

The Body As Text In The Writings of Nietzsche And Freud

Joanne Faulkner

Abstract

Recent publications have traced a relation of influence between Nietzsche's philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis. While Freud is certainly intellectually indebted to Nietzsche, the present paper emphasises the significant difference between these philosophers' works: Namely, that they exhibit a different economy, and are thus committed to competing theoretical structures. This difference comes to the fore in the approach that each takes to elaborating the mind-body relation, and especially in the contrast between Freud's early neuroscientific speculations (which haunt his later writings) and Nietzsche's emphasis upon language, and particularly metaphor. In order to illustrate this 'economical' difference between their theories, the paper critiques Freud's early commitment to neurological discourse using Nietzsche's genealogical method.

Within Freud's writings on the unconscious, dream interpretation, and the vicissitudes of the drives, resonates the ever-present spectre of Nietzsche's *absence*, as an intellectual indebtedness about which Freud consistently remained silent. Freudian scholars now regularly attempt to repay this debt, as the growing incidence of articles and books comparing Freud to Nietzsche testifies.¹ It is now recognised that Freud was aware of Nietzsche's remarks on the significance of dreams in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Lehrer 1995, pp. 75-9, 142)² and *Human, All Too Human* (Lehrer 1995, pp. 76, 80, 83; Lehrer 1999, pp. 184-5; Parkes 1999, p. 208; Assoun 2000, pp. 38-9),³ the writings on sublimation and repression (or *ressentiment*) in *The Genealogy of Morals* (Lehrer 1995, pp. 71-2),⁴ and

the philosophy of will to power and the drives more generally (Lehrer 1995, pp. 137-45; Assoun 2000, pp. 53-69).⁵ I do not wish here solely to establish a connection of influence between Nietzsche and Freud, as I believe this has been amply demonstrated in existing literature. Rather, my primary aim in this paper is to explore the *differences* between their philosophies: differences that are often obscured by commentators in their enthusiasm to reveal the germ of psychoanalysis in Nietzsche's philosophy. In particular, I am interested in the different mode of discourse that each adopts in his effort to comprehend the enigma of the relation between the body and language. For, while there are clear comparisons to be made between Freud's and Nietzsche's researches — and a clear genealogy between them — I wish here to contend that Freud's theory of drives demonstrates a commitment to a different 'economy' than Nietzsche's: in short (and according to a Nietzschean typology), Freud's writing exhibits a different 'will to power' to that of Nietzsche. Thus, notwithstanding their shared emphasis upon the importance of the unconscious, dreams, and the drives, Freud's and Nietzsche's theories tell very different stories about the *life* of the drives. For, while the economy that informs Freud's theory accords to a conservative perspective, for Nietzsche life is expansive, even wasteful, and thus his philosophy is, economically, contrary to Freud's. I would like to provide the conditions in this paper for a conversation between Nietzsche and Freud, albeit a rather one-sided conversation, in which Nietzsche is given the last word.

When I argue that the style, or economy, of discourse limits the kinds of answers that it

can turn up, I employ Nietzsche's account of the relation between truth and the body that we find in his perspectivism and his ontology of will to power (*Wille zur Macht*). Perspectivism is the doctrine that all knowing is a perspectival-knowing — an interpretation developed by particular interests and with particular goals — and thus that ‘truth’ is always partial and motivated. Accordingly, will to power is what motivates perspectival truths: that is, what interprets. While the concept of perspective critiques the philosopher’s notion of universal Truth, will to power is Nietzsche’s challenge to the common conception of ‘will,’ as a singular form that controls our actions. He writes in his notes: “the will of psychology hitherto is an unjustified generalization... this will *does not exist at all...*” (Nietzsche 1968a, §692, p. 369). “There are no durable ultimate units, no atoms, no monads,” he writes in another note: rather, “‘beings’ are only introduced by us (from perspective grounds of practicality and utility)” (1968a, §715, p. 380). Nietzsche introduces the term *Wille zur Macht* as a principle of multiplicity and growth. Rather than the monadic ‘will,’ he posits that there are many ‘wills’ — or drives — at work in the course of events, and that through constant struggle (*Kampf*), this plurality provides the impetus for events, decisions, and interpretations, or perspectives. The organism itself is the outcome of a *confederacy* of wills to power (*Willens-Punktationen*) (Nietzsche 1970, VIII/2, 11(73)): a bargain struck between wills for the sake of a collective increase of power. The body *interprets* itself as a unity, as any short-term victory achieved by one will or another is claimed by the will of consciousness. Will to power and perspectivism are thus intimately connected for Nietzsche. All life, as will to

power, *interprets*: that is, it orders whatever it encounters into a value hierarchy, according to its own needs. The organism itself is the *product* of wills interpreting — or organising — one another. As such, the interpretation (or perspective) is indicative of a specific mode of life, and must be read not as impartial, but as a function of the particular order of drives of which the body is composed.

This understanding of the body as an organisation of competing and cohabiting wills, and of truth as conditioned by will to power, is what Nietzsche has in mind when he writes of philosophy, in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir...

