compelling).

¹⁴³ *Marine Lover* p. 18

¹⁴⁴ "The fact that Nietzsche, then, spoke of a superman, and not of becoming the man he was, reveals the point about and from which many of his commentators wander, in my opinion, and, perhaps, Nietzsche himself lost his way. Indeed, this superman would amount to a mere turning upside down of Platonism without really leaving its economy. The matter would be one of freeing energy from idealities, but without shaping it differently. [...] This might even endanger the human being, and even human life, if another way of arousing and structuring energy is not supplied." Luce Irigaray, "On Overcoming Nihilism through Nietzsche's Teaching" from *Nietzsche als Kritiker und Denker der Transformation* (edited by Helmut Heit, Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir De Gruyter, 2016). pgs. 17-18.

¹⁴⁵ The discussion of whether or not Irigaray reifies the categories man and woman in a way that ends up limiting her own thought is summarized in Danielle Poe's essay "Can Luce Irigaray's Notion of Sexual Difference Be Applied to Transsexual and Transgender Narratives?" (in *Thinking with Irigaray* ed. Hom, Khader, and Rawlinson. State U of New York, 2011.)

Kelly Oliver has addressed this passage from Irigaray in her *Womanizing Nietzsche*, in a reading I find convincing. Oliver argues that Irigaray's cold reception of the figure of the Overman may in fact be a strategic defiance, negating the figure until the role of woman and of difference in its genesis becomes more adequately recognized. She writes that "By presenting her side of the story, Irigaray forces tensions in Nietzsche's work to an immediacy unprecedented in Nietzsche scholarship. She reflects violence back at itself in order to produce the possibility of something other."¹⁴⁶ We could claim that Irigaray's criticism of the Overman is consistent with the rest of Irigaray's project in *Marine Lover* and, in fact, consistent also with the sort of marriage preached by Zarathustra (if at the textual level). By acknowledging the inconsistencies and shortcomings of the articulation of the Overman, the reader might be forced to take a step back and *re-imagine* the figure, interrogating what steps may be missing—in this case it is, in fact, woman.

But concurrent with the importance of communion with another, Zarathustra also stresses the importance of self-improvement. Our relationships with others create conditions for meaningful self-improvement, but I believe it is equally and perhaps primarily important for us to work on *ourselves* in order to be meaningful partners and friends, and to be a good example for all those that we encounter in day-to-day life. To be a good partner or friend, to help another improve, you must be willing to bring your best self to that relationship and work on that self even on your own time.

The next step in our effort to (re)construct the Overman must thus be to better understand how difference is located at the heart of this process of self-growth for Zarathustra. At first glance, Nietzsche's focus within the book on the overcoming of man may seem antithetical to the

¹⁴⁶ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche* p. 114

process of self-improvement. But when we look more closely, the work also stresses that the path to man's overcoming does lie in man becoming the best he can possibly be. While the higher man cannot himself become the Overman, moving toward the limits of the category of man is the prerequisite for man's overcoming, and this movement depends on becoming the best that one can be (i.e. it depends on self-improvement).

Woman may serve here as a clue to the limits of man that must be crossed for the Overman to be born, provided that one appreciates the concrete historical conditions that have given rise to a gendered division in the first place. This division manifests itself as a distribution of qualities that have no inherent belonging in one body as opposed to another; seeking to transcend that division through acknowledging and meaningfully engaging with the existence and materiality of the category of gender may in part pave the way to the necessary overcoming of man. What this means for man, and for man's relation to himself will be examined next, with Zarathustra's actions serving as our guide.

Zarathustra's Down-going

A reading of difference outside of the scant passages on woman in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—i.e. reading it in the interactions between Zarathustra and his friends, as well as between him and the townspeople he visits—entails reading difference in the way Nietzsche understands men and the relationships between them. So far in this project we have grounded the concept of difference in woman herself, and in the relation between man and woman (especially as the basis for Irigaray's work of the irreducibility of two). While woman presents an important opportunity to posit difference, and this opportunity may be deployed toward an overcoming of man, it must also be situated *in* man, or at least be made comprehensible *for* and *as* man, if one wishes to work towards a falling away of both categories (necessary for the birth of the

Overman). Thus, reading difference into *Zarathustra* will not posit its characters as possessing difference inherently within themselves. Instead, and more importantly, man's *relationship* to life and self-improvement will be analyzed as an instance of difference in its own right. This approach will allow for an understanding of man's relation to himself and to others that can then function as a model for the overcoming of the limitations of his subject position. Rather than attempting to simply invert the Platonic categories meaningful to man, as Irigaray has accused Nietzsche of doing,¹⁴⁷ Zarathustra's project represents an ongoing effort to reconcile himself with difference within his own lifetime and in anticipation of his own death alongside the death of man.

Zarathustra's actions within the book take place to the rhythm of what he describes as a series of "down-goings," movements between his life of seclusion in a cave in the mountains (where he is surrounded only by animals) and his life of social interaction. He moves between these places with a clearly defined purpose, with a knowledge of the role he must play, as a prophet, wherever he goes. This movement between solitude and the masses is a movement whereby both end points come to be shaped by each other. This motion seems more dialectical than Nietzsche's ideas typically are, but the nature of this movement will be understood as nonetheless 'Nietzschean' in terms of its take on nihilism (and its overcoming). And here we will be building on some of the insights of our previous chapter.

Zarathustra's actions within the book are sure-footed and self-motivated. As he moves between solitude and society in a way that allows his immediate experience in one area to inform another, the force that drives him to make these changes seems to be entirely internal, divorced

¹⁴⁷ Irigaray, "Overcoming Nihilism Following Nietzsche's Teaching" pgs.17-18.

from any prior law or science and rather based often in the conversations he has with his heart.¹⁴⁸ There is a certain limitation associated with a type of movement propelled by negation;¹⁴⁹ but Zarathustra's movement seems to be based chiefly in an affirmation of life—one that is anchored at that point where one's becoming-active veers into becoming-reactive. The way Zarathustra speaks to himself (or to "his heart" or his animals) differs greatly, in his own opinion, from the way he speaks to the masses and what he is able to communicate to them. Knowledge of this difference, and the ability to move fluidly between solitude and the world, requires an attunement both to one's needs and one's capacities to give, and one's understanding of them as linked. Thus, Zarathustra's positive project is sustained by a regular movement *between* self-improvement/healing and a sustained exposure to those who differ from him. This is (albeit distantly) related to the claims made by scholars who discuss the role of the gift in Nietzsche, particularly those that see the gift as a form of selfishness in both giving and receiving. For Nietzsche, selfishness becomes a virtue alongside the ability to bestow, though both are manifested primarily in the presence of others (at the level of language).

