

Mundus est Fabula
Reflections on the Nihilism of Maurice Blanchot's
"Reflections on Nihilism"

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I

One of the most clearly delineated descriptions of the relation between nihilism and the death of God in Nietzsche's published works belongs to *On the Genealogy of Morality* (from now on, GM)². On the one hand, its main argument describes nihilism as an event: since the ascetic ideal of moral truthfulness has been logically exhausted with the disappearance of the ultimate guarantor of its world-denying aspirations, modern *décadence* unleashes the world into a void of despair and disorientation³. In what constitutes a *crisis* of values, then, nihilism appears as consequence and symptom of the radical devaluation that the death of God represents, yet as *history* another perspective on nihilism opens: one that takes this paralyzing *épuisement* of the will experienced in European culture since the advent of modernity and only exacerbated in Nietzsche's time as more fundamentally related not to the will to truth, but to the will to nothingness.

Parallel to the will to truth's relation to the modern self-abolition of values, let us recall another of GM's central arguments on nihilism. The will, lacking a goal after the surplus of suffering brought about by the earliest debtor-creditor relations, confronts the meaninglessness of suffering and imposes a life-denying *moral* meaning on it. The will now has a goal: it chooses to will nothingness instead of suicidal nihilism (GM II, 21; III, 1, 14, 28) —in other words, to continue willing even if through a

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³ cf. Reginster (2006).

paradoxically reactive, self-dividing, self-devaluing willing of nothingness that, as active and creative force (GM, II, 12), is also a will to nothingness. Here, it is as valuations built on world-denial that values devalue themselves, thus appearing the willing of nothingness as the very logic of nihilism. No longer merely *le mal du siècle* or even a history-breaking depletion of voluntaristic resources⁴, “nihilism can basically be nothing else but the will to nothingness” (Müller-Lauter, 1999, p.45), a logic of decadence in which moral values develop according to a “process of wasting away that leads to self-destruction” (p.49).

Even before questioning the worth of that *nihil* that always refers back to being, Nietzsche’s imagery for the event and history of nihilism has a decidedly, if not problematically, naturalistic tone. More importantly, if according to a theory of forces decadence comes when subordination to a ruling drive breaks down and finds as its command a will to disintegration and self-destruction⁵, then Nietzsche applies this same approach to other misarchic symptoms of the historical sickness: from socialist, feminist and anarchist ideas to modern science, decadent art, Russian novelists or French psychologists. Or as *The Case of Wagner* reverses a formula from Bourget and the naïve priority it still assigns to organic totality, consider *literary* decadence, where, following a similar will to disintegration, “life does not reside in the totality any more. The word becomes sovereign and jumps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and blots out the meaning of the page, the page comes to life at the expense of the whole” (CW, 7)⁶.

Since literary fragmentation was indeed for Nietzsche a symptom of modern nihilism, this makes the work of Maurice Blanchot particularly appropriate for a return to the problem. For facing the will to truth the abyssal emptiness of a godless universe—the impossibility of accounting for itself without losing its moral faith in truth to the play of extra-moral illusion—, language in its autonomy ascends as the space of meaning and non-meaning, but also of that which exceeds, subverts and suspends the dialectical logic of their opposition. Language, in sum, does no longer speak about “truth” through a “subject”, so while to the Nietzschean question “who speaks?” Foucault replies, echoing Mallarmé, “the Word itself” (2005, p.417), Blanchot, maybe more radically still⁷, writes about a language deprived of any ruling presence guiding

⁴ cf. Siemens & Shapiro (2008, p.5).

⁵ cf. Müller-Lauter (p.44-45), Campioni (2004, p.267-300).

⁶ cf. Müller-Lauter (p.43), Constable, Potolsky & Denisoff (1999, p.16).

⁷ cf. Bruns (1994, p.180, p.313-314), Weller (2008, p.99).

its movement, yet still answering, this freed writing, to a demand rather different than that of *logos*.

The present work is a commentary on the problem of nihilism as it appears in “Réflexions sur le Nihilisme”, the sixth chapter of Blanchot’s 1969 work *L’Entretien Infini* (*The Infinite Conversation*, from now on, IC) and part of his “most substantial explicit analysis of nihilism” (Weller, 2008, p.103). Of course, Blanchot soon abandons the notion out of its philosophical sterility, so studying his reasons will shed light on the positive interest he has in Nietzsche. Indeed, since the critique of nihilism —and with it, of notions still too compromised with ontoteology like its *overcoming* or the meaning and possibility of the *Übermensch*— guides “Reflections” until *Nietzsche et l’écriture fragmentaire*, its third, final part and the chapter’s core philosophical discussion⁸, our next section will focus on its key arguments as they relate not only to nihilism’s meaninglessness, but also to the introduction of what Blanchot considers to be Nietzsche’s actual radical challenge to thought. Consequently, section III will investigate Blanchot’s notions of difference, writing, and the para-ontological temporality of return that the latter also opens, relating their connection with death and its impossibility to an ongoing discussion on the deeply problematic role that Heidegger’s thought and interpretation of Nietzsche have for Blanchot. In section IV, and with a broader perspective on Blanchot’s nihilism in “Reflections”, we will sum up concluding aspects of his appraisal of Nietzsche but with particular interest in the relation they might have with the different way the latter also interpreted the crisis of nihilism.

Finally, there are clear problems in using such a specific text for a partial approach that nevertheless aspires at wider systematic conclusions —to name just one, the neglecting of Blanchot’s later return to Nietzsche in 1973’s *Le Pas Au-Dela*. Yet to insist on these problems in a world of becoming, interpretation and chance seems useless, as if the “true” text, approach or system were still goals for thought to desire, as if the world were something beyond the fables written about it.

II

Although the opening section of “Reflections on Nihilism”, *Nietzsche, aujourd’hui*, deals with the ways Schlechta, Jaspers, Löwith and particularly Heidegger had tried to correct Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche’s obscene betrayals of her brother, the question in need of reflection is already introduced in its first paragraph: nihilism

⁸ cf. Hill (2012, p.33-34).

“retains all its historical, political, and literary vigor”, yet also, “and even because of the verifications time accords it”, seeming “almost naive and like the still tranquil dream of a ‘better’ age” (IC, p.136). This ambivalence soon gives way to a provisional interest in the concept’s fruitfulness, not as a philosophical or literary *cliché* but as that which is implied by knowledge. Indeed, as the final passages of this opening section show, it is as if the dangers of modern science justified a contemporary interest in nihilism, thus leading us to return to Nietzsche’s thinking and contradictions, the latter also *our* contradictions, as his contemporaries refused to hear what Blanchot voices as his *avertissement*: “Those who want science must also want the consequences of science, and must therefore in the end want nihilism” (p.143).

On a first glance —and *aujourd’hui*, when we suddenly “perceive that the danger to which knowledge exposes us is not the danger of a style and when, at the same time (with what hypocrisy), we endeavor to preserve all the advantages of science, but [...] refusing its risks” (p.143)—, it is *science* what makes a return to the Nietzschean problem necessary. Since science, says Blanchot, “is the meaning of a world deprived of meaning”, the nihilism that makes it possible also allows it to make nihilism, absolute nothingness, possible in return. Blanchot’s verdict on science is clear: “[this] means that, by it, the human world can perish” (p.146).

