Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung

W
DE
G

Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung

The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language

by

Claudia Crawford

Language is the most quotidian thing of all: it needs a philosopher to occupy himself with it. Those who find language interesting in itself and others who recognize in it nothing but the medium of interesting thoughts.

Nietzsche, Notes for "Homer and Classical Philology"

Language did not return into the field of thought directly and in its own right until the end of the nineteenth century. We might have said until the twentieth century had not Nietzsche, the philologist, been the first to connect the philosophical task with a radical reflection upon language.

And now, in this philosophical-philological space opened up for us by Nietzsche, language wells up in an enigmatic multiplicity that must be mastered. ... It is quite possible that all those questions now confronting our curiosity (What is language? What is a sign? What is unspoken in the world, in our gestures, in the whole enigmatic heraldry of our behaviour, our dreams, our sicknesses — does all that speak, and if so in what language and in obedience to what grammar? Is everything significant, and, if not, what is, and for whom, and in accordance with what rules? What relation is there between language and being, and is it really to being that language is always addressed — at least, language that speaks truly? What, then, is this language that says nothing, is never silent, and is called 'literature'?) — it is quite possible that all these questions are presented today (as) ... replies to the questions imposed upon philosophy by Nietzsche.

Foucault, The Order of Things

Acknowledgements

Preface

This work initially grew out of a desire to write a comprehensive study dealing with Nietzsche's theory of language. Nietzsche's theory of language is an especially pertinent area of research for Nietzsche scholars, philosophers, and critics today. In the past three decades many works have been published about Nietzsche, almost all of which acknowledge the importance of his work with language in one of its dimensions or another. It seemed important, therefore, to trace and explore the genealogy of Nietzsche's theory of language from its beginnings through his mature philosophical works. My research revealed, however, that there are several specific phases in the evolution of Nietzsche's theory of language, each of which merits a study in itself.

Nietzsche's view of language as a product twice removed from reality, or his "non-correspondence" theory of language, is a much quoted and interpreted idea. In his early unpublished essay, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Nietzsche writes that the physical world initiates a nerve stimulus in the human animal. This nerve stimulus is transferred into an image, and the image in turn is imitated in a sound. This rhetorical or metaphorical process ends by giving us words with which to form concepts. In addition, Nietzsche emphasizes that language only becomes possible within a community of speakers who agree upon commonly held conceptions and meanings of words, creating a system of language relevant to that community.

Now the problem with taking this essay as a point of departure for understanding Nietzsche's theory of language is that it encapsulates ideas with which he had been working for years. It summarizes in a few sentences some very basic ideas which can be traced in detail in following the influences of Schopenhauer, Lange, and Hartmann upon the beginnings of Nietzsche's theory of language. It has recently been suggested that Nietzsche's essay "On Truth and Lies" as well as his notes for a course on "Rhetoric" take over the major ideas of Gustav Gerber's *Die Sprache als Kunst* (*Language as Art*), and thus, that Gerber stands as the most significant source for Nietzsche's early theory of language.[1] However, my research demonstrates that "On Truth and Lies" is a further genealogical development of ideas which Nietzsche had already formed upon the basis of the influences of Kant,

---

[1] See my chapter 14.

Schopenhauer, Lange, and Hartmann as they came into contact with Gerber's rhetorical model of language. Gerber offered Nietzsche a new metaphor, that of rhetoric, for a body of ideas concerning language which Nietzsche already had in place by 1871.

For Nietzsche, the origins and ongoing process of language do not reside in community, rather, community only becomes possible with the *conscious* use of language. And conscious use of language itself only becomes possible as a result of purely unconscious instinctual activities of individual human beings. This idea, of the unconscious and instinctual origination of language, which Nietzsche's beginning theory of language demonstrates, finds a place in "On Truth and Lies" in two rather enigmatic sentences: "the artistic transference of a nerve stimulus into images is the mother, if not grandmother of every single concept;"[2] and the metaphors which humans agree to use according to fixed conventions and through forgetting their origin in metaphor, originally consist of "a mass of images which streamed from the primal faculty of human imagination."[3] There is first, a continual physiological unconscious origination of language through instinct, and then, consciousness, community, the pathos of truth, and science, grow out of these origins as secondary, weakened processes. According to Nietzsche's beginning theory of language, conscious language provides only an image of an image, a symbol of a symbol, and after Gerber, the metaphor of a metaphor. The individual has a unique unconscious and artistic language of his or her own in images, an idea Nietzsche also expresses in "On Truth and Lies:" "each perceptual metaphor is individual and without equals and is therefore able to elude classification."[4] However, when once translated into sounds and the conscious language of the community, it loses its uniqueness and becomes merely conventional, becomes herd language. Nietzsche expresses this contrast between the language of the individual and that of the community repeatedly throughout his work, for example, in *Zarathustra*, "On Enjoying and Suffering the Passions" or *The Gay Science*, aphorism 354. Conscious language poses a very definite limit, while in its unconscious artistic aspects, language exists as a most provoking possibility.

As a result, in his beginning theory of language, Nietzsche comes to emphasize the artistic nature of the unconscious metaphorical production of language. In describing the intuitive being, as opposed to the rational being in "On Truth and Lies," Nietzsche reiterates his earlier insight, gained from

---

[2] Nietzsche, WL 85, KSA 1: 882. Please refer to the Key to Abbreviations for Nietzsche's works. Where appropriate, quotes are followed by reference to English translation and original German.

[3] Ibid., WL 86, KSA 1: 883.

[4] Ibid., WL 84, KSA 1: 882.

Hartmann, that it might be desirable to make some conscious use of the artistic nature of unconscious language.