Peter Sloterdijk considers the link between these two virtues in the third section of his *Nietzsche Apostle*, where he argues that one's self-evangelism can be a gift to others insofar as it opens up an *active* future for them, allowing them to exit gifting relationships founded in debt and therefore to exit reactivity, taking value from the future instead of dwelling in the past.¹⁵⁰ While the gift is something of a major lesson to be taken from *Zarathustra*, and will come into

¹⁴⁸ Nietzsche uses this metaphor for Zarathustra's internal monologue as early as page 5, and it carries on throughout the book.

¹⁴⁹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 188, see also the discussion in this thesis around note 17 of ch.2.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Sloterdijk, *Nietzsche Apostle* (trans. Steve Corcoran. Semiotext(e) 2013) pgs., 47-64.

Alan Schrift also touches on the gift, its role in the symbolic economy of men as one of debt versus the overabundance of woman's symbolic economy in "On the Gynecology of Morals: Nietzsche and Cixous on the Logic of the Gift" (in *Nietzsche and the Feminine* ed. Peter Burgard)

play again in the last section as it pertains to the eternal return, it will suffice for now to underscore that accepting a gift can be more difficult than offering one. For Nietzsche, this is, in part, because of the selfishness of the gift as an act; in “Of the Bestowing Virtue,” Zarathustra likens the gift giver to cats and wolves, able to give and receive offering but always in the form of stealing. Of those that seek to develop their own similarity to these animals, Nietzsche writes “You compel all things to come to you and into you, that they may flow back from your fountain as gifts of your love.”¹⁵¹ Within the book, exchanges of speech are treated as gifts more than physical tokens, thus communicating with those who differ from oneself is necessary for this flow. Later in the same section, while considering the stakes of all this on the body and soul, Zarathustra states that: “The body purifies itself through knowledge; experimenting with knowledge it elevates itself; to the discerning man all instincts are holy; the soul of the elevated man grows joyful.”¹⁵² Zarathustra, despite stressing the importance of difference throughout his journey, still struggles to follow his own advice. Upon one of his returns to solitude he notes the paradox in his capacities to give and receive; where in solitude “the words and word-chests of all existence spring open to me: all existence here wants to become words, all becoming here wants to learn speech from me[,]” in his encounters with the masses he struggles with the reality of this task despite understanding its importance. Nietzsche writes: “He who wants to understand all things among men has to touch all things. But my hands are too clean for that.”¹⁵³ This exhaustion is alluded to multiple times upon Zarathustra’s return to the mountain, though this does not stop him from going back down once his mind reaches clarity on the problems that sent him into isolation. This frustration is, perhaps, as human as the lapses in belief in truth that

¹⁵¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 101.

¹⁵² *Ibid*-p.102.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*-p. 203

characterizes nihilism. It is not that Zarathustra does not feel them. It is precisely that he does, at times, veer close to falling from that which he has built, and that he nonetheless acts in accordance with his perceived duty to continue building and creating in ways that are possible for him. This capacity is developed based on Zarathustra's knowledge of himself, but this knowledge is cultivated in Zarathustra's time spent with others.

Still, Zarathustra's failure comes to represent an important part of his role as prophet and decisively *not* as Overman himself. That the Overman is *not* man and never can be is in fact at the heart of his teaching, particularly to those visitors or friends that become his primary interlocutors toward the end of the book. Deleuze stresses the impossibility of a human Overman in *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, and while he does so in reference to the higher men, it applies in equal measure to Zarathustra himself. Deleuze writes:

We must reject every interpretation which would have the Overman succeed where the higher man fails. The Overman is not a man who surpasses *himself* and succeeds in surpassing himself. The Overman and the higher man differ in nature; both in the instances which produce them and in the goals that they attain.¹⁵⁴

Both Zarathustra and the higher men are ultimately incapable of personally becoming the Overman, but while Zarathustra integrates this into his teaching and his practice, there is a sense of unease among the higher men who occupy an uncomfortable place within Zarathustra's narrative. That they can be thought of as the 'best' man has to offer is only true, for Zarathustra, insofar as they do not abide by those categories or qualities that are touted as desirable by systems of value nearing their collapse. Put differently, they are only the highest insofar as they are, quite literally, failures.¹⁵⁵ The higher men are failures insofar as man itself is a failure for Nietzsche. Zarathustra plays with this idea of failure to advocate for the higher men to direct

¹⁵⁴ *Nietzsche & Philosophy* p. 168.

¹⁵⁵ "The higher its type, the less often does a thing succeed. You Higher men here, are you not all – failures?" *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 303

themselves toward the future instead of the past, and to treat the future joyfully in a move to accept their own failed natures. This leaves them in a strange predicament; ostracized and not tempted by the dominant society they belong to, and yet hopeless for an escape from that society.

Nonetheless, in “Of the Bestowing Virtue,” Zarathustra preaches the merits of these solitary men, not on the basis of their solitude, but on the basis of their coming together: “You solitaires of today, you who have seceded from society, you shall one day be a people: from you, who have chosen out yourselves, shall a chosen people spring – and from this chosen people, the Superman.”¹⁵⁶ In order for these higher men to create something larger than themselves, they must still stake out a space in the world that they can occupy and others they can occupy that space with. In the case of Zarathustra’s contemporaries, the men he surrounds himself with (as “solitaires”) may eventually compose a “people,” but their own shortcomings as solitaires must be overcome. They have come out of their hermitic tendencies in order to be in the company of each other and of Zarathustra, but this is not sufficient for the sort of community Zarathustra alludes to here.