Yet as *Nietzsche, today* closes and the next section begins, scientific nihilism gives way to nihilism as historical break, being the origin of this *dégradation* “that turning point in the history of the world from which the light of the divine has withdrawn” (p.144). In fact, in the first pages of *Passage de la ligne* Blanchot’s double strategy is both to restrict his approach to nihilism as an historical event following the death of God, and to attribute to Nietzsche, not without reason, the kernel of his own subsequent critique of the concept, suggesting he had finally conceived it as “an extreme that cannot be gotten beyond and yet [as] the only path of a true going beyond, the principle of a new beginning” (p.144). Thus, although as a crisis of value it “can no longer move us, so familiar has it become” (p.144), as the principle of a new beginning, the “infinite negation that withdraws from us every solid foundation”, nihilism still seems to imply an “intoxicating task”: “the sudden opening on a space of unlimited knowledge” (p.145). Blanchot thus offers a *première approche* to nihilism as “an event accomplished in history that is like a shedding of history—the moment when history turns”, as well as its negative and positive traits: “values no longer have value in themselves”, “for the first time the horizon is infinitely open to knowledge” (p.145).

But the opening of an infinite space for knowledge collides with modern man's mediocrity: "Present-day man is man of the lowest rank, but his power is that of a being who is already beyond man" (p.147). This tension will lead to a discussion on the particular willing that characterizes the *Übermensch*, but not before a main reason to drop the term "nihilism" is covertly introduced, it being closely related to the reason why overhuman willing is ultimately aporetic. An early footnote says about nihilism: "The word itself is flat. Turned into a system, it contradicts itself. The contradiction only brings out its dryness. The semantic play between nothingness [*le neant*] and nothing [*rien*] shows that it is apparently difficult to negate what has not first been affirmed" (p.451, n.6, translation modified). Nihilism, to deny absolutely, implies something which, in being denied, is being previously affirmed. More than just a latent systematic contradiction, "the term's lack of density" (p.451, n.6) is rooted in it being, and we will return to this, "an unreliable and questionable, because still ontological, concept" (Hill, 2012, p.261, n.46)⁹.

A further analysis of this enigmatic, already fading presence that lurks in the impossibility of nihilism is what the *Übermensch* will open. Following Heidegger's already influential interpretation, Blanchot describes it as "the being who has overcome the void (created by the death of God and the decline of values), because he has [found] in this void the power of overcoming" (IC, p.147). As Blanchot then suggests ambiguities within an image of the *Übermensch* he himself is not sure of, his final version will betray aspects that relate to Heidegger in a more complex, unsaid manner than the text's understated acceptance of him as "the only person capable of defending a true philosophical reading of Nietzsche's work" (Holland, 1996, p.179).

"Reflections" introduces the will to power as the quoted description of the *Übermensch* goes on to question the contradictory status of the *end* it is supposed to represent —the opposition *end or accomplishment* being a false problem of ontology, as we will finally see in relation to Blanchot's critique of the present in the name of return. If the *Übermensch* is the goal, it stops self-surpassing itself, stops being the *Übermensch*; but if it is *not* the goal and hence *also* in need of something to surpass, then its will shows not to be "free of all external meaning; his act of willing [...] still a Will to Power" (p.147). This idea, the will to power as depending on external meaning, carries its own conclusion: "The overman is he in whom nothingness makes itself will and who, free for death, maintains this pure essence of will in willing nothingness" (p.148). Sounding farther from a Nietzschean, more tragically-inclined conception of

⁹ cf. Weller (2008, p.109).

the fleetingness of *physis* than from Hegelian or Heideggerian philosophies of post-Christian finitude¹⁰, Blanchot not only suggests that the *Übermensch* might not represent the overcoming of nihilism but its “very form” (p.148), he also describes the positive essence of the will *as* will to nothingness. Freed from external limitations, then, the will wills nothing for willing something would be equal to a voluntary self-denial of that newly-found overhuman possibility.

Three things should be kept in mind here since they will guide our final perspective on Blanchot’s nihilism in “Reflections” —before returning to them, of course, a proper treatment of Blanchot’s interest in force as difference, fragmentary writing, and the impossible present that the thought of return objects to the thought of being is imperative. Notice first the blurring of Nietzsche, Hegel and Heidegger in Blanchot’s notion that a (human) will freed of limitations equals a will freed from *negation*, and the latter a paradoxical will to *absolute* negation. A certain *Kojevian* conception of negation as the historical motor of human activity thus turns the conflictual becoming of forces into the rational unfolding of *logos*, the logic of resentment into the labor of negation¹¹, and the overcoming of nihilism into the end of history: a line to be crossed. Second, Blanchot’s text punctuates the (overhuman) equation of the will and the will to nothingness with a reference to GM’s previously-discussed passage on the will willing nothingness over instant suicidal escape in the face of *horror vacui* (GM III, 1, 28), yet while Nietzsche clearly distinguishes suffering’s meaninglessness from nothingness *as* meaning, he also distinguishes the *latter* from the will to power. As Blanchot also seems to follow Kojève in taking nihilism as *logically* equal to suicide¹², it is important to insist in GM’s triple distinction between suicide and the willing of power and nothingness, for the self-refutation of the ascetic ideal implies for GM, and Nietzsche’s thought in general, the urgency of announcing the recently-opened possibility of a new goal for modern humanity *other* than, say, Mainländer’s suicidal surrender to entropy or Schopenhauer’s all-too-theistic atheistic pessimism, a modernized version of previous asceticism.

So the contradiction that is nihilism led us to the one in the *Übermensch*, both overcomer *and* world-denier; this will lead to Blanchot’s later analysis of eternal return as giving access to *another* thought in Nietzsche, one that is irreducible to his hypothetical system, its inconsistencies, or its vulnerability to Heideggerian charges. More than a mere logical contradiction, then, a deeper Blanchotian argument against

¹⁰ cf. Hasse & Large (2001, p.60), IC (p.155-156).

¹¹ cf. 149.

¹² cf. Weller (p.104).

nihilism might still appear. For now, however, a final dimension of his reading of willing as willing nothingness needs to be highlighted, for perhaps the main issue is not Blanchot's take on the latter as a *Nietzschean* notion. Perhaps his account on nihilism, "more essentially a debate with Heidegger" (Hill, 2012, p.33), is also marked by the latter in subtler ways than the text's explicit references to his reading of Nietzsche or dialogue with Jünger.

Seeing in the will to power the last stage in the history of metaphysics, Heidegger not only coincides in neglecting the Nietzschean distinction, he does so as a consequence of his reframing of the will to power into the accomplished metaphysical subjectivism grounding the radically world-negating calculus of total planetary domination. Simply put, since the will to power consummates metaphysics' own essence of forgetting being, the very idea of nihilism as will to nothingness becomes trivial: the "true" world finally becomes, indeed, a fable, as "the closing off of the truth of beings [...] from the truth of Being [...] appears as a liberation from all metaphysics" (Heidegger, IV, p.239). Far from agreeing with the will to power as the thought of the being of beings once reduced to their crudest ontic presentation —he would differ with the idea of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician¹³ while not even being entirely in line with ontological difference¹⁴—, Blanchot's treatment of the *Übermensch*, in equating the willing of power and nothingness in a way that challenges every distinction made by Nietzsche even if it is far from the worst contender to dilute nihilism by attributing such a gesture to him¹⁵, seems to follow not only a Heideggerian reading of the Nietzschean figure¹⁶, but also a broader, "implicit union between ontological nihilism and axiological nihilism" (Ferraris, 2000, p.23, my translation). Thus, we must proceed with attention to Heidegger's lurking presence and larger influence in Blanchot's overall assessment of Nietzsche's philosophical significance.