> The intuitive being would be guided by means of intuitions rather than by concepts. There exists no word for these intuitions; when man sees them he grows dumb, *or else he speaks only in forbidden metaphors and in unheard-of combinations of concepts.* He does this so that by shattering and mocking the old conceptual barriers he may at least correspond creatively to the impression of the powerful present intuition (my emphasis).[5]

This passage characterizes the artistic, socially subversive, and transformative possibilities of language which Nietzsche's worldview in *Anschauung*[6] first offers, where these very unconscious creative possibilities become an end in themselves. This period, in which Nietzsche thinks about language in terms of rhetoric, has yielded many rich articles for the Nietzsche literature. However, it fits into the overall development of Nietzsche's early theory of language more as a mid-point rather than as its beginning.

Another very significant area of Nietzsche's theory of language which needs to be taken into consideration involves the relation of music to language. Nietzsche begins to write about this relation in 1870−71 and it remains a constant in his thinking up and through the *Case of Wagner.* In 1870 music becomes a paradigm against which to measure language, its limitations and possibilities. Nietzsche pursues the distinctions between various unconscious and conscious languages in essays like "The Dionysian Worldview," "Greek Musicdrama," and his fragment on "Music and Words." Music symbolizes the essence of things and represents world harmony. The gesture of the lips, and other gestures, symbolize the appearance of being of human beings. Gesture language, which is completely instinctual and without consciousness, Nietzsche equates with music dynamics. The language of words consists in the merging of the gesture of the lips and tone. Nietzsche considers the language of thoughts and concepts, which he equates with rhythm, to be unconscious feeling transferred into conscious representations. Concepts are a holding in memory of the symbol of the accompanying gestures after the tone has faded away. Because words and the symbolism of human gestures "are measured by the eternal significance of music," it is music which brings to words their force. It is significant to note that the scheme which Nietzsche builds with regard to music and language retains the same structure as his worldview in *Anschauung* and represents a modification of that scheme. Music corresponds with the *Ur-Eine*, while unconscious gestures connected to feeling correspond to the first image of the will-acts

---

[5] Ibid., WL 90, KSA 1: 888−89.
[6] Nietzsche's worldview in *Anschauung* is offered for the first time in the present work.

of the *Ur-Eine*, which humans perceive as tone. Words, then, correspond to human representation, and remain a mere image of this first image. In the worldview in *Anschauung* human representing can never know the *Ur-Eine* directly although human beings are one with it in their essence as appearance of its will-acts. In exactly the same way:

> Music can create images out of itself, which will always however be but schemata, instances as it were of her intrinsic general contents. But how should the image, the representation, create music out of itself![7]

The privileging of music as the most adequate form of expression of the will remains with Nietzsche throughout his thinking. In *Zarathustra* singing is lauded over speaking. In his "Attempt at a Self Criticism," Nietzsche calls his own writing a "contrapuntal vocal art and seduction of the ear."[8] In *The Case of Wagner* Nietzsche writes: "one becomes more of a philosopher the more one becomes a musician." But "Wagner was not a musician by instinct," rather he "increased music's capacity for language," while Nietzsche attempts to increase language's capacity for music. Wagner required the gesture, literature to persuade the world to take his music seriously. Music was a mere means to him, "But no musician would think that way." Nietzsche demands that "music should not become an art of lying."[9] In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche turns the tables of *The Birth of Tragedy* against Wagner, rather than for him, and precisely upon the question of the relation of music and words. The ranking in order of priority of effective communication of languages remains constant for Nietzsche: music first, then gesture, and finally the word and conceptuality. Thus, there is another whole study, or a related one, to be found in an examination of how Nietzsche emphasizes not just the language of lips and tongue, but also of facial and bodily gesture, dance, song, performance, imitation, flight, and laughter.[10] This merging of all the human symbolic possibilities or languages, Nietzsche brings together in the Dionysian dithyramb, which permeates the communications of Zarathustra, and which is tied so strongly to the last period of Nietzsche's work in *Ecce Homo* and the "Dionysus Dithyrambs" where he styles himself "the disciple of Dionysus and the inventor of the dithyramb."[11]

   With *On the Genealogy of Morals* yet another specific phase in Nietzsche's thinking about language takes form. Language finds its place in the context of force, in the play of active and reactive forces and the concept of the will

---

[7] Nietzsche, MW 33, KSA 7: 362.
[8] Nietzsche, GT 25, KSA 1: 21.
[9] Nietzsche, DFW 158, 172, 177, 180, KSA 6: 14, 30, 35–36, 39.
[10] For a beginning study along these lines, see Graham Parkes, "The Dance from Mouth to Hand," forthcoming in *The Postmodern Nietzsche*, Ed. Clayton Koelb.
[11] Nietzsche, EH 306, KSA 6: 345.

to power. Still drawing upon its earlier formulations, Nietzsche now under-
stands language as a force among forces. Language exerts its quanta of energy
and is simultaneously acted upon by other forces. Thus, Nietzsche's thinking
about language turns from an interest in its origins and manner of unconscious
production to a concern with the effects of language change upon humans
and cultures. In this context Nietzsche's method of genealogy, as it relates to
his theory of language, assumes a pivotal role. In his genealogical analysis of
how the slave morality "got its word (and its *words*) in,"[12] Nietzsche is
interested in tracing meaning changes within human interpretation of events
as translations of those events into linguistic forms, as well as the reverse:
how linguistic forms and values transform or shape human cultures. Words,
when examined from a historical and genealogical point of view, are seen
not simply as descriptors of events, but as the very shapers of those events.[13]