Nietzsche’s discussion of “peoples” within *Zarathustra* is relevant here and of considerable interest, particularly as it differs from “states” in the sense of being potentially liberatory social organizations. Though a discussion of “peoples” may seem like a problematic issue to consider given the ways Nietzsche’s ideas have nourished the ideas of the far-right, it nevertheless will constitute the next step in our interrogation of difference within *Zarathustra*. Part of my goal here will be to indicate that a better understanding of what Nietzsche means by “neighbour” may lead us into a more nuanced conception of peoples and of states.

¹⁵⁶ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 103

The Neighbour, the State, and the People

To approach the way Nietzsche conceives of large groups of people and their organization, we must first inquire about how each type is distinct from, and informs, the other(s). The first of these delineations for our purposes is the neighbour, originally posited as distinct from the friend but, I think, helpful in understanding the basis for Nietzsche's thought as it concerns groups of people beyond oneself and one's immediate surroundings. "Of Love of One's Neighbour" is located between Nietzsche's discussion "Of Old and Young Women" and "Of the Friend," while discussion of peoples and states come much later in the book, and stands somewhat between Zarathustra's teachings on marriage and on friendship (those we considered above). Love of one's neighbour as a Christian teaching is, according to Nietzsche, falsely conceived as a positive instance of difference. Nietzsche is rather of the view that the love of one's neighbour is a bad love of oneself. He writes: "One man runs to his neighbour because he is looking for himself, and another because he wants to lose himself. Your bad love of yourselves makes solitude a prison to you."¹⁵⁷ Within the paradigm I have advanced in the thesis, we can see that the neighbour occupies a position of relative distance and difference from oneself, though not enough difference to rightfully pose a challenge to one's own limitations. Instead, the position of relative difference allows both parties to smooth over their particular limits, physically, epistemologically or politically. So for Nietzsche some individuals run to their neighbour to find themselves because the neighbour occupies a place of *relative* sameness—not different enough to challenge your faults, but different enough for a relationship of two wherein neighbours can reaffirm the category they both belong to. But others run to their neighbours in order to lose themselves, as this relationship is not the type based in mutual growth or

¹⁵⁷ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 87

inspiration. In the relationship between neighbours, issues pertaining to the self can be more easily ignored in favour of a harmonious but superficial relationship based in what they share.

This discussion of the neighbour ought perhaps to be put back within the context of Nietzsche's own personal life in the small towns he tended to live in. But our own contemporary context could also be regarded as pertinent here, and more specifically, with regards to the class-based makeup of neighbourhoods. The focus on sameness, or on conditional belonging, creates a certain superficiality in the relationships between members of those communities where sameness is cultivated (reinforced by the class markers of each neighbourhood) and difference suffers.

Whether Nietzsche profoundly 'suffered' (or not) from superficial attachments with neighbours he never got to know is not the main issue we are concerned with. But it is likely to have informed his reflections on the importance of the friend, and of relationships founded in relationality and especially creativity. In the (true) friend and the lover, our shortcomings are worked through, and they *must* be worked through (and against) in pursuit of the Overman in Nietzsche's view.

Within the same section "Of Love of One's Neighbour", Nietzsche includes a critique of festivals and more specifically, of the actors that populate them. These festival actors are, in Nietzsche's view, distinct from the actors he praises in *The Gay Science*, largely because of the former's focus on their role as preserving a façade of sameness, whereas the actors praised in *The Gay Science* vie for survival without that façade.¹⁵⁸ Here too, in actor festivals, the expectation of sameness within is a formula for shallow relationships forged in the name of sameness rather

¹⁵⁸ Nietzsche's discussion of actors in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is most complete in "Of the Flies of the Marketplace" where he describes them as having much spirit but little consciousness of it. In *The Gay Science* he describes the actor as possessing "falseness with a good conscience" in section 361, analyzed in the first chapter of the thesis on page 39.

than the more productive relationships Nietzsche writes about in the cases of the friend or in marriage. Within the same section, Nietzsche underscores some of the ‘costs’ of this shallowness: “It is the distant man who always pays for your love of your neighbour; and when there are five of you together, a sixth always has to die.”¹⁵⁹

Given our interpretation of what precedes this, this passage gives a pretty strong condemnation of prioritizing sameness in one’s relationships. If neighbour relationships are predicated on the assumption of sameness (in order to lose oneself, or perhaps to lose one’s difference), Nietzsche seems to argue that the damage of that erasure plays out on those more distant, or more different. Or phrased differently, the implicit claim that could be seen here is that the illusion of sameness among those who embody a mere ‘relative difference’ ends up having violent consequences for those who actually *do* embody difference in a much more profound way, either geographically, or in terms of visible and cultural differences (categories of ethnicity or nationality are also pertinent here).

Nietzsche’s critique of love of one’s neighbour, then, as something that is antagonistic to the development of the self in the name of preserving a façade of sameness, seems to also condemn models of politics that are premised on that façade. Indeed, Nietzsche’s criticisms that could be said to be “political” are generally about concepts like equality or moral systems that deny the value of life itself. Thus a life-affirming politics, for Nietzsche, is one that rejects the (superficial) relationship of the neighbour, and the violence contained within and that rather embraces a flourishing and life-affirming diversity, one rooted chiefly in the difference between self and other(s), rather than an appeal to a common humanity. While Nietzsche’s criticism of love of one’s neighbour concerns predominantly the ‘narrow’ conceptions of equality of the legal

¹⁵⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 87

or bureaucratic order (i.e. as treatment according to an equal and homogenizing standard), his criticism is also directed more widely at the way that treatment impacts those who embody meaningful difference from that equal standard.