For example, it may be *against* a Heideggerian connection between eternal return and accomplished metaphysical subjectivism that Blanchot says that the human impossibility of willing backwards marks the *failure* of the *Übermensch*. In return, "[p]ersonal and subjective all-powerfulness is transformed into the impersonal necessity of 'being'" once the will that wills nothing wills eternity and, "in this process, eternity, without either will or end, returns to itself" (IC, p.149). But we have seen the dialectical contradiction of willing nothingness: negation implies affirmation. It leads

¹³ cf. Hill (2012, p.33).

¹⁴ cf. Newman (1996, p.168).

¹⁵ cf. Zupančič (2003).

¹⁶ cf. Müller-Lauter (1999, p.80).

Blanchot to question the entire link between nihilism and nothingness since the former is rather “tied to being. Nihilism is the impossibility of being done with it [...]. It says the impotence of nothingness [...]; it tells us that when we think nothingness we are still thinking being. Nothing ends, everything begins again” (p.149). So the true problem of nihilism does not coincide with a logic of decadence —the will to nothingness as a *reactive*, hence perpetually self-devaluating, willing of power— but with the very terms structuring the logical discourse on nihilism: being and nothingness as dialectical opposites. It is when confronted with the *impossibility* of total negation, and thus of ascribing back to that being that resists it the ontological consistency initially ascribed to nothingness’ negation, that nihilism crumbles, *for it is not the willing of nothingness but the thinking of being*¹⁷. So the *Übermensch* is not the thought “most able to enlighten us as to the kind of trap that nihilism is”, for the latter “surpasses itself absolutely by making itself definitively unsurpassable” (IC, p.148). Maybe Nietzsche’s challenge to the thought of being is how he *diverts*, and not how he fails overcoming, this ungraspable gap between nihilism exacerbated *and* overcome¹⁸.

Similarly, against a Heideggerian account on the *Übermensch* as the man of complete technical domination —but also minimizing previous concerns with *le monde humain péri* that science produces—, this “weakness of the negative”, appearing “in the being that cannot be negated, lays waste at one stroke to our attempts to dominate the earth and to free ourselves from nature by giving it a meaning—that is, by denaturing it” (p.149). While resisting the dialectical thought of nothingness while still justifying a Hegelo-Kojevan turn in which Nietzschean denaturalization is taken for a meaning-giving *Aufhebung* —another line to be crossed as the very possibility of crossing seems more and more doubtful—, this being that ruins nihilism marks the undecidable nature of the latter’s “end”. As Blanchot says following Heidegger’s rebuttal of Jünger: “either passage into the nullity of nothingness or into the region of a new turning of being” (p.150). This allows us to conclude: conceived the thought of return as the overhuman affirmation of nihilism, *the entire problematic* appears as aporetic, insofar as it is tied to an ontology that is, at worst, unquestioned —for what is the status of this being that nihilism fails to deny?—, and at best, obsolete —for undeniable being wrecks being’s very opposition to nothingness.

Both logical contradiction and ontological impossibility, the sterility of nihilism thus calls for a displacement of ontology. As *Crossing the line* approaches its end, Blanchot follows Heidegger in acknowledging the need to start writing these terms as

¹⁷ cf. Weller (p.105).

¹⁸ cf. Hill (2012, p.198-199), Heidegger (II, p.182).

being or nothingness (p.150), but also in seeming to assume a Heideggerian critique of the naïve “realist efficacy” of taking man as “a passerby who would have only a geographical relation with what he crosses” (p.150). Since the entire dialectical comprehension of overcoming neglects that man is himself “this zone and this line”, it seems as if an existential analytic is what “Reflections” will propose as the much needed novel approach to nihilism. Yet Blanchot’s move, as we will now study, is rather to recover the thought of return in relation to that which in Nietzsche exceeds even the questioning of tradition —for contestation “keeps one within the horizon of the same interrogation” (p.150). A “very different language” calling him, now it will be the Nietzsche of a fragmentary *écriture d’effraction* who will assume “an exigency of rupture that [...] turns him away from what is in *his power* to think” (p.151), but also who —indirectly, through the unsaid relation between the return of difference as the temporality of writing and death as an un-crossable line shattering the supposed unity of authentic existence— will help question Heidegger’s own commitment with the ontological discourse of light and its absence. Before returning to the still pending significance of nihilism as will to nothingness, we must turn to Blanchot’s proper interpretation of Nietzsche.

III

The title *Nietzsche and fragmentary writing* already introduces the question of a different Nietzsche than what systematic reconstructions propose. On the one hand, “[e]ven disengaged from a unitary system and engaged in an essential plurality”, his “thought must still designate a center”, even if the interpretation that holds it is “a philosophy of interpretation”. But Blanchot’s interest lies elsewhere, *outside* the question of the coherence of Nietzsche’s thought, “if it is dialectical or antidialectical, if it ends metaphysics or replaces metaphysics” (p.151). Which doesn’t mean he neglects a proper analysis of Nietzschean conceptuality. In a dialogue with recent commentators —Derrida or Deleuze, for example, but also Klossowski—, *force*, *repetition* and *difference* will serve to localize a Nietzsche “dissymmetrical [...], irreducible to any conceptual programme” (Hill, 2012, p.34). Indeed, since these notions respond to a certain voiceless exigency in Nietzsche’s writing, Blanchot will now aim at that towards which they point to, “without ever being able to formulate it as such: that which thought is constrained to think once it leaves itself behind, without relinquishing itself, and strains or reaches towards the outside” (p.35). This makes Nietzsche not only his fundamental predecessor on the theme of the fragment (p.26),

but also synonym with the very form of temporality that authorizes the ascent of language and, more radically still —as through it language’s complicity with being is suspended—, *writing*¹⁹.

Nietzsche and fragmentary writing thus implies “a very different language: no longer of the whole but of the fragment, of plurality, of separation” (IC, p.152). Outside the logic of the whole also means the whole of philosophy²⁰: philosophy completed with the Hegelian system as undetermined being and nothingness infiltrate the Nietzschean *dead-end* at the end of philosophy. So it is not a question of the aphoristic style, but of a “surplus of affirmation” (p.154) cut off from the work of negativity or the presenting light of being, what Blanchot suggests with $\pm \pm$, a notation that both subtracts and adds. Does this make $\pm \pm$ a *representing* notation? Like Blanchot himself, Nietzsche too is aware “he is obliged to think from where he is, [...] to speak on the basis of the discourse he is challenging” (p.153), thus the will to power and eternal return think the multiple, yet “in relation with the one, still a multiplied affirmation of the One” (p.153). Like $\pm \pm$, however, “fragmentary speech does not know contradiction” (p.154) but *difference*: a juxtaposition of texts escaping simultaneity in relating to each other by the “indeterminate blank that neither separates nor unites them but brings them to the limit they designate, which would be their meaning —if, precisely, they did not thereby, hyperbolically, escape a speech of signification” (p.154).