In the works of his last year another phase in Nietzsche's understanding
of language is intensified and provides the material for a specific study.
Language retains its effectiveness as force and play of forces, but now
Nietzsche begins to lay more stress on the power which each individual
instance of language production exerts as an instance of *value and action*.
Although this had been integral to his genealogical analysis of *ressentiment*
from a historical perspective, Nietzsche now emphasizes the creator of un-
known futures for human beings as one who consciously wields the power
of language. Language becomes a dynamic instance of interpretation and
valuing, not in a critical sense of a subject who interprets values and then
speaks or writes about those interpretations, but in a creative sense where
the speaking or writing itself *is* the new value force embodied. Nietzsche's
critique of grammar, yet another fundamental area of his theory of language
which needs to be traced from its first formulations in the beginnings of his
theory of language and throughout his thinking, rests on this distinction
between language as the *reportage* of a "subject" and language as actually
creating being. In 1885 Nietzsche writes:

> What sets me apart most fundamentally from the metaphysicians, is that: I
> do not agree with them that it is the "I" which thinks: further I take the
> "I" itself as a pure construction of thinking, along the same order as
> "material," "thing," "substance," "individual," "goal," "number:" only as

---

[12] Nietzsche, GM 26, KSA 5: 260.
[13] Nietzsche poses a question in his note to the First Essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals*: "What
light does lingustics, and especially the study of etymology, throw on the history of the
evolution of moral . concepts?" For a beginning consideration of this question from a
perspective which merges de Saussure's ideas on etymology · and linguistic value with
Nietzsche's linguistic genealogy, see my article, "What Light does Linguistics, and Especially
the Study of Etymology, Throw on the History of the Evolution of Moral Concepts" in
The Paradigm Exchange II, Center for Humanistic Studies, University of Minnesota, 1987.

regulative fiction, with whose help a kind of constancy, that means some-
thing "knowable" is put into a world of becoming, is *poeticized (hineingedich-
tet)* into it. The belief in grammar, in the linguistic subject, object, in verbs,
has subjugated the metaphysicians up until now: I teach foreswearing of
this belief.[14]

Nietzsche's theory and practice of language in his last year changes us,
moves us, not through its informational or referential nature, its logical
arguments, its conceptual wanderings, but by the effectiveness of its meta-
phorical force. Language no longer names things, rather Nietzsche's language
creates things. Because there is no "thing in itself," no truth, to which a
word is referred for verification, the word itself stands as the thing. Its power
engraves, as Nietzsche expresses it in *Twilight of the Idols*, "sign upon sign on
bronze tablets with the sureness of a destiny." Language, becomes *action*
which makes a difference. Each act of language has the potential for rein-
forcing or changing the existing value moment, both within the system of
language itself, and at the same time, in the broader cultural or moral systems
of a people which depend on it.

By this time, Nietzsche has contradicted his earlier belief, based upon
Lange's "standpoint of the ideal" that metaphysical worlds may and should
be created, *not* as proffering truth about the world, but more in the sense of
comforting artistic visions; this is the "metaphysical comfort" of *The Birth of
Tragedy*. However, in his "Attempt at a Self Criticism," written fourteen years
later, Nietzsche offers his new perspective that when we use language to will
a world, it is always *this* world that we create. We ought to learn to use the
art of language for *this*-worldly comfort and "dispatch all metaphysical
comforts to the devil — metaphysics in front."[15] From the beginnings of his
thinking about language, Nietzsche believed that its formal aspects, its
unconscious forms and physiological processes (in his later formulations, the
will to power) condition any conscious use of conceptuality and abstraction.
As a result, as his theory of language evolves, Nietzsche comes more and
more to emphasize that if human beings could develop the capacity of
exploiting the unconscious forms of language as creative possibilities, and
translate them in terms of a *conscious willing* into force and action, it would be
in this essential transforming quality of language, that any hope of transval-
uation of values could find its arena of action. Nietzsche's own practice of
language in his last year, his value actions, leads him, as Charles Altieri
expresses it, not to idealize the will to power as a concept, but to perform
it.[16]

---

[14] KSA 11: 526.
[15] Nietzsche, GT 26, KSA 1: 22.
[16] Charles Altieri, "*Ecce Homo:* Narcissism, Power, Pathos, and the Status of Autobiographical
Representations," *Boundary 2*, Vols. IX, No. 3 and X, No. 1, Spring/Fall 1981.

In an effort to persuade through performance, Nietzsche critiques several instances of philosophical and cultural discourse in which language has exerted its force upon the formation of Western civilization. Throughout his mature work, though in no one text and in no systematic manner, Nietzsche develops a genealogy of five worlds which the Western philosophical tradition has so far interpreted and acted for itself by means of language: the actual, apparent, real, true, and other worlds. In *Twilight of the Idols* and his "History of an Error,"[17] Nietzsche describes these worlds as effective instances of linguistic force and emphasizes each as a conceptual phase in an ongoing process of transformation. Each conceptual phase constitutes a creation, by means of words, which has prepared the very perception of life of Western culture and the quality of lives lived in it. Nietzsche then indulges in the freedom of destroying these worlds, of "breaking their words," and in the liberty of creating a new one. By staging a wor(l)d drama in which he replaces the old words with his own, in the most forceful and psychological of styles, by replacing the old worlds with his Dionysian world, Nietzsche desires to create a new phase in world transformation which will result in the actualization of lives of a higher quality. In *Zarathustra*, in "On Old and New Tablets," Nietzsche had already referred to the destroying and creating power of words when he links the breaking of the old tablets, the old laws, with the breaking of words: "Such words were once called holy ... where have there been such better robbers and killers in this world than in such holy words? ... Break, break this word of the softhearted and half-and-half."[18] In *Ecce Homo*, Altieri suggests, that Nietzsche heightens the stakes of his personal conflict with history. His autobiography is not offered as a history or an alternative to history, but stands as one of the most forceful tests of historicity itself.