Though the stakes of this discussion of equality and difference might seem fairly abstract, they become more tangible in what Nietzsche writes about the state as a structure within *Zarathustra*. Nietzsche addresses the state at length in “Of the New Idol,” and though Nietzsche’s scorn for politics in its traditional sense has often been noted and discussed,¹⁶⁰ what is most interesting about his remarks in this section is the reasoning behind this scorn. Nietzsche writes, “The state is the coldest of all cold monster. Coldly it lies, too; and this lie creeps from its mouth: ‘I, the state, am the people.’”¹⁶¹ In this ascribed coldness we can see the state as a denier of life, though the discussion of people(s) is somewhat more complicated. Nietzsche insists that it is *creators*, rather than states, who create peoples, and that they do so in the service of life. The passage continues:

I offer you this sign: every people speaks its own language of good and evil: its neighbour does not understand this language. It invented this language for itself in custom and law.
But the state lies in all languages of good and evil; and whatever it says, it lies – and whatever it has, it has stolen.
Everything about it is false; it bites with stolen teeth. Even its belly is false.¹⁶²

Nietzsche’s critique of the state returns to the neighbour, understood here as distinct from the people. We are told here that the people arise as a creative entity, a group forged in friendship and experimentation that makes meaning according to that group’s own utility (a claim we will

¹⁶⁰ Wendy Brown correctly problematizes this notion of Nietzsche’s relationship to the political in “Nietzsche for Politics” which appears in Alan D. Schrift’s *Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture, and Politics* (2000). Otherwise, the subject of Nietzsche’s politics is lively area of scholarship, including (but certainly not limited to) Tracy Strong’s *Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (2000), Leslie Paul Thiele’s *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: a study of heroic individualism* (1990), and Keith Ansell-Pearson’s *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (1994).

¹⁶¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 75

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 75-76

return to shortly). But contrast this with the state, which attempts to speak for all within its confines and thus ends up erasing the differences between peoples in an area. The concepts of good and evil the state utilizes may be based in some historical peoples' valuation for Nietzsche, but this (or any) valuation is not and cannot be considered permanent or absolute. Instead, the Nietzschean view sees value systems (similar to his understanding of language¹⁶³) as arising out of people who have come together on the basis of friendship, out of self-improvement as a *choice* made alongside select others who, by extension, end up choosing the qualities that are to be improved upon and granted the status of "good" within that group. These qualities deemed "good" are not the things that make one weak (those things Nietzsche criticizes in slave morality). Instead, these 'good' things are those life struggles that have been turned into triumph—a Nietzschean claim picked up by Alenka Zupančič about pain and sickness turning health into an affirmation.¹⁶⁴ Nietzsche's claim about the 'value' of great suffering and struggle does raise some questions when one thinks of those groups who, for various socio-economic factors, are unable to make moves toward self-improvement of the sort Nietzsche celebrates, or are simply unable to make the particular choices he considered important and 'healthy'. Indeed, we know that resilience is not unrelated to socio-economic privilege. Given that much of Nietzsche's writing *is* directed at those who see themselves reflected in the history of philosophy (i.e. a privileged few), it may be helpful to take some distance here from Nietzsche and conceive of what these groups may look like outside of that privileged few. What is affirmed as "good" among peoples, for Nietzsche, is that which affirms life for those organic communities. Conceivably (though Nietzsche himself did not suggest this explicitly), this definition of 'good'

¹⁶³ Recall our discussion in chapter 1 (on page 48), where "words come into existence on the basis of their utility within a given context, but their popular usage requires that original context to be cut away". Conceptions of "good," in their movement between peoples and states, operate in a similarly precarious position.

¹⁶⁴ Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow* p. 88.

could be said to apply to ongoing struggles for self-determination and liberation from oppressive structures among groups that share a history of struggle (and that includes economic structures). In the face of these structures that could be said to deny life and the lives of those with meaningful differences, survival could be regarded as a logical part and continuation of that very struggle. Moreover, the continuation of that struggle can be seen as active (rather than reactive) insofar as many shared histories exist outside of the narrative of the category of man (as necessarily reactive). Many of these shared histories are also incommensurable with the state, which will be our next object of discussion.

The state, Nietzsche argues, renders the new values that emerge organically among peoples (i.e. originally created in service of life and growth, and made in good faith) and redirects these new values against life. Indeed, the state puts them in the service of the state's own continued existence, which is dependent on the state's (false) claim that it speaks for all peoples within it.

This critical view on the state is also expressed within the pages of *Human, All Too Human*. And here, Nietzsche's discussion of "artificial" nationalism is especially pertinent for our discussion of the state's erasure, or demonization, of differences. Nietzsche seems to view the abolition of nations¹⁶⁵ favourably, at least above what he calls the continued "forcibly imposed state of siege and self-defence inflicted on the many by the few[.]"¹⁶⁶ Within *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche embraces the label of a "good European,"¹⁶⁷ which entails aspiring to live as a higher man and carrying many of the same limitations therein. But what is at stake in

¹⁶⁵ Nationhood can (and often does) appear distinctly from statehood, however Nietzsche's own context of 19th century Europe saw a major shift to the nation-state as a model for European politics that may in part have fueled Nietzsche's vitriol for both things. I refer in this instance specifically to nations (as Nietzsche does), though again, as conceived primarily in the European context.

¹⁶⁶ *Human, All Too Human* s. 475

¹⁶⁷ *Human, All Too Human* s. 475, 480

one's relation to one's nation is unpacked somewhat further within *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. What is fairly clear is that this 'good European' has little if nothing to do with the sort appealed to by White Nationalists within North America.¹⁶⁸ Nietzsche would not defend Europe *as such* any more than he would defend man *as such*, and perhaps both are to be similarly overcome.