So Blanchot returns to the fatally-flawed thought of eternal return, only now with renewed interest in the way its impossible affirmation can be turned against metaphysics not to create an opposing *anti*-metaphysics —maybe a “philosophic pluralism” (p.154) or “a philosophy of ambiguity, [of] the experience of being as multiple” (p.155)—, but to displace its center. Blanchot revisits the *Übermensch*: it signifies the disappearance of man, “he whose essence is disappearance”, also of “successful man, [...] wherein everything, the whole, is realized”, but also of *man as a whole*, “the being in whom the whole in its becoming has become being” (p.155). Nihilism, thus, signifies not a devaluation of the moral value of truth in relation to which “one can accommodate oneself to”, but the question of thought “when being — unity, the identity of being— has withdrawn without giving way to nothingness, that too easy refuge” (p.156). And it is here, where devaluation is demoted in the name of the definite retreat of being, that eternal return manages to differ from the latter’s

¹⁹ cf. IC (p.xi-xii), Hill (2012, p.197).

²⁰ cf. p.xii.

history, for its affirmation is the decision to affirm chance, difference not predicated in the one or its multiplicity, Dionysus reborn and perpetually fragmented.

But what is the exact relation between the thought of return and the writing of the fragment? It is not enough to state that a plural speech that talks not of meaning or its absence echoes the chance-affirming thought that also affirms *itself*, and infinitely, as aleatory²¹. Blanchot's current analysis is rather aimed at the common exigency heard both in writing and return. Since ontology cannot settle if man disappears or if its overcomer comes—the very distinction between the resented past and the affirmed past yet-to-come being *undecidable*—, intermittent speech talks out of that unbridgeable *between*, that “moving tear of time that maintains, one infinitely distant from the other, these two figures wherein knowledge turns” (p.158). Outside Hegel, but also outside Hegelianized Nietzsche²², the empty accomplishment of *logos'* affirmation of the *all* leads not to the apory at the end of the history of being, but to the lack of a present in which to even enunciate that everything returns as *itself* another temporality²³. Thus, this infinite rupture that return introduces *between* past and future—this “non-present temporality of the present” (Newman, 1996, p.164)— is also the time of a writing that, cut-off from the self-identical unity of meaning, demands to be always already-written, always yet-to-be. And if neutral time displaces being and meaning from their presence as affirmed or denied, it must also displace subjectivity from its *self*-presence.

As Klossowski's 1969 book *Nietzsche et le Cercle Vicieux* closely suggests, the very truth of return needs its forgetting in order to continue to reverberate through eternity. Hence, it does not mean subjectivity accomplished but its aleatory disappearance, which means a contradictory, *impossible* teaching²⁴. Having translated *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* but also Heidegger's two-volume *Nietzsche*, Klossowski must have known his reading had critical consequences towards Heidegger's. Something similar occurs in Blanchot's work of the same year: the differing time of repetition decenters subjectivity from itself, yet this decentering does not seem to repeat the theme of ecstatic temporality, but rather to interrupt it by focusing on its constitutive “space of dis-location” (IC, p.156)—almost as if eternal return, not only *surviving* its interpretation as a subjectivist, metaphysical doctrine, actually illuminated *Sein und Zeit's* *previous* residual metaphysics of presence, for if returning non-present

²¹ cf. p.167-168.

²² cf. p.157.

²³ cf. Fynsk (2013, p.186).

²⁴ cf. Klossowski (1997, p.55-73).

challenges a reading of eternal return as the (essentially incoherent) last thought of the totality of beings²⁵, it must also challenge the role *death* had in disclosing the structural whole hidden in inauthentic existence.

Indeed, while *Sorge*, "Dasein's primordial totality of Being" (SZ, §39)²⁶, is phenomenologically testifiable during anxiety's relation to death as Dasein's innermost possibility of impossibility²⁷, one might say that the Nietzschean *Stimmung* does *not* result in the disclosure of a thought of (merely ontic) *totality*²⁸. Perhaps the limitless experience of return constitutes a different temporality than Dasein's, perhaps an eternal *Augenblick* in which Dasein's self-referring totality is as volatilised as it is disclosed in anxiety —circular normativity thus being *excluded* from the vicious circle of repetition²⁹. Or perhaps, more radically still, Blanchot's Nietzsche shows *Being and Time*'s enduring reliance on the dialectics of limits, crossings, and what the latter offer to vision. If so, eternal return would open said reliance to the *outside* of being and its light, not contesting an antithesis but silently evoking the thrust of Heidegger's own 1927 critique of Kant and Descartes, as anxiety bares *Sorge* in the present presence of its meaningful unitary totality.

Although some of these issues will return in Blanchot's later *Le Pas Au-Dela*, and we will return to them as the temporality of writing displaces a certain naïve opposition of life and death still present in Heidegger, the third part of "Reflections" mounts the tensions between Nietzsche, Heidegger and Blanchot's own altering repetition of them. His new questioning of Heidegger occurs as he approves the idea that return belongs to *the same* —return thus saying "the being of becoming" (IC, p.159)—, while also adding the *difference* that repetition brings when the same returns *as* the same. Now, since the fragmentary interrupts all discourse by drawing it outside its faith in *logos*, Blanchot accepts it may "seem to play the game of nihilism [...]. And yet how far it leaves this power of negation behind" (p.159-160). Exactly how far: at the possibility of thinking the will to power no longer as a metaphysical principle, but as that which "does not allow itself to be understood either as clarity or as form" (p.160). Indeed, having Nietzsche realized that being is light³⁰ —thus moving away from the Apollonian "value of form [...] in the face of an obscure Dionysian terror"

²⁵ cf. Hill (2012, p.67, 201).

²⁶ cf. §45, §64, §65, §82.

²⁷ cf. §53, §62.

²⁸ cf. Hill (2012, p.66).

²⁹ cf. Hill (p.203).

³⁰ cf. p.162.

(p.160)—, he thinks a will whose *puissance* does not equal *pouvoir* nor “dominating violence”, but *force*. Force, therefore, would escape light.

But how to think force, if *chaos* already refers to *order*? Citing Deleuze’s recent *Nietzsche et la Philosophie*, Blanchot declares that force is always said as multiple, for its very being is plural. Yet, he adds, “[t]he plurality of forces means that forces are distant, relating to each other through the distance that [...] inhabits each of them as the intensity of their difference” (IC, p.161). Privileging Deleuze’s idea of distance insofar as *differential* element of force³¹, this intimate exteriority of forces appears not as “a tranquil spatial and temporal continuity”, but as a disjunction “where time and space [...] rejoin by their mutual disjoining”, instituting “relation on [...] an interruption that does not bring together” (p.161). Difference is then redoubled as its very differing also *defers*: this leads Blanchot to conceive becoming not as “oriented homogeneity” but as “the play of time and of space”, so just as the experience of return marks repetition as difference and vice versa, Nietzsche’s interest in *force* proves to be aimed at supporting “the presentiment that difference is movement” (p.162). Becoming, then, is the “‘common’ field” (p.161) where space is dissymmetrical, time is distraction, and speech is interruption, which means, in sum, that force really says movement, movement says difference, and “difference, essentially, writes” (p.162).