I would like to propose one last area of Nietzsche's theory of language which merits a study in itself. It would explore the relationship of Nietzsche's practice of language as transgression of language forms: the language of madness or impropriety, the language of seduction and excess; his refusal of decorum. I contend that this aspect of Nietzsche's practice of language consitutes a phase in his relationship with language which is consciously understood and exploited. Here, Nietzsche's "style" would have to be reexamined. Nietzsche's style cannot be adequately understood as merely exceptionally persuasive, or as constituting a labyrinth from which no redeeming thread need be desired, rather, Nietzsche redefines style altogether. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche makes a crucial distinction between "good style in itself,"

---

[17] Nietzsche, GD 485, KSA 6: 80–81.
[18] Nietzsche, Z 314, 324, KSA 4: 253, 265. This reference comes from Michael Ryan, "The Act," *Glyph*, No. 2, 1977.

which is on a par with "idealism," the "good in itself," the "thing in itself," and his own art of style.

> *Good* is any style that really communicates an inward state, that makes no mistake about the signs, the tempo of the signs, the gestures — ... the art of gestures.[19]

Nietzsche's *"great"* style communicates an inward state, "an inward tension of pathos," and not a knowledge. It communicates unique, individual states, but not in the sense of a "subject" telling about itself as "object." The communication uses all the possibilities of symbolic language, unconscious music, and the tempo of that music, and the art of unconscious gestures translated into the signs of a conscious language. To be mistaken about signs would be to use them without tempo, without the art of gestures, to use them merely as concepts. Nietzsche equates the number of his stylistic possibilities with the number of inward states at his disposal: "considering that the multiplicity of inward states is exceptionally large in my case, I have many stylistic possibilities."[20] Each inner state has its own style. It is not the style which is constant, that is, "good in itself," "thing in itself," which unifies a host of states. It is rather, that the inward state, in each instance, enacts, performs, communicates the signs, tempo and gestures of its moment of being. In *his* style, the Dionysian dithyramb, Nietzsche carries to the ultimate point his idea that language is largely an unconscious creative will to power, that it is action, value, that it can, not only poetically, but *actually*, prepare a stage for its own silence and the beginning of *our* transvaluing action. The excess, the overfullness, and unheard combinations of metaphors of the intuitive being, referred to above in "On Truth and Lies," with which to break the old conceptual barriers, simply *become* pathos, gesture, and music in Nietzsche.

This work, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language*, seems a sober, if not pedantic introduction to Nietzsche's theory of language, as it takes its first forms from the influences of Eduard von Hartmann, Schopenhauer, Lange, Gerber, and others. Still, it is essential to give close attention to these beginning sources, because although Nietzsche modified and carried to their ultimate conclusions his work with language in the areas just outlined, the basic relationship of language to epistemology, the understanding of language as at once, a limit and a possibility of the greatest kind are prepared at this early point out of these influences.

---

[19] Nietzsche, EH 265, KSA 6: 304.
[20] Ibid.

To Nietzsche, then, whose language, and the multifarious art of that language, provides a source of continuing delight, riddle enough and more for any searcher and researcher.

Minneapolis, Minnesota   Claudia Crawford
September, 1987

Table of Contents

Key to Abbreviations

Nietzsche's Works Used

KSA   *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe.* Ed. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari. Berlin und München: Walter de Gruyter und dtv, 1980.

KSB   *Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe.* Ed. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, Berlin und München: Walter de Gruyter und dtv, 1986.

MusA   *Gesammelte Werke.* Musarionausgabe. München: Musarion Verlag, 1920–1929.

BA   *Werke und Briefe. Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe.* München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933–1942. Indicated in text as BAW for *Werke.*

GA   *Grossoktavausgabe* of Nietzsche's *Werke.* Leipzig: C. G. Naumann Verlag, 1901–13.

Nietzsche's Works Used in English Translation

"Untitled Notes" (1863)	"Untitled Notes"	UN
"Zu Schopenhauer" (1867/68)	"On Schopenhauer"	ZS
"Zur Teleologie" (1867/68)	"On Teleology"	ZT
"Vom Ursprung der Sprache" (1869/70)	"On the Origins of Language"	US
"Die dionysische Weltanschauung" (1870)	"The Dionysian World-view"	DW
"*Anschauung* Notes" (1870/71)	"*Anschauung* Notes"	AN
"Über Musik und Wörter" (1871)	"On Music and Words"	MW
Die Geburt der Tragödie (1872)	*The Birth of Tragedy*	GT
"Notes-Summer 1872–Beginning 1873"	"The Philosopher"	P
"Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne" (1873)	"On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"	WL

"Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben" (1874)	"On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life"	HL
"Rhetorik" (1872?—74)	"Course on Rhetoric"	R
Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II (1880)	*Human, All-too-Human Part II*	MA 2
Morgenröte (1881)	*Daybreak*	M
Also sprach Zarathustra (1883—85)	*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*	Z
Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft (1882, Part V, 1886)	*The Gay Science*	FW
Jenseits von Gut und Böse (1886)	*Beyond Good and Evil*	JGB
Zur Genealogie der Moral (1887)	*The Genealogy of Morals*	GM
Der Fall Wagner (1888)	*The Case of Wagner*	DFW
Götzen-Dämmerung (1889)	*Twilight of the Idols*	GD
Ecce Homo (1908)	*Ecce Homo*	EH
Die Nachlass-Kompilation, *Der Wille zur Macht* (1930)	*Will to Power*	WM

I use my translations of: UN, ZS, ZT, US, AN, and DW.

I use Walter Kaufmann's translations of: GT and DFW (Vintage Books, 1967), FW (Vintage Books, 1974), JGB (Vintage Books, 1966), GM and EH (Vintage Books, 1967), and Z and GD (*Portable Nietzsche*, Penguin Books, 1954).

I use Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale's translation of: WM (Vintage Books, 1968).

I use R. J. Hollingdale's translations of: HL (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), M (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), and MA 2 (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986).

I use Daniel Breazeale's translation of: WL and P (*Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, Humanities Press, 1979).

I use Carole Blair's translation of: R (*Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1983).