... I do not believe that a “drive to knowledge” is the father of philosophy; but rather that another drive has, here as elsewhere, employed understanding (and misunderstanding) as a mere instrument. (Nietzsche 1989a, §6, p. 13)

Philosophy, thus conceived as a type of confession, attempts to conceal the drives, or interests, that motivate it with the veil of universal reason. For Nietzsche, the desire to be impartial, or to speak universal truths, betrays a weakness in the organism that will not *own* its truths. Throughout his writings, Nietzsche sets to unmasking the philosophers, demonstrating the ‘type’ of being for whom the truth of the text holds. From Socrates to

Hegel, he diagnoses philosophers as sick animals, and philosophy as the host for their disease. For this reason Nietzsche looks forward to a time when ‘philosopher-artists’ use their discourse to explore, rather than conceal, the drives. Such a philosophy would emphasise the creation of truth — through the use of a poetic language of metaphor — rather than truth’s description or delineation, as if it were already ‘there,’ a thing-in-itself. Nietzsche’s philosophy of will to power and the drives, too, may be regarded only as truth in this sense of truth as creation: will to power is a metaphor with which we can make sense of our experience, but is false if understood as a truth ‘in-itself.’ Nietzsche’s ontology of will to power is, by his own account, merely a ‘waking dream’: the interpretation of “nervous stimuli,” and subsequent positing of their causes.⁶ For Nietzsche, the ‘healthy’ philosopher acknowledges his truths as his own poetic creations: as the product of the free play — or dream-like interpreting — of his drives.

We find the criterion for Nietzsche’s judgements of the philosophers in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Here Nietzsche develops his philosophy of drives through an account of how humanity has come to turn life against itself: or, how we have come to value the inhibition of wills rather than their direct expression as will to power. This inhibition of will is most evident in religious doctrines that preach the renunciation of sensuality and desire. Yet, the philosopher, with his self-effacing appeal to universal reason, also renounces life and will. So how did this devaluation of desire and will come to take a hold of humanity? Nietzsche responds to this question by characterising

different ‘modes of life’ in terms of their perspectives. The ‘master-type’ is Nietzsche’s appellation for those who take control of and determine their environment through the act of naming, evaluating whatever agrees with their constitutions as ‘good,’ and whatever does not agree — that is, whatever appears base, beneath consideration — as ‘bad.’ On the other hand, the ‘slave-type’ — Nietzsche’s diagnosis for humanity in general — designates those ‘ill-constituted’ beings already labelled ‘bad’ by the master, and to whom the former morality poses a threat. The slave-type evaluates backwards, demarcating first whatever intimidates it as ‘evil,’ while that which appears most harmless becomes its highest virtue. However, Nietzsche’s objection to slave morality is not simply that it is a derivative mode of evaluation. Rather, it is a question of *culture*: in other words, of the type of evaluation that shapes the life of a people. The ill-constituted slave has achieved a reversal of all values, and thus triumphs over the master. The master is ‘better constituted’ as his confederacy of wills, will to power, strikes a productive balance between the active force that commands, and the reactive force that obeys. Conversely, the circuitous process by which the slave moral system develops re-routes the drive so that ‘life’ is inhibited. In the slave-type the most passive (or ‘reactive’) drives dominate and subdue the most active. Like a herd animal, the slave lives so as not to draw to himself the attention of the stronger, better constituted, beast of prey. Thus life in the main is reduced to a mode of self-preservation rather than increase; and the master-type is marginalised, alienated from his power, and must convert to the slave morality in order to survive the wrath of the overwhelming number of slaves pitted

against him.

It is in the account of the master's conversion to slave morality that we find the clearest resonances with Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his accounts of sublimation and repression. For Nietzsche, the master is tamed through the acquisition of conscience, or more precisely "bad conscience": that feeling of guilt that serves to reign in the expression of power. The victory of slave morality is to universalise the perspective of the downtrodden, the victim, and to install this perspective into the master, at whose hands the victim suffers. In grammatical terms, guilt consists in an identification with the object of an action rather than its subject, and thus all become passive, unable to give expression to their impulses. This situation came to prevail through the socialisation of the human, who had thereby to become "*calculable, regular, necessary*, even in his own image of himself, if he is to be able to stand security for his own future" (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 58): in order, that is, to have the right to make promises. Nietzsche's variation on the theme of the social contract, therefore, demonstrates what must have occurred *before we were able* to make a contract in the first place. We must have had to install a sense of the other's well-being into ourselves *at the expense of* our own free expression of power, and this must have necessitated an extremely painful and protracted process of shaping the individual as a more or less exchangeable type within the social economy:

“If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory” — this is a main clause of the oldest (unhappily also the most enduring) psychology on earth. (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 61)

Only in the context of a social economy of sameness could the notion of guilt arise, according to Nietzsche, out of the concept of debt (the German for both ‘guilt’ and ‘debt’ is *Schuld*).⁷ Punishment thus consists in the creditor’s right to extract from the debtor’s body the pleasure of freely discharging one’s power at the expense of another. The nature of the economy is that all are exchangeable, and the juridical system regulates this principle by converting masters into slaves and slaves into masters, in what Nietzsche