Or so Blanchot says “[o]ne must conclude”. This conclusion appears as inevitable insofar as force has been quietly abandoned for risking “an apparent dogmatism” (p.162), just as its parallel status as the *genetic element* of Deleuze’s take on the will to power was previously ignored, and just as perspectivism too needs to be criticized for reproducing the “imperialism of light” (p.162). This allows Blanchot to renew his critique of nihilism: “invincible as long as, submitting the world to the thought of being, we entertain and seek truth on the basis of the light of its meaning, for it is perhaps in light itself that meaning is dissimulated” (p.162). The problem of nihilism, as we have been studying, is ultimately *being as light*, the latter hiding in the illumination of what it discloses, being this absence “infinitely more obscure than any obscurity” (p.163). This makes light’s deception actually *double*: it hides in its clarity the mediated status of what it discloses as immediate, while also hiding *itself* as this mediating clarity. Now, both as mediation and as the immediate, Nietzsche too held a double suspicion against the true, and it means his proper position against the thought of being: thinking “the world in order to free thought [...] from the idea of being [...]: in

³¹ cf. Deleuze (1983, p.39-72).

order [...] to think something other than what for it is possible. Or, again, to speak in saying this 'more', this 'surplus' that precedes and follows all speech" (p.163-164)

Nietzsche does not think *being* when he thinks the *world* —or at least when turning himself over to the exigency of the fragmentary³². Blanchot goes on to explain that being, meaning, value and light have validity within the world, while the latter itself "cannot be thought, cannot be said as meaning or as a whole [...]. The world is its very outside: the affirmation that *exceeds* every power to affirm [...] in the endlessness of discontinuity" (p.164). Thought as will to power, then, the depth of the world escapes the thought of being by being eternally disjointed both from itself and from that which light permits to unveil. Even more, far from "an integral subjectivism", the will to power is an infinite unfolding of interpretation "without subject and without complement", a *Dasein* without *Sein*, a mere *there* in which interpretation, infinity and the world "can only be given in a juxtaposition that [...] does not put them in relation, and that thus responds to the exigency of fragmentary writing" (p.164).

The will to power as a *Dasein sans Sein* —a "neutral movement of interpreting" (p.165) *exterior* to the space of meaning and its "dialectic of illusion" (p.163)— recalls Deleuze's defense of Nietzsche in the face of its Heideggerian interpretation: "Nietzsche is opposed to every conception of affirmation which would find its foundation in Being, and its determination in the being of man" (1983, p.220, n.31). Yet Blanchot's para-ontological acceptance of the will to power —only reluctantly: "world" outside "being"— rather mirrors Derrida's 1967 eager offering of Nietzsche to Heidegger until the naivety of a metaphysical critique of metaphysics is "almost lost for the question of being" (1997, p.19). It is there, says Derrida, that Nietzsche "regains [his] absolute strangeness, where his text finally invokes a different type of reading, more faithful to his type of writing [as] not originally subordinate to the logos and to truth". If, as we have seen, the impossibility of nihilism leads to the impossibility of refuting "[t]he commentator who Hegelianizes Nietzsche" (p.157), it now becomes clear that, for Blanchot and for Derrida, *what cannot be refuted is the one who Heideggerizes Nietzsche*, precisely in order to announce that which would mark the *failure* of such a procedure —for Nietzsche too "wanted to write", suggests Derrida against Heidegger, "the history of metaphysics as the epoch of presence" (p.143). In any case, being *writing* that which resists Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche as "captive of that metaphysical edifice [he] professes to overthrow" (p.19), the latter's

³² cf. p.163.

real problem according to Derrida is also closer to Blanchot's next argumentative steps in *Nietzsche and fragmentary writing*.

Beyond the affinity of Blanchot's Nietzsche to Derrida's, his distance from Deleuze has direct consequences for the continuing analysis of nihilism as an ontological pseudo-problem. Since Blanchot has explicitly said of forces that "the differential element' [...] is the whole of their reality" (IC, p.161), there is no value given to the distinction between active and reactive forces—in fact, Deleuze's *sûre remarque* warning not to think the relation "of one force with another [...] as a negative element" (p.161) has been sidestepped from the start by the systematic consideration of the reactivity of the will as negating determination³³. This means Blanchot cannot follow a notion of Nietzschean nihilism in which, since force is also the *genetic* element of the will to power—the latter having always been, in Deleuze's anti-Hegelian reading, a thought of non-dialectical self-disjunction—, its reactive weakening must lead to a becoming that is *foreign* to what can be apprehended on the basis of Hegelian or Heideggerian conceptions of the relation between *logos* and being. However, since Blanchot has been clear in that force risks the dogmatism of light, we must defer, at least until we have read "Reflections" entire argument, any discussion of the theoretical consequences of, for example, his reluctance to build an univocal ontology on returning difference³⁴—a Deleuzian idea of immanence being foreclosed for perhaps being assumed to suppose an ontological language which would speak of a living present in the past, just as transcendence would speak of one in the future³⁵. In any case, Blanchot's ongoing argument now leads directly in the core of his reading on the impossibility of nihilism.

If "to interpret: the infinite: the world" (IC, p.164) can even be said to "mean" that the world is a text, this precludes a vulgar idea of the latter as meaningful. But that the world is not a text given to meaning does not lead, on its part, to a naïve mysticism of mute plenitude; it rather leads to *laughter* at the fragmentary writing that disrupts its disclosure, at the fact that—even taking *Twilight of the Idols'* well-known criticism of the metaphysics of grammar into account— *mundus est fabula*. Still, what could this reference to the world as fable mean? Perhaps that the ruptures turning language, "the metaphor of a metaphysics" (p.166), into a writing that does not say the world to a subject lead to the *seul destin* not of having to perpetually fail at overcoming "nihilism in the guise of reason" (p.166), but of having to make language

³³ cf. p.147.

³⁴ cf. Hill (2012, p.252, n.75).

³⁵ cf. Hill (2012, p.203).

persist: “to speak without end, and in accordance with the exigency of difference, always [deferring] speaking” (p.167). As the introductory note to IC says: “writing is called upon to undo the discourse in which, however unhappy we believe ourselves to be, we [...] remain comfortably installed. From this point of view writing is the greatest violence, for it transgresses the law, every law, and also its own” (p.xii).

Blanchot proceeds to characterize this “writing of effraction” (p.168) as an affirmation of chance that manages to free the neutral enigma of writing “so that, in writing itself, it might expose itself as the very enigma that writing maintains”. He then asks if man does not have to disappear for such *écriture sans discours* to arrive, yet we know the dead-end to which such a question leads. Furthermore, the question is even less significant once we add the idea that “the Universe (that which is turned toward the One) [safeguards] the truth of human *presence*”. As “Reflections” suggests—in an essential point that constitutes a quite different position from a fragmentary Nietzsche merely *juxtaposed* to the completed whole of tradition—, there *is* a rational cosmos as unitary whole, but only because it appears under “the submission to light that human reality represents when it is *presence*”. This must be distinguished from the “very different ‘time’” of writing’s unreachable obscurity, “such that the difference that governs it unsettles, disconcerts, and decenters the very reality of the universe—the universe as a real object of thought”. Thus we have: man, Universe, God and any guarantee of the truth of the world as illuminated by meaning; and on the other hand, that “speech without traces wherein writing nonetheless calls us” to return to the enigma of an infinite *poursuite-rupture*. We might call this incompatibility, following Heidegger’s suggestion in the distance it advises, Blanchot’s dual ontology³⁶.