I use the Oscar Levy translation of: MW (*The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Vol. 1, Gordon Press, 1974).

Introduction

Nietzsche's writings evince a complex, constantly modified and developing view of language. His view of language is concerned with the possible origins and qualities of language, with the interrelationships of power of effect between language and human consciousness and knowledge of the world. It is also very much concerned with the limitations of language. Although what I have chosen to call a theory of language can be abstracted from Nietzsche's writings, it would be inaccurate to assert that Nietzsche himself organized his thoughts about language in any systematic manner as an independent aspect of his overall philosophizing. Nietzsche does not single out and give specific form and priority to his theory of language, except at what appear to be sporadic intervals in his thinking.[1] It is the purpose of this work to demonstrate that, although on the surface this appears to be the case, Nietzsche carried with him, from his earliest writings, a passionate interest in language and its workings and a fundamental realization of the significance of certain advantages and disadvantages of language. In discussing Nietzsche's theory of language throughout this work, I inevitably simultaneously discuss his ontology and theory of knowledge. Nietzsche's theory of language is inseparable from his thinking about human knowledge of the world and the creation of a practical philosophy for living in it. When

---

[1] Works dealing with language specifically are "On the Origins of Language" ("Vom Ursprung der Sprache," 1869–70), "Music and Words" ("Über Musik und Wörter," 1871), "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" ("Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne," 1873), and notes for a course on "Rhetoric" ("Rhetorik," 1874). Many references to language also appear in the unpublished notes of the period during which these essays are written. The next clear cut work with language comes in the *Genealogy of Morals* fourteen years later, which is ultimately an exercise in Nietzsche's theory of language. *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Antichrist*, again, return to theoretical statements about language, some of which repeat views developed in the early years. *Ecce homo*, stands as an example of Nietzsche's theory of language in practice. (See my article: *"Ecce Homo*: Problem of the 'I am'". *Enclitic*, 4:1, 1980.) All other references to language specifically, from the period of *Human All Too Human* up until *The Genealogy of Morals*, including the *Nachlass*, while often extremely significant to the overall theory, are scattered. One can generally say that Nietzsche was most overtly concerned with language at the beginning of his thinking and again in the last year or so of his thinking. However, the period in between, of approximately ten years, demonstrates Nietzsche's continuing evaluations of language. See, for example, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "On Poets" and "The Song of Melancholy" or *Beyond Good and Evil*, especially the Preface and "On the Prejudices of Philosophers."

taken together as a changing, but coherent perspective, his beginning theory of language can be seen to provide a rich grounding element for his later philosophical and artistic enterprise.

Theory and Method

At the outset two questions present themselves in this undertaking: How is theory used; and, why language? I wrote that Nietzsche held a constantly modified and developing *view* of language, rather than, for example, a system of language, a conception of language. To have used such terms as system or conception would be to deny at the outset the insights which my following of Nietzsche's work with language yields. Theory is used primarily in its original Greek and Latin sense as "a looking at," a mental viewing or contemplation. Theory, here, is not to be understood as "a systematic state- ment based upon strongly verified underlying principles," or as "a mental plan of a way to do something," two of the primary dictionary definitions. Both of these definitions of theory imply that one has a plan, idea, some principles, into which the field of study is to be subsumed. Theory in the sense "of looking at" simply looks to see what is seen and then a formulation of apparent relationships of certain observed phenomena — in this case, the texts of Nietzsche, — which has been verified to some degree, results. Viewing is a transformation, a transfiguration, and not a prefiguration of that which is to be looked at. To a large extent theory as it is intended here, means speculation, even in some instances, plain old guesswork.

The method used in this work does not assume that it is possible or desirable to recreate the "truth" of the moment in which Nietzsche himself wrote a text, to suggest with some claim to authority that this and only this was what he thought when he wrote it. Rather, this work is, in the sense of Foucault's archaeology, a rewriting, that is, Nietzsche's texts, "as a preserved form of exteriority, are subjected to a regulated transformation. It is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object."[2] I have attempted a "regulated transformation" of Nietzsche's texts on language in the sense which Foucault defines regularity.

> Archaeological description is concerned with those discursive practices to which the facts of succession must be referred if one is not to establish them in an unsystematic and naive way, that is, in terms of merit. At the level in which they are, the originality/banality opposition is therefore not relevant:

---

[2] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972. A 139—40.

between an initial formulation and the sentence, which, years, centuries later, repeats it more or less exactly, it establishes no hierarchy of value; it makes no radical difference. It tries only to establish the *regularity* of statements ... it designates, for every verbal performance ... the set of conditions in which the enunciative function operates, and which guarantees and defines its existence. ... Thus, archaeology seeks to uncover the regularity of a discursive practice. A practice that is in operation ...[3]

This work in regulated transformation, in theory as "a looking at" is pursued in all rigor and attention to detail. The attempt will be to bridge a gap which Bernd Magnus points to in his article "Nietzsche Today: A View from America." On one side, he writes: "to read Nietzsche as offering theories *of* knowledge, or morals or ontology — or in this case, language — is itself the product of a tacit conception of philosophy as an enterprise which confronts a reasonably fixed set of issues within timeless constraints," in other words, within the tradition of logic and analysis which characterizes Western philosophy. Magnus continues: "to give up this picture is essential to understanding Nietzsche's deconstruction of 'philosophy'."[4] On the other side, Magnus characterizes what he understands as a deconstructionist approach to Nietzsche which operates devoid of analysis or argument. These readings "must either stare at his texts in mute silence or use them to see whether they inspire *us* to say anything interesting, to reduce them to mere means in a free-association game, as has been done by some Derridians."[5] Theory, in the sense used in this work, falls somewhere in between these two characterizations. Although traditional philosophy and strictly held logical analysis is assuredly under attack by Nietzsche, and not only Nietzsche, still for a long time to come, any deconstruction of it is constrained to operate to a large, perhaps lessening, extent within it. Derrida said that, and Magnus also recognizes this constraint. Nietzsche's texts are a paradigmal instance of an attempt to both remain within traditional philosophy, insofar as it is necessary, and yet to offer practices of exploding it. However, theory in the sense of "to look at," especially with regard to Nietzsche's theory of language, is also, in some ways, compatible with the idea of "staring at

---

[3] Ibid., A 144—45.