Now, the theme of overcoming is raised more explicitly in relation to the state when Nietzsche continues his discussion of the state in "Of the Flies of the Marketplace," where he writes: "Only there, *where the state ceases, does the man who is not superfluous begin*: does the song of the necessary man, the unique and irreplaceable melody, begin."¹⁶⁹ The power of the state, in offering a certain standard of comfort through a promise of equal treatment, removes the urgency of projects of self-improvement in part on the basis of its erasure of difference. This promise of equal treatment creates a population that does not engage with one other on the basis of their difference according to Nietzsche, but rather act as neighbours to each other and shy away from addressing their own shortcomings in their political context. Nietzsche's disdain for the 'many too many,' then, applies to the masses only insofar as they are unwilling to assert their respective differences, opting instead to embrace the 'Truth' of their equality under the state, in a passive nihilist move. Nietzsche adds: "There, where the state *ceases* – look there, my brothers. Do you not see it: the rainbow and the bridges to the superman?"¹⁷⁰ Both the state and the nation intervene (with regrettable consequences) in the process of self-improvement in Nietzsche's view, and therefore the overcoming of man is a process that must occur largely outside of the confines of state action. To put it differently, any meaningful attempt to strive toward the

¹⁶⁸ There is a tendency within North American white supremacists to appeal to European ancestry as a location of white origin as opposed to the regional and nation-state-based chauvinisms that take place across Europe and which Nietzsche explicitly criticized.

¹⁶⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 77. Our emphasis.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*-p. 78

Overman cannot occur while one has made a commitment to nationalism or to states as rightful entities *over peoples*, as these constructs, for Nietzsche, directly impede upon the processes vital to the necessary overcoming.

But what is important to stress here is that the *coming-together of peoples* does not impede this process of overcoming in the same way, and in fact, Nietzsche's depiction of "peoples" within *Zarathustra* is more akin to his account of friendship and love than to that of the state (recall that in friendship and love, human bonds are freely chosen on the basis of a will to *create* something together). Although the reader finds only one *small communion* of friends toward the end of *Zarathustra*, the process of overcoming is not necessarily limited to a select few, or to a very small 'people'. In any case, Nietzsche's key insight here is that this process of overcoming is one that must take place under conditions that do not universalize; the paths to the Overman are infinitely varied, and differing groups will come around to their own paths at their own times and their own 'styles'. Nietzsche may insist upon self-improvement, but the process itself is not universalizable in any way that would allow it to remain meaningful and—to use Nietzschean terms—noble and healthy.

This focus on (individual) self-improvement and small communities of the fairly like-minded may seem to erase any politics out of Nietzsche's thought according to some readers. But I do not believe that such an interpretation would be consistent with what is at stake in *Zarathustra's* teaching. This more microcosmic focus on the interpersonal does not deny any political element of the figure of the Overman (and perhaps resorting to a Deleuzian *micropolitics* would be helpful to underscore this point very clearly—which I could only do in a future or separate project). I believe that what is affirmed in Nietzsche is that the location and constitution of a 'good' Nietzschean politics are vastly different and antithetical to already-

existing political systems and modes of organizing bodies within geographic areas. What Nietzsche invites us to do is to embrace, instead, a prefigurative politics¹⁷¹ of everyday resistance through self-improvement. Nietzsche (if implicitly) addresses what is at stake in his perspective on political matters, especially toward the end of the book, in “Of Old and New Law Tables.” Here, Nietzsche underscores the political significance of his ‘Overcoming’ as grounded in his account of people(s) as vastly heterogeneous group(s), as an experiment premised on difference and on accountability to those differences. He writes:

And around him who cries: ‘Behold here a well for many who are thirsty, one heart for many who long, one will for many instruments’ – around him assembles a *people*, that is to say: many experimenters.

Who can command, who can obey – *that is experimented here!* Alas, with what protracted searching and succeeding, and failing and learning and experimenting anew!

Human society: that is an experiment, so I teach – a long search: it seeks, however, the commander!

–

An experiment, O my brothers! And *not* a ‘contract’! Shatter, shatter that expression of the soft-hearted and half-and-half!¹⁷²

This passage, without a doubt, contains an enthusiasm and set of convictions that could be said to be revolutionary. While Nietzsche makes direct reference to a commander, or to “who can command,” he does so, in my view, in a manner that seeks to shed the imagery of mastery associated with authoritarian ideas, distancing leadership from domination. Indeed, the passage in question objects to the idea of a social contract as flawed in its fixity, instead favouring prefiguration, creating the conditions for the future within the groups and vehicles intended to help us get there.

¹⁷¹ Prefigurative politics refers to the process of building in the *present* those structures and networks that one wants to see in the future. To put it differently, this approach entails not waiting or merely advocating for change at the structural level, but rather building new political structures starting at the interpersonal level, structures that have no reliance on (or history with) the actually existing political structures of the time or place.

¹⁷² *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 229

While in several passages Nietzsche makes reference to war and to being willing to die for one's beliefs as a necessary aspect of the eternal return, the (socio-political) organization he gestures towards in *Zarathustra* seems to be based above all in non-domination and in regarding the 'arch' enemy, truly, as one's previous (limited) self—not the other. Peoples, as distinct from neighbours or nations or states, can assemble freely in the interests of a conscious experimentation and a conscious reckoning with the future of humanity. And for Nietzsche, it can do so with the express purpose of the overcoming of man, or of humanity, itself. But as a (specific) politics, this project *necessarily* bears no resemblance to politics as it has hitherto been conceived, including the nature of assembly or political congregation (as such, it could be said, once again, to bear some resemblance to a Deleuzian micropolitics). Put differently, Nietzsche's politics does not seek to resemble its ancestors, but its children and the generations to come. One could suggest that, as such, Nietzsche's concern is never with self-improvement as *an end in- or for-itself*. The focus of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is always the future; it is always the creation of a future that can break away from the worst aspects of the past by breaking with them unapologetically in the present. Thus, Nietzsche's focus on the projects of self-improvement at the individual and social levels seeks to link what he perceives to be the art of living (and living well) with the organization of society, through politics (re)conceived as a *creative* (and perhaps existential) enterprise.

His analysis of different forms of relationships and of social organizations is, in short, pursued in order to invite us to embrace a type of organization that is capable of creating and affirming life (in part via its celebration of difference). What one also finds here is a call for the wholesale abandonment of those organizations that cannot fulfill that (healthy, difference-respecting) mandate. In Nietzsche's discussion of woman, we saw that he regarded it as a hard

truth that woman's best hope for herself was to give birth to the Overman. And what we saw in this chapter is that for Zarathustra, this is also man's highest hope. In the last few pages that follow, we will say more about this Overman, as the culmination of this politics of difference and as the logical 'extension' of Nietzsche's account of the eternal return.