“World” as “text” versus ~~world~~ as fable: as Blanchot contends that the entire philosophical issue of nihilism belongs to the first alternative—and even then it ignores its grounding in the thought of being—, it is destined to fail. Yet we can still make further precisions on the Blanchotian meaninglessness of nihilism. As “Reflections” approaches its end and the light of presence is distinguished from the traceless speech of writing, the “text” that would be the metaphor for the world—itsself another metaphor—is defined as “the movement of writing in its neutrality” (p.168). This neutrality has come up before and it is now, with Blanchot’s discussion of punctuation signs as paradigms of the ontological dislocation of *écriture*, that we can examine it. As a paradoxical entry into its elucidation, however, let us be aware that terms like those used to describe writing, or “writing” itself, “still belong to the preliminary discourse

³⁶ cf. Gregg (1994, p.27).

that at a certain moment has allowed them to be put forward" (p.168). That positing, on its part, arranges these *mots juxtaposes* through "signs that are modalities of space, and that make space a play of relations wherein time is at stake: we call these signs of punctuation" (p.169). As these empty discontinuities indicate temporal rhythms —accents, scansion, pauses—, it is clear they do not replace sentences as carriers of meaning. In fact, not representing *any* absent meaning "except the void they animate without declaring it", Blanchot states that "[t]heir value is not one of representation"; rather, these pure differences bearing "the non-identity of the same, the movement of distance" (p.170), articulate the void as meaning via voids that *suspend* meaning, hence, just as was the case with $\pm \pm$, not posing terms "as though the alternative of positive and negative, the obligation to begin by affirming being when one wants to deny it, were here, at last, enigmatically broken" (p.169). Ultimately, then, punctuation signs show writing's neutral movement outside the ontology of affirmation, negation, or the being that negation cannot but presuppose as already affirmed.

So the neutrality of the fragmentary precludes the possibility of asserting being as present or absent. But if nihilism cannot be overcome for there will always be *something* to spoil absolute negation, how to comprehend this *present being* that writing, meanwhile, shows as impossible? We have seen how in the thought of return what returns is the present moment as already gone or yet-to-come, thus interrupting the whole of past and future with a finite interval that opens to an undialectizable infinite. Although this is not the place to discuss a neuter that will return in 1973's *Le Pas Au-Dela* —along with related topics as the *il y a* or "the interminable suspension of dying which no experience in the present can comprehend" (Hill, 2012, p.210)—, it is still worth to say something about the peculiar experience of writing as its connection to return has been established, and better yet if we can refer to the passive temporality of death that literature entails outside of "Reflections" argument. For as Haase and Large have said, every literary work "struggles to reinvent language once again. This singular experience is the experience of the anonymity of language that seems to be spoken by no one, and which Blanchot calls the neuter" (2001, p.80).

Now, since we have merely alluded to the role of death in Blanchot's interpretation of Nietzsche, a few comments on the issue, but also on negation and literature, are necessary³⁷. In Heidegger, we have seen how the unitary totality of existence that comes to the fore with world-crumbling anxiety can lead to the

³⁷ cf. Haase & Large (p.30-37).

appropriation of death, meaning that the radically singular possibility of impossibility can be put to work towards *Eigentlichkeit*. In Hegel, and particularly in Kojève's anthropologico-existential interpretation, death as pure negativity permits the very life of language and consciousness, death being now put to work for the dialectical unfolding of historical Reason itself. The negative labor of language is thus related to the mastery of death. As Hill says before quoting Blanchot's early *La Part du Feu*, "death is the source of the negativity that separates sign from object [...]: 'It is therefore entirely accurate to say that when I speak,' as Blanchot puts it, 'death speaks in me'" (Hill, 1997, p.113).

But as the temporality of writing outside time structured around the present, eternal return challenges these all too philosophical conceptions of death. Even more, the experience of dying as literature incarnates it not only questions the rational optimism of submitting death to the ends of *Geist* or *Dasein*, it also denounces—in writing as an exigency that is *not* addressed to subjectivity since it rather kills it, in a Nietzschean death that radicalizes the death of the thing that the Hegelian *logos* brings about in order to turn it into a concept—the philosophical notion of death as opposed to life, even as a possibility of life³⁸. In other words, if death not only belongs to language but also to its *subject* as her self-presence is incompatible with writing³⁹, death stops being an event of life—for example, the Heideggerian limit to existential possibilities that possibilitates a resolute appropriation of finitude—, and this for two reasons. First, because there is no present in which it can be said that death has occurred: death is, from this perspective, an unsurpassable limit, or following the Blanchotian formula against Heidegger, not the possibility of impossibility but the *impossibility* of possibility. Second, because the impossibility of death testified in *écriture's* impossible present "deprives me of the power to say 'I'" (Haase & Large, 2001, p.53). Once again against Heidegger—and confirming the critical consequences towards *Being and Time* we extracted from Blanchot's eternal return—, this *other* death rather means an impersonal, disappropriating and meaningless experience of otherness. "The philosophical notion of death, then, hides behind its persuasiveness another more essential death, which is not the ground of my own authentic existence" (p.48)⁴⁰.

Although Blanchot's avoidance of dialectics forbids the construction of a "theory" of dying that would be opposed to Hegelian or Heideggerian versions, a

³⁸ cf. Rose (1996, 194-197).

³⁹ cf. IC (p.168), Weller (2008, p.90).

⁴⁰ cf. Weller (p.100-101).

systematic consequence of his distance from death as negativity or from proper death is its consideration as a limit that cannot be located nor crossed, so not properly death as event but rather a *dying*. The same occurs with the limit that *nihilism* implies: following what we saw as Blanchot's reading of its real significance⁴¹, the question on how to overcome the definite retreat of being from thought loses its grip. The entire logic of beginnings and endings —or, for example, birth and death as the two "limits" of natural life— belongs to an ontology of presence in which that which begins and that which ends can be clearly seen under the light of the present moment. On the other hand, however, the uncrossable nature of the present means that the arrival of absolute nothingness has not yet occurred since anonymous and neutral being persists, while at the same (yet *differing*) time, the possibility of overcoming the nihilism of being through the passive experience of writing *overlaps* the impossibility of nothingness⁴². Nihilism may then lead ontology to apory, but it also leads to a *receptivity* to that infinite neutrality that constitutes ontology's impossible —because decentered from presence— center.

Without past nor future but also without *subject*, in the thought of return one is forever outside ontology even if being persists, just like during the interminable time of dying "one is forever dying but not dead" (Haase & Large, p.52). Now, if Heidegger —to cite one authoritative proponent of the thesis— is correct in that there is an essential unity between eternal return and the will to power, one should not jump to conclusions and condemn Blanchot for naming "death" what Nietzsche considered "life" —see, for example, Blanchot's quote about the law of return implying a state of perpetual death in Hill (2012, p.208). At this point this would be a hasty conclusion as both writers tried to pass beyond the binary of life and death as each other's limits. More importantly, it is necessary to comprehend that this "experience of dying permeating life" (p.54) in the eternally differing time of fragmentary speech constitutes a demand to a subject whose intermittent dissipation precisely *precludes* an active response. The paradox of Nietzsche's teaching: trying to grasp this ungraspable exteriority to ontological language by passively responding to its exigency through persistent, differing writing.

At the very final paragraph of "Reflections on Nihilism", Blanchot unequivocally states that difference "can only be a difference of speech, a speaking difference that permits speech, but without itself coming directly to language —or coming to it and then referring us back to the strangeness of the neutral in its detour" (IC, p.170). In

⁴¹ cf. IC (p.156).