[4] Bernd Magnus, "Nietzsche Today: A View from America," in *International Studies in Philosophy*, Binghamton: State University of New York, XV/2, 1983. NT 102.

[5] Ibid. By selecting these remarks from Magnus' article, I do not want to create a false opinion of his relationship to the deconstructionist perspective. Magnus advocates the useful interaction and, when effective, merging of the three major research perspectives which he points to in this article: analytical, deconstructionist, and reconstructionist. I merely wish to point to the fact that Magnus has apparently divided deconstructionist interpretation into two categories: salvagable und unsalvagable. The staring at Nietzsche's texts in mute silence and using Nietzsche's texts as a means to free-association and game clearly belonging to the latter.

Nietzsche's texts in mute silence." For to add language to looking, in itself already transformation, is for Nietzsche, to transform once again the shape of what is seen. To use Nietzsche's texts "to see whether they inspire *us* to say anything interesting, to reduce them to mere means in a free-association game," once again, is not only not far from the Nietzschean enterprise, but central to it. Assuredly Nietzsche wants us to say what *we* have to say; we cannot do otherwise.[6] Nietzsche's ultimate aim may have been to seduce us in all manner of ways to do just that. And certainly the Freudian, and most especially the Nietzschean perspectives should not allow us to scoff at either the idea of free association or game and the logics, assuredly of a different sort, which are attached to them.

I would like to take a middle road. Theory, in this work, does attempt to get beyond the truth-oriented texts and methods of traditional philosophy, but from a perspective at least twice removed. I go to Nietzsche's texts in an attempt to see him looking at the problem of language. But this is always, as Nietzsche's perspectivism reminds us, my looking at his looking, and in this sense, his text will assuredly produce in *me* something of my own. It is not *exactly* a free association or a game because a logic is applied and an attempt is made to take my looking as "seriously" as possible. I take the stance of the genealogist, who is primarily a documentarian. The project, in Nietzsche's words, "is to traverse the enormous distant, and so well hidden land as it actually existed, has actually been lived ... as though with new eyes."[7]

On the surface the job of the genealogist is not to act as an original voice, a creator and shaper, rather it is to decipher a hieroglyphics, to practice an art of exegesis, exegesis in Nietzsche's sense of it as *rumination*. Rumination is a slow, repetitive, grey activity. Thus, in discovering Nietzsche's beginning theory of language I work with documents in an effort to see Nietzsche seeing, and to make his seeing available to others. Yet inevitably *something* of those elements of game and free-association will have their effect. Again, Foucault's words may come to offer an addendum to what I am attempting to say about the orientation of my method in this work. He characterizes the "truth analysts" in the following way.

> By analysing the truth of propositions and the relations that unite them, one can define a field of logical noncontradiction: one will then discover a

---

[6] Nietzsche makes this clear in many places. See, for example "On the Prejudices of Philosophers" in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 6, where Nietzsche attributes the productions of philosophers more to the prompting of the instincts, to drives other than "the knowledge drive," and more as "personal confessions of their authors and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir," than to the production of objective conscious thinking.

[7] Nietzsche, GM 21, KSA 5: 254.

systematicity; one will rise from the visible body of sentences to that pure, ideal architecture that the ambiguities of grammar, and the overloading of words with meanings have probably concealed as much as expressed.

Foucault then suggests an alternative:

But one can adopt the contrary course, and, by following the thread of analogies and symbols, rediscover a thematic that is more imaginary than discursive, more affective than rational, and less close to the concept than to desire; its force animates the most opposed figures, but only to melt them at once into a slowly transformable unity; what one then discovers is a plastic continuity, the movement of a meaning that is embodied in various representations, images, and metaphors.[8]

In taking a "middle road," I not only intend to bring together such approaches to reading Nietzsche as the analytical, though non-truth oriented, or the approach of free association and play, but also to emphasize the dynamics of exegesis at work not only in my own method, but especially in Nietzsche's practice of reading and writing. The middle road is intended to be just that, travelling in the middle of texts, the texts of Nietzsche, and the texts which contributed to their genesis. The "event" of reading a text, or any other act of exegesis, according to Nietzsche, is our essential act. Exegesis "occurs when a group of phenomena are selected and united by an *interpreting* being."[9] Jaspers quotes Nietzsche: "Perhaps it is scarcely possible ... to read a text *as text*, without permitting any interpretation to commingle with it."[10] Perhaps it is even true that "all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown and possibly unknowable but felt text. ... After all, what are our experiences? Much more that which we read into them than what they contain!"[11]

Thus, the word theory as it is used here, in the sense of a regulated transformation, implies a process of "looking at" in the sense of exegesis, in its sense as rumination, and again in its sense as an interpreting activity, both rigorous and fantastical at the same time.