Conclusion – or, Peroration on the Overman

The Overman should be approached in the same way as the rest of the concepts this thesis have been: namely, as belonging to a creative process, and as being valuable insofar as the reader is able to apply that concept (or process) to their own experience. Our way of approaching key Nietzschean concepts is largely inspired by the work of Keith Ansell-Pearson—and most particularly by his essay “Who is the Übermensch? Time, Truth, and Woman in Nietzsche”. Ansell-Pearson's reading regards Nietzsche's conception of truth as part of a creative process, with its claims acting as “‘symptoms’ of ascending or descending life”.¹⁷³ More specifically for our purposes, the Overman is said to represent at once the culmination of the tendencies through which life ascends and the casting away of those ‘sick’ symptoms through which life descends. This puts some distance between the Overman understood as a concept embodying the culmination of life-giving and life-preserving practices, and actual, living human beings whose practices can be seen as viable or unviable. This distance can make it difficult to conceive of the Overman as anything but an eschatological figure, far enough from (actual) man to render it

¹⁷³ Keith Ansell-Pearson, “Who is the Übermensch? Time, Truth, and Woman in Nietzsche” p. 312.

unintelligible as an ethic or praxis. And eschatology would seem to deny any creative element in this process.

But once looked at more closely and in light of the various concepts our thesis has considered, Nietzsche's Overman could be re-read in a different way. In the previous chapters, we have looked at Nietzsche's concept of woman and described it as the embodiment of difference (through her otherness from man), but also as embodiment of truth and life (through her creativity and irreducibility to man). In the discussion that followed, we have sought to describe nihilism a distinctly *human* phenomenon and as a symptom of the movement by living things *against* life—one that comes about when man's thought processes engage violently with difference. The Nietzschean accounts of marriage, and of the friend, were then described with an eye to underscoring their varying degrees of difference and sameness. And we argued that the spouse and the friend could also be understood as playing a role similar to that of 'woman' (as difference), and, as such, as equally important to making the Overman intelligible. We then saw that the neighbour, the state, and the people are also key for this intelligibility: the first two types of social organizations are ones that *deny* difference in order to preserve the structures that give them power (and as such, they operate in a way akin to nihilism), whereas Nietzsche understood 'the people' as a type of social organization more akin to the friend or the marriage-partner. It is through these 'healthy' bonds and type of communities that one could seek (self) improvement, and engage in a politics whose only dictate is that its actions in the present should be consistent with its goals for the future.

The relationship between woman and the Overman within Nietzsche's thought is one I find under-theorized in the literature (I note here that it is not really considered by Ansell-Pearson either, despite woman's inclusion in his essay cited above). As we saw earlier in the

thesis, the few sources that seek to deal explicitly with the question of woman tend to make reference to the role or significance of woman in Nietzsche as though it were a separate existential code, and a damning one at that.¹⁷⁴ Our discussion of Irigaray's *Marine Lover* in the first chapter sought, in response to this problem in the secondary literature, to take Irigaray's critical re-reading of Nietzsche's texts to give voice to the figure of woman within his works. This helped us indicate the subtleties that woman came to represent within Nietzsche's late-middle works, and it can help us also respond to some of the major criticisms made by Kelly Oliver on the topic of the birth of the Overman. For Oliver, "Nietzsche's Dionysian *Übermensch* [...] is a strong new type who can bear the excesses of pregnancy without individuation. The *Übermensch* has no need for truth or individuation. These are for the impotent and the sick who cannot bear life's excess, for *those who cannot affirm pain and difference.*"¹⁷⁵ Our thesis sought to show that Kelly Oliver's interpretation calls for significant nuances. In particular, in the first chapter, we saw through Nietzsche's use of Baubo and of her connection to Demeter and Persephone, a narrative (located in woman and in women) concerning the difficulty with individuation for those whose relationships are founded in birth—particularly the mother and daughter. The figure of Baubo represents woman's problem *with* truth as the embodiment *of* truth for Nietzsche. Thus the qualities inherent to the Overman that relate to the conditions necessary to its birth are found in Nietzsche's understanding of woman, and as such, to view her inclusion only as she who ambiguously gives birth is to profoundly misunderstand the role played by woman and birth within Nietzsche's oeuvre.

¹⁷⁴ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche* 146.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*; our emphasis

Here it might be helpful to return briefly to the essay by Ansell-Pearson, for whom it is highly problematic to mistake Nietzsche's statements on woman for "logical truths when they need to be read as powerful fictions or metaphors which refer to experiences and processes".¹⁷⁶ I believe that this claim about woman is equally applicable to the concept of the Overman (and it is certainly relevant to be considered here considering my claim about the conceptual inseparability between woman and Overman). We saw earlier that Derrida's work evades the mistake often made by Nietzsche interpreters, as does Irigaray's when she is read as a *supplement* to Nietzsche. But we also acknowledged that Irigaray's interpretation, taken in isolation, falls into the same trap we identified in Oliver's *Womanizing Nietzsche*, namely to treat woman as possessing a fixed truth for Nietzsche.

Contrary to woman, man is understood within Nietzsche's work as possessing logical truths, likely because of Nietzsche's peculiar understanding of the history of man as constitutive of man. Man, as the subject who articulates logical truths, also contains a few in his own right. Though Nietzsche writes at length about male pregnancy as a metaphor for creation, this image is not representative of men on the whole within Nietzsche's thought. The concept that concerns predominantly man and that simultaneously creates the limits for man's possibility is nihilism. Nihilism understood as a distinctly human—and indeed distinctly masculine—phenomenon is certainly relevant for understanding the Overman. The Overman is that being who has overcome the nihilism inherent to man, and man (as a *gendered subject*) is that group within humanity that remains fixed, against life, to his own systems and modes of inquiry. As we have discussed earlier, this fixity is the very process that results in nihilism. In remaining bound to his systems, man resists that which may lie outside of them, or which may be irreducible to them (in the case

¹⁷⁶ Keith Ansell-Pearson p. 312

of woman), refusing to acknowledge difference. This refusal to acknowledge difference facilitates a refusal to interrogate and confront one's own limits in the pursuit of a truly life-affirming process of self-creation.