⁴² cf. Gregg (1994, 29-30).

Nietzsche, and as the incoherent thought of return tried to grasp, it is his writing *as* writing —or *on* his own writing, to use Derrida’s indication (1997, p.19)— what Blanchot considers possesses the complicity with interminable death that, more broadly, is also literature’s. As language carries its own outside short-circuiting its ideal as a representational mean of communication and knowledge, literature pushes writing to that “divergence on the basis of which begins, without beginning, [its] pursuit-rupture” (IC, p.170). Thus, seeking to answer —through an always deferred answer— the demand coming from outside of the language of presence, literature experiences anonymous and neutral alterity by responding to the exigency of writing through the most passive passivity —an experience structurally analogical with *mourir* to the point that literature, indeed, “has made a pact with death, it is itself an experience of death, of an extreme passivity” (Haase & Large, p.56). This relates to the notion that, in the end, what the world as fable might mean is not some silly post-modern relativism of the world as its descriptions, but the interminable yet interrupting dislocation by which the very idea of “world” becomes a *written* fable: the One precariously held together by the *between-two*, the world having its very ontological centering —whether as being or nothingness— perpetually decentered by the eternally differing *écriture* needed to sustain it.

IV

Or *mundus est fabula* in a double sense: being, meaning, unity, light, universe and God as written fables, but on the other hand, their writing itself as pointing to the experience of literature, the passive movement by which interminable dying disturbs the ontology of being as presence and meaning as its absence, by reminding them of their status *as* fables. To put it differently, if a notion like Blanchot’s double ~~ontology~~ has a minimum of interest it may lie in seizing the ambiguous movement of writing by which being and meaning, but also their negating absences, are left as ontology’s concern, while that very movement forever keeps presence crossed out with an exigency from outside the language of being that is impossible to apprehend with it, at least without killing the discreet neutrality of the *il y a* under the light of ontological affirmation —hence literature’s privileged access to the eternally recurring temporality of *mourir* in its unworkable meaninglessness over philosophy’s interest in negativity for the production of sense.

Yet we have seen how a nihilism disjointed from being a mere shaky application of ontology insists in the margins of Blanchot’s dismissal of the notion, and hence our

concluding remarks cannot but try to make sense of the significance of Blanchot's nihilism being haunted by this *other* nihilism, the will to nothingness. Indeed, if our concern continues to be the Nietzschean notion of the will to nothingness and its unspoken relation to Blanchot, and if the double ontology we concluded with is built on a radical critique of (the aporetic ontology behind) nihilism as Blanchot grasps it through Hegel and Heidegger-inspired readings of Nietzsche, then the exact point in which both issues can be put into discussion is, precisely, the gesture by which the Blanchotian world of ontology becomes fable and its relation to the specific perspective on nihilism that, as outside its Hegelian or Heideggerian comprehensions, Blanchot systematically neglects.

This justifies our lack of interest in Blanchot naming *mourir* the exact temporality that Nietzsche ascribed to the essence of *life*, an interesting topic regardless of the necessity of excluding from its development naïve conceptions of life and death. For although Blanchot's insistence in language as the power of negation, however put in question by *écriture*, may open a "Nietzsche turned inside out: [...] not so much that God is dead as that death is God" (Bruns, 1997, p.45), Blanchot is too aware that any such inversion would play the game of nihilism in a way which would recall Heidegger's worst criticisms of the emptiness of a Nietzschean inversion of Platonism. Closer to our interest, on the other hand, Weller suggests that it is *nihilism* that which haunts writing, yet his notion of nihilism is based on the idea of eternal return as "the nihilist thought par excellence" (IC, p.148) insofar as it exposes the failure of ontology to answer —not to mention *grasp*— undeniable, non-present neutrality. In other words, Weller's proposed "possibility that nihilism cannot in fact be located safely outside the literary" (2008, p.94) —a possibility criticized by Hill through a mere repetition of the very notions Weller attempts to problematize in Blanchot⁴³— still assumes the nihilism that would be *écriture's* uncanny guest in its *Blanchotian* characterization, that is, as it is inspired by Hegel and Heidegger. Thus, Weller points to Blanchot's own symptomatic relation to nihilism and his need to keep writing uncontaminated by it, but through a confrontation that insists in giving more importance to the ontological naivety of nihilism than to what eternal return could say about its inescapability⁴⁴.

Our interest, however, lies elsewhere: not in the Blanchotian idea of nihilism that would haunt his own idea of writing and hence the clear line between them, but in the nihilism that, as we have seen, is silenced in several ways during "Reflections": in

⁴³ cf. Hill (2012, p.261, p.n.46); Weller (p.92).

⁴⁴ cf. (p.107-10), IC (p.159-160).

Blanchot's highly idiosyncratic reading of GM's treatment of the will to nothingness or the way it agrees with Heidegger's blurring of the distinction between willing power and willing nothingness, but also in his problematic relation to Deleuze's Nietzsche, in his broad dismissal of force, in the precise consequences this has in relation to the question of reactive becoming, and even in his early minimization of the philosophical relevance of the scientific annihilation of the world. So how to even begin to draw the contours of a possible relation between Blanchot and the nihilism he refuses to consider?

Mundus est Fabula: On a purely textual level, it is highly suggestive that Blanchot's only use of the formula is juxtaposed to a reference to *Twilight of the Idols*, whose brief chapter "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable", as we have alluded, has a special place in Heidegger's overall Nietzsche interpretation. In fact, as Ferraris has indicated, it is not "irrelevant that the multiple thematizations of the conversion of the world in fable in the post-modern age have started from [the] Heideggerian version of the apologue from *Twilight of the Idols*" (2000, p.23). As he then characterizes the aftershocks of Heidegger's reading, the devaluation of values is conjoined with the disappearance of being, axiological nihilism is read as ontological nihilism, and the world is thus subjected, at the dead-end of metaphysics implied by Heidegger's *Nietzsche*, to an aestheticist fableization that Ferraris also calls the "dematerialization of the world" (p.23)⁴⁵. Meanwhile, he suggests, Nietzsche had an altogether different goal: to *disassociate* nihilism as the problem and fate of human valuations from ontology as the problem and fate of being, hence *disabling* the question of the latter's meaning⁴⁶.

This would mean Nietzsche sidesteps the question that SZ §3 posed as *previous* to any ontology. Even more, man's relation to being cannot be his starting point — recall Deleuze's position—, since the will to power was never a *thought* of the being of entities. Having never had much to do with dialectics nor ontological difference, Nietzschean pluralism rather *breaks through* Blanchot's convenient dismissal of it as a philosophy of "*the experience of being as multiple*" (IC, p.155, my italics). Indeed, as the canonical §36 of *Beyond Good and Evil* makes clear, Nietzsche assumes one type of causality —i.e., one type of "being" constituting forces but also their paradoxical self-displacing *from* ontological stability, as Blanchot's analysis of difference showed—, yet as non-totalizable plurality that causality of the will precludes any notion of the will

⁴⁵ cf. 27.