How do I propose to trace the single thread of Nietzsche's theory of language in a manner which bridges the gaps mentioned, which *attempts* to be as "faithful" *as possible* to Nietzsche's optics of language, while retaining a critical distance? By bringing to my aid Nietzsche's own method of pursuing such circuitous pathways, one already mentioned above — the method of genealogy. By contrasting and blending the genealogical and critical aspects

---

[8] Foucault, A 149–50.
[9] Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, trans. Charles Wallraff and Frederick Schmitz, Chicago: Henry Regnery, Co., 1965. JN 288.
[10] Ibid., JN 289.
[11] Ibid., JN 290.

of my study. Genealogical study concerns "the effective formation of discourse, whether within the limits of control, or outside of them," in other words, genealogical analysis follows the formation of discourse, at once scattered, discontinuous and regular. Criticism "analyses the process of rarefaction, consolidation and unification in discourse."[12]

The genealogical method does not lend itself to a neat breaking up of Nietzsche's thinking into major periods, and the placing of them under structuring labels. This approach is a vestige of historical simplification. To some extent, aside from the prejudice of historical thinking, this has been a result of the state and availability of Nietzsche's texts themselves. Now, however, with the publication of the new Colli-Montinari Critical Edition of Nietzsche's works, as Breazeale says: "One of the most fertile fields of Nietzsche research is opened up. This concerns the evolution and *development* of Nietzsche's thought, as well as the influences upon and sources of the same."[13]

In retracing the genealogy of Nietzsche's theory of language, I follow the evolution of an area of thought as it develops out of specific influences and transformations of those influences. However, I wish to emphasize that evolution or development in my genealogical method, as opposed to a strictly historical development of "logical" sequence and structuring labels, is applied in Nietzsche's sense of it where:

> The "evolution" of a thing, a custom, an organ is by no means its *progressus* toward a goal, even less a logical *progressus* by the shortest route and with the smallest expenditure of force — but a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subduing, plus the resistances they encounter, the attempts at transformation for the purpose of defense and reaction, and the results of successful counteractions. The form is fluid, but the "meaning" is even more so.[14]

It seems reasonable to agree that the more of Nietzsche's "text" which is made available to us in its chronological completeness, the more able we are to assess the strands of his thinking. Rather than neat breaks in his thinking, the painstaking work of genealogical analysis reveals a winding, circuitous path, a forward and backwards movement, with however, enough consistencies, common terms, and reformulations of terms to allow an effective direction to emerge. In a genealogical sense,

> the entire history of a "thing", an organ, a custom can in this way be a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations whose

---

[12] Foucault, A 233.
[13] Daniel Breazeale, "We Alexandrians," in *International Studies in Philosophy*, Binghamton: State University of New York, XV/2, 1983. WA 50.
[14] Nietzsche, GM 77—78, KSA 5: 314—15.

> causes do not even have to be related to one another but, on the contrary, in some cases succeed and alternate with one another in a purely chance fashion.[15]

Nietzsche's theory of language consists of a transforming and recombining of elements, experimentation, creation of forms and sloughing off of forms. Nietzsche often grows a new skin over which the old simultaneously begins to loosen, die, and fall off. Sometimes Nietzsche clings to the old skin long after it has lost value for him. Often it will seem as if I have gone out of the way of the thread of language which we are following, but only to find the thread again in more significance.

In offering a genealogical exegesis of Nietzsche's beginning texts on language this work is also largely concerned with the texts of others and the manner in which these texts come to be integrated into Nietzsche's own text on language. Nietzsche was undoubtedly a valuable and unique thinker, but he was also very much a product of his times. I attempt to discover under what conditions Nietzsche devised his beginning theory of language and what value it possessed for him. It is in the small and painstaking work with the texts of others, that Nietzsche begins, through the process of rarefaction, consolidation, and unification, to form what is finally "his own." The genealogical method attempts to pull together the scattered, regular and discontinuous elements which result in the effective formation of Nietzsche's beginning discourse on language. I am putting into practice Nietzsche's method of tracing "conceptual transformations" *("Begriffs-Verwandlungen")* and phases in such conceptual transformations.[16] Therefore, in treating influences upon Nietzsche's beginning theory of language, the coincidence and interchange of texts is played out in some detail. To the genealogical exegete this offers the coincidence and juxtapositioning of documents upon which the practice of rumination can be applied. It is part of my purpose to allow a play of interactions between texts to arise in the reader, in conjunction with or independent of my interpretations. Certainly no attempt will succeed in following Nietzsche's thinking about language and the influences upon this thinking as completely and variously as it in all probability occurred. I indicate some of the influences which helped to form Nietzsche's beginning theory of language, but it can also be said with certainty that there must have been others as well.

What the reader will confront, then, is in the nature of a nodal procedure of genealogical method. An attempt is made to provide a general on-going background, upon which moments in Nietzsche's thinking about language,

---

[15] Ibid., GM 77, KSA 5: 314.
[16] Ibid., GM 27, KSA 5: 261 and GM 29, KSA 5: 263.

in the context of influences upon that thinking, are enlarged upon, opened up, and played out in detail, in order to suggest certain, but far from all, relations moving between nodes. I will focus primarily on ideas surrounding and relating to the role of language in major influences upon Nietzsche *as they seem important to him*. The manner in which this is done is the following: what I present of Schopenhauer, Kant, Hartmann, Gerber, and other sources of influence should be read as telescoped versions of their thinking seen from the perspective of what we eventually come to understand as Nietzsche's theory of language. To put it simply, I take Nietzsche's view of language, from his discourse at a later time, primarily his 1873 unpublished essay "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne" ("On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense"), and then look back at Schopenhauer, for example, to see what fits it, which ideas could have served to influence it. What is revealed is a sort of echo in advance, which allows us to trace a probable path of genealogical development. Of course, proceeding in this manner puts us in a position of advantage which Nietzsche himself did not have, that of knowing at the beginning approximately where his theory of language was heading. However, this in no way detracts from the effectiveness of the genealogical method, in fact, such a genealogical method presupposes it.

To give the reader an indication of the nodal procedure of my analysis, I mention the progress of just two such nodes, of which at least twelve are offered. A brief description of each genealogical node is given in Appendix B.1. The procedure of nodes results in a cumulative effect, so that, what may appear as arbitrary and unnecessary detail at the beginning of the work comes to be used and reused throughout the work; detail, which, by the end, proves itself important to the overall economy of the genealogical method.