Woman, as both constituted by difference and as containing it within herself, does not face this same impediment to affirmation according to our Nietzschean insights, provided that she does not buy wholesale into the symbolic economy of men. Her awareness that her boundaries and limitations tend to be situationally and socially imposed allows woman to create opportunities for self-interrogation and struggle whenever her limitations are made an issue for her. This relationship to her limits can be made explicit in her relationships to other women, but self-improvement in the Nietzschean sense is an issue woman navigates regardless of whether she makes it explicit, and is bound up with the way she navigates language itself. Instead, man continues to operate under the labels (and discourses) of Science, Philosophy, Faith, or Politics (those of the nation or state), largely uninterested by the "niche" projects taken up by those excluded from his dominant categories and his history. There is more to man than simply this certainly, for Nietzsche, who invites man in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to work against these structures.¹⁷⁷

Nonetheless, man's path to the Overman does not resemble a continuation of the structures that delineate his historical limits. His path is located in the pursuit of self-improvement, which can be attained only through an honest confrontation with his own limits. And as I have insisted throughout this thesis these limits can only be revealed through an understanding of (or encounter with) those who do not possess the same epistemological contours as themselves. This encounter with difference is necessarily distinct from a traditional

¹⁷⁷ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 259.

anthropological approach, which in the name of Science would result in the same violence enacted on the other and in subsequent nihilism at the lack of an attained Truth. And this is where Nietzsche's concept of the friend (as a means to mutual growth) is particularly instructive. The friend can provide an engagement with the outside world that can participate in the struggle against nihilism and toward the creation of peoples and of new values.

The problem of nihilism, though "human" in scope, can (and should) also be understood as historically and materially *specific*. According to Nietzsche, the paths that lead to nihilism are born out of and concurrent with the tendencies of a particular European history whose quest for Truth and freedom also entailed actual *conquests* around the globe, which demolished entire cultures and groups. The weight of European history is a heavy one needless to say, and the weight of individual nihilism may rightly pale in comparison. The systematic replacing of diverse ways of living with one indebted to the so-called 'good old' Europe replaced geographically and historically-specific ways of understanding the world with the categories Europe insisted upon in its plunder. The imperialist project replaced alternative modes of life (some of which served life well) with the categories of knowing and acting Nietzsche so passionately attacked.

In Nietzsche's "Of Old and New Law Tables," which considers the various path(s) to the Overman, a way of moving forward is offered:

O my brothers, your nobility should not gaze backward, but *outward!* You shall be fugitives from all fatherlands and all fore-fatherlands!
 You shall love your *children's land*: let this love be your new nobility – the undiscovered land in the furthest sea! I bid your sails seek it and seek it!
 You shall *make amends* to your children for being the children of your fathers: *thus* you shall redeem all that is past! This new law-table do I put over you!¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* p. 221

On the surface, this passage may seem to further support projects of conquest. But looked at more closely, what one can gather from it is chiefly its call for an inspiring reorientation: a reorientation from a privileging of the past toward a view of nobility directed toward the future. This movement is from one of the denial of life to the service of it, from a debt to the past toward a gift to the future (where the gift need not be reciprocated, only passed along).

The passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* I just quoted at length raises a complex issue I have had to confront in my own research and study of the continental philosophical tradition (named for its geographically-specific genesis), as a Canadian who is part of an ongoing settler-colonial project. The issues are obviously complicated and complicate our study. Though woman came to represent difference for Nietzsche (through her exclusion from the symbolic realm of men) and though the role played by ‘woman’ is crucial to an understanding of his analysis of nihilism’s overcoming, a meaningful commitment to these Nietzschean insights today cannot be limited to woman as described by Nietzsche in the late 19th century: namely, a bourgeois, European, child-bearing subject. If woman is said to truly represent difference, from this we must seek to abolish the same essentialism that created her category (as is exemplified by Irigaray in her strategic essentialism).¹⁷⁹ This abolition of essentialism might take place through accountability in my view; if woman is crucial to the Overman because of her creative and life-affirming tendencies, then it is creation and the service of life, through a duty *to future generations*, that is the Nietzschean lesson to be embraced here.

But let us be clear: these ‘tendencies’ are not unique to *woman*. And they are certainly not found in all or even most bourgeois, European and North American, child-bearing subjects in our current historical and (unsettling) political context. But this is hardly a reason to despair. In my

¹⁷⁹ Luce Irigaray, “*Ecce Mulier?*” in *Nietzsche and the Feminine* ed. Peter Burgard, p. 319

own academic experience, I have had the good fortune to correspond with an Indigenous Elder, Marcelo Saavedra-Vargas who gave me (and countless other University students) an important and life-affirming teaching: one nested within his idea of “being a good ancestor”. This idea is at the heart of much of what Marcelo teaches, and even though it was brought to my attention by him, it is a common teaching across Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (the land mass of North America). To put it simply, being a good ancestor means that we ought to care for and take from the earth such that it will remain in a desirable state for thirteen generations going forward. It is clearly a teaching that stands in direct contradiction to principles of infinite growth that have been based in value systems founded in the ideal sphere, and located external to life itself. This teaching is taken up, in the context of everyday resistance¹⁸⁰, by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in *Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back*, which discusses Indigenous resurgence in the context of the Nishnaabeg peoples. For Indigenous peoples in the context of Turtle Island, one’s ancestors are a source of strength and power toward keeping good one’s commitments to coming generations and to dismantling the systems enforced by settler-colonialism. Simpson speaks about shame as misplaced among her people, and about overcoming that shame as a necessary act of resistance to settler-colonialism. She writes of her experience: “I began to realize that shame can only take hold when we are disconnected from the stories of resistance within our own families and communities. I placed that shame as an insidious and infectious part of the cognitive imperialism that was aimed at convincing us that we were a weak and defeated people, and that there was no point in resisting or resurging.”¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ And it is directly relevant to Nietzsche’s understanding of peoples in a tradition that is decisively anti-European.