⁴⁶ cf. p.69.

to power as a unitary metaphysical principle⁴⁷. Kleinherenbrink's defense of Deleuze from critics such as Badiou could perfectly apply here as a defense of Nietzsche from the classic Heideggerian charges: if we wish to insist on calling Nietzsche's philosophy an "ontology", its unique character would rather lie in it being "neither an ontotheology nor a metaphysics of presence" (2019, p.38). Consequently, reversing Heidegger's accusation of subjectivism one could read his resistance to take conflictual pluralism to the letter as a symptom of the deadlock that is an interpretation of Nietzsche that "can be adequately thought only [...] on the basis of the fundamental experience of *Being and Time*" (Heidegger, III, p.189).

But if we have been clear in that Blanchot does not follow many aspects of Heidegger's thinking and appropriation of Nietzsche, we have also insisted in the gestures that seem to follow his reframing of nihilism *as* ontology. In fact, when Blanchot dismisses devaluation *because* he has read it through the categories of ontology only to then substitute it for the problem of the demand of writing as that which reveals ontology as a disjointed set of fables, he may well be criticizing the history of being, but he is also being consistent with, for example, Heidegger's paradigmatic refusal to follow *Nietzsche Contra Wagner's* formula *aesthetics as applied physiology* —for seeing natural processes as perspectival valuations would be "reducing [*herabsetzen*] art to [...] gastric juices" (I, p.93), complains Heidegger, unaware of the way his materialist conception of natural becoming reproduces the same "wanting to halt before the factual" (GM, III, 24) that Nietzsche criticized in modern scientific asceticism. In sum, perhaps it all depends on the meaning of the Nietzschean "fable", since there is a fundamental difference between the ontological world being turned into a fable, ~~world~~, and Nietzsche's true *moral* world as that which becomes a fable and subsequently opens the world *as* will to power —a world that, as Blanchot noted, is *already* disjointed from being.

From a Nietzschean perspective, then, Blanchot's *faux pas* does not primarily lie in using Hegel or Heidegger to read Nietzsche. For in answering the question "who speaks?" with the obscure neutrality of language, Blanchot disregards the will to power as Nietzsche's own answer, only in its eminently *conservative* mode, an answer "taken not from metaphysics but from animal physiology: *the herd instinct speaks*" (quoted in Schrift, 1995, p.29, 46). This marks Blanchot's accurate retrieval of the will to power as the differing dislocation of the ontological "world" as, nevertheless, misleading, since as "Reflections" last paragraph insists, the locus of that dislocation always

⁴⁷ cf. Müller-Lauter (p.20-21, 130-133).

already belongs to language. While the case can be made that the *body* is the true locus of the will to power as conflictual dynamism⁴⁸, more important still is what the primacy given to textuality against nihilism as an ontological dead-end *misses*. This is not only that sacrificing Nietzsche to Heidegger in order to *then* find the temporality of writing as the operation's remainder might be redundant —since Nietzsche wasn't what Heidegger said he was, and since much of what characterizes the movement of *écriture* already characterized the will to power. Crucially, what the priority of textuality misses is a radical implication of the *nihilism as will to nothingness* hypothesis, that is, that the history of ontology as that which ends in its status as ~~ontology~~ —enclosed thought haunted by the impossible outside that is literature— may just be an episode in the broader, natural history of human (and that word is already all-too-human) resentment, judgement and condemnation against life.

Deleuze says about nihilism: "The will to nothingness [is] the universal [...] becoming-reactive of forces" (1983, p.69), while Ansell-Pearson similarly characterizes it as "the story of the becoming-sick of the human animal" (1997, p.154). Now, it is known that Deleuze's immanent ontology of machinic forces —reading nihilism as becoming-reactive and later as autonomized anti-production— goes well with Nietzsche's anti-positivistic, anti-reductionist, extra-moral *appropriation* of naturalism (Emden, 2005; Moore, 2002), yet this is a dimension of Nietzsche's thinking that Heidegger has taught to dismiss as it would breach an ontological difference that perhaps never really applied to it. On its part, Blanchot would seem to agree only to find as *resistant* to Heidegger a notion of language whose fragmentary autonomization deprives it of having to answer to the unity of meaning, something Heidegger, in the end, only saw in the will to power as a failed attempt at overcoming *ontology*, as if the latter, and not the denaturalizing logic of resentment, had been Nietzsche's concern.

At the aporetic end of metaphysics that is also the ascent of language, this leaves Blanchot's textual dematerialization of the world —the ~~world of ontology~~ ± the neutral affirmation outside it that ontology cannot use to its ends— not only as the possibility that nihilism and literature are, indeed, closer than it seems, but also in a problematic relation to the will to nothingness. At worst, the most passive passivity in the face of undecidable ambiguity and unending *mourir* exposes what happens when the becoming-reactive of forces has finished spiritualizing itself in freed writing after the death of God, thus "the absolute self-sacrifice of the writer to the negative" (Weller, p.87) insinuating itself as a sign of *contemporary* decadence: the acceptance

⁴⁸ cf. Franck (2011).

of defeat and inaction in the face of the blatant success of the will to nothingness⁴⁹. Although one may wonder if the error of presence is truly equal to the interminability of death and not, in Nietzschean fashion, to the essence of life as will to illusion —and, furthermore, if considering finite life as a state of living *dying* is not the precise type of thing Nietzsche had in mind with nihilism—, we have no interest in developing a *symptomatical* approach to *écriture* in the strict Nietzschean sense of the type of life that wills said experience of interminable death. What is more interesting, in the end, is that ontology ends, literature appears as a paradoxical experience of alterity outside the grasp of being, and yet nothing really happens *except* the continuing, relentless progression of a reactive will that Nietzsche systematically tried to distinguish from (the world as) life-affirmation. Perhaps, indeed, Nietzsche's insistence in life's denigration by nihilist willing —continuing even after GM described the exhaustion of the moral blackmail of Platonism with the self-abolition of the will to truth— deserves new attention as naturalist discourses lacking any interest in the epistemological scorn post-phenomenological sensibilities throw in the direction of their naïve realisms show the logical endgame of ten millennia of *lived* moral judgements against the world⁵⁰.

Rescuing the Nietzsche that Blanchot —following Hegel, Heidegger and Kojève— ignored means noting that GM's central point of the will willing nothingness in order *not* to stop willing shows Nietzsche having always been aware that total life-denial is impossible, since it equals suicide. But then the remainder which does not deny in the willing of nothingness constitutes the very *activity* that marks the latter as a —however reactive— willing of power⁵¹. This implies that GM's triple distinction determines the will to nothingness as a form of nihilism that is not an *actual* denial of life, but life's history of valuing its own denial. The will to nothingness, therefore, is but suicidal nihilism on a much slower and temporarily differed *tempo*, a self-defeating form of power-willing whose very *logic* is denaturalization, a *natural history of nihilism* that, consequently, also corresponds to the age of man beyond its rather recent relation to being, perhaps its very *epoch* as the anthropocenic deployment of the infinitely creative ways it has willed nothingness. And in that case, if the latter term can still be said to possess some of the usefulness Nietzsche saw in it, perhaps one might force things further and add to it an even cruder image of what this willing has actively willed into existence —and here philosophical objections to science's obsolete ontology do nothing against the movement of disintegration that Nietzsche saw as the

⁴⁹ cf. Zerzan (2008, p.69-95).

⁵⁰ cf. BGE 32.

⁵¹ cf. Biswas Mellamphy (2011, p.87).

physiological problem of morality—: “‘biotic attrition’, a nice euphemism” (Kolbert, 2014, p.172).

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