The first nodal example, revolving around the progression in Nietzsche's thinking with regard to language, is the node of relations which pertains to the sensory perception of sight, its translation into images, and projection of images. When, in discussing Schopenhauer's theory of language, the reader finds a long passage on the sense of sight, a first piece in the overall node arises, which surfaces again in Lange's discussion of sight as an example of sensory synthesis and the question of projection of images. The node again surfaces in the discussion of images of representation as opposed to things in themselves, or Schopenhauer's will, or Hartmann's unconscious. Eventually Nietzsche develops his worldview in *Anschauung* which, in one of its aspects, is nothing less than a whole theoretics of viewing, images, and projection of images. The theoretics of language as arising out of a metaphorical imaging process is then discussed in light of "On Truth and Lies" and the influence of Gustav Gerber's *Language as Art*.

A second example of the genealogical nodal procedure centers around Nietzsche's interest in and criticism of the basic grammatical forms of subject and predicate. Nietzsche works with this node of thought again and again, each time under a new influence and in a new context. He first meets with the problem in Schopenhauer and Schopenhauer's criticism of Kant. Again, in Hartmann and Lange. So ingrained does the subject predicate node become for Nietzsche, that he eventually turns it into use as a major weapon of criticism against Schopenhauer. Finally, in the worldview in *Anschauung*, Nietzsche's cumulative thought about the subject predicate relationship comes to ground his first stated non-identity of the subject and the purely representational nature of any predicates attached to such a non-identity. The subject predicate relationship is also at the basis of Nietzsche's view that appearance is all there is and that artistic or rhetorical language is the only effective, but not true, means of expressing it.

It is important to note that these nodes with which Nietzsche is working in his beginning theory of language do not end with his worldview in *Anschauung* or his essay "On Truth and Lies." They continue to be reformed and worked with, in some cases, throughout his philosophical thinking. In my use of the genealogical nodal method a roughly chronological order is preserved. However, chronology is not strictly maintained in the interests of providing a synchronic aspect to the study. A chronology of the period studied is provided in Appendix B.2. An overall logical order of thought is maintained, but does not always prevail. The genealogical nodal method used is almost the technique of pointillism in which, when one backs up and takes the totality of points into view, each of which is uniquely necessary, something of a whole picture presents itself.

Now to address my second question: Why language? First, because language has become one of the central and most widely developed objects of thought in the twentieth century. Language has become a study in itself, along with the recognition of its structuring effects on all fields of endeavor. In 1869 Eduard von Hartmann wrote, and Nietzsche read, in his *Philosophie des Unbewussten (Philosophy of the Unconscious)*:

> Still to this day there is no *philosophy of language*, for what goes by that name is altogether fragmentary, and what is usually offered as such are pretentious appeals to human instinct, which afford no explanation at all ... yet philosophy, the farther it has progressed, has ever more clearly perceived that the understanding of one's own thinking is the first task, and that this is admirably furthered by raising the spiritual treasures which are buried in the language of the discoverer.[17]

---

[17] Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, 3 vols., trans. William Chatterton Coupland, London: Trübner and Co., 1884. In all cases reference to the English translation is followed by reference to the German *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, Berlin, 1869. PU 1: 295, PUG 228–29.

Since then philosophies of language have become abundant and respectable, if not necessary as precondition to philosophy in general, to understanding of human forms of interaction through communication and institutions. The study of language and discourse has brought about reevaluations of such ordering principles as history, mythology, psychology, and philosophy. The effects of research in such areas as linguistics, semantics, and semiotics are restructuring most others, literary criticism, psychology, education, social patterning and communications interaction. Language has been turned upon itself from a critical aspect. Such staples of Western thought as subject and object, logic, truth, and knowledge, are being reexamined from a new perspective of language which finds that language is not static, that meanings change, that unconscious drives and motivations contribute to the formation of and use of language often over and above that of rational thinking.

Secondly, it is my aim to find Nietzsche's place within this series of events in which language has, as Foucault writes, "returned into the field of thought directly and in its own right." I am very much in sympathy with Foucault who gives Nietzsche credit for "opening up" the space wherein language has now become so central, in calling Nietzsche "the first to connect the philosophical task with a radical reflection upon language."[18] However, a note of criticism is needed here. It is surprising that Foucault, who, as we saw above, champions the nonrelevance of originality or priority of the authors of texts, but chooses to study, rather, the regularity of discourse-objects, should after all give Nietzsche priority here. It appears to be true that Nietzsche deserves much of this credit, however, my study demonstrates that Nietzsche's theory of language is itself largely the product of a "regulated transformation" of the texts of others.

Much has been written in the last fifteen years or so about Nietzsche's unique relation to language,[19] usually in connection with what is currently

---

[18] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. R. D. Laing, New York: Random House, 1973. OT 305.

[19] See, for example: Arthur Danto, *Nietzsche as Philospher*, New York: Macmillan Co., 1965; Paul de Man, "Rhetoric of Tropes" and "Rhetoric of Persuasion," *Allegories of Reading*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979; Jacques Derrida, *Eperons*, Paris: Flammarion, 1976; Ruediger H. Grimm, *Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977; Sarah Kofmann, *Nietzsche et la metaphor*, Paris: Payot, 1972; Philippe, Lacoue-Labarthe, "Le detour" and "La fable," *Le sujet de la philosophie*, Paris: Aubier—Flammarion, 1979; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, London: Harvard University Press, 1985; Bernard Pautrat, *Versions du soleil: Figures et systeme de Nietzsche*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971; Jean-Michel Rey, *L'enjeu des signes*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971; J. P. Stern, *A Study of Nietzsche*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975; Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983; and Gerold Ungeheuer, "Nietzsche über Sprache und Sprechen, Über Wahrheit und Traum," *Nietzsche Studien*, 12, 1983.