¹⁸¹ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing On Our Turtle’s Back* p. 14.

The inclusion of this narrative into a project on Nietzsche is meant to underscore the relevance of Nietzsche's teaching outside of the particular white 'European' sphere he belonged to, and to draw our attention to less 'visible' ways of overcoming oppressive systems, ways that are rooted in self-growth and self-improvement. While these ways to fight 'systems' might seem small, self-centered or not radical (or hardly political), they are, in fact, exceedingly relational, radical and political thanks to their deep commitment to difference and diversity.

And while readers might object to the connection between Nietzsche's reflections on 19th century nihilism and our own colonial past and present, it ought to be said here that Nietzsche had his own (if indirect) brush with a settler project. As is well-known, Nietzsche had close connections to projects of settler-colonialism via his sister and her husband Bernhard Förster, who undertook the project of an Aryan settler colony in Paraguay.¹⁸² Though the project failed, for Nietzsche what became clear is that there can often be a need to break with one's family and history in the interest of the affirmation of life. And it is obvious here that there are many women who embody difference in ways relevant to Nietzsche's project whom also need today to take distance from their ancestors in the sense Nietzsche urges us to in the passage above.

But while there are many who must break from their fatherlands and make amends to their children, this condition too lacks universality. If difference is to be a meaningful focus in our projects of overcoming life-denying structures and forces (be they nihilism or externally-imposed domination), the connection to others ought to be based in a commitment to the future but—contra Nietzsche—with an eye to the past in the interest of equally meaningful accountability. In the case of settlers on Turtle Island and in other areas engaged in settler-colonial projects, there is

¹⁸² Details of this project and Nietzsche's relation to it are available in Ben Macintyre's *Forgotten Fatherland: The True Story of Nietzsche's Sister and Her Lost Aryan Colony* (Broadway, 2011).

much work to be done in decolonizing, in the interest of becoming good ancestors in community with others—perhaps even (to be momentarily ambitious) ancestors for the Overman.

The eternal return, then, as the doctrine that accompanies the Overman could be understood as a return of the same *and* of the different (a position embraced by scholars like Kelly Oliver). In teaching man how to overcome nihilism, the eternal return becomes a return of difference in order to turn him away from history; he must confront those different from himself in order to overcome his nihilistic tendencies and patterns of thought born of his own history. But this overcoming is premised on man's confrontation with *his own role in that history* and with the fact that he may have greatly benefited from that history. Man's limits are constituted by the history of structures and systems of thought that are life-denying and violent to those different from himself. This violence extends to individuals who fail to live up to that flawed category of 'man', as well as to others whose very histories resist that category (but who are still subject to the logocentric operations of masculine knowing). One of the main goals of my thesis was to indicate that the eternal return must be understood in large part as a return of *difference* in order to underscore this aspect of overcoming and the political implications that flow from this.

But the eternal return is *also* a return of the same insofar as Nietzsche advocates the eternal return as a teaching whereby man acts such that his past can be reconciled with his conception of himself—a reconciliation oriented toward an understanding of history that makes possible the birth of the Overman. Accounting for a return of the same might here be better understood through the lens of those located outside of the limited and limiting category of man. The "peoples" described in *Zarathustra* will best 'see' the return of the same insofar as their resilience through the totality of that history becomes a resurgence of their own truths. This is especially true in the period before the category of "man" is completely overcome, a period seen

to others as a return of *difference*. In the case of woman, her relation to the eternal return hinges on her role *as* difference for man and on her knowledge outside of the symbolic economy of men. In the case of Indigenous resurgence, the ongoing process of decolonization sees the past affirmed toward a future which affirms life. This process necessarily entails the withering away of the structures of colonialism (many co-constitutive at the epistemological level with the category “man” as a European concept) and ultimately the vindication of the past with an affirmation of the present and future. Understanding the eternal return *only* as a return of the same would not allow man to break with his past and with the structures that led to his position; it is the return of *difference* that forces man to confront his complicity in historical structures in order to re-orient himself toward the future.

Now, to restate what is perhaps obvious: to understand Nietzsche as a philosopher of nihilism and its overcoming and as a philosopher of difference entails, in my view, reading Nietzsche as a political thinker. This is true even if a Nietzschean politics does not resemble any previous account of the political and hardly seems to fit perfectly with any type of contemporary political theory. The form of a Nietzschean politics must be described as prefigurative insofar as the means to nihilism’s overcoming can be taken up by anyone in possession of his teaching of the eternal return (which culminates, as we saw, in the Overman). Possessing this teaching and applying it to one’s own life and relationships does not require one to have a very concrete idea of what the world will or should look like (or how it will be organized) when the Overman arrives. The Overman, as the very embodiment of the eternal return, is *purposefully indeterminate*, representing the overcoming of nihilism and the ultimate affirmation of life. In line with Nietzsche’s teaching of the death of God, the affirmation of life requires an abandonment of those structures that are no longer (or that never have been) capable of serving

life. Though Nietzsche addressed the majority of his work to individuals that resembled himself in terms of proximity to masculinity, whiteness and mastery of the histories of classics and philosophy, he in fact saw these ‘categories’ as headed toward disaster and called for their re-valuation, which would de-universalize their status as perceived “good” in their own right. He saw an alternative to these values in woman and although, as I have shown, the category of woman contains its own complications, it also contains means toward a movement beyond simply woman.

This Nietzschean-inspired project of overcoming offers us alternative ways of looking at relating and being with others and it opens up creative forms of pluralism. These forms might help create better conditions of accountability *between* people and might also allow the necessary distance required for an accountability towards oneself. Thus our reflection on the overcoming of nihilism might give us some modest tools for working out some of our insecurities and some of the more complicated aspects of our relationship to our past. Nietzsche’s reflections—married with those of Irigaray—might help us better theorize a way of relating to others that is oriented towards the future and that is abundant and rich, precisely because it is *between two*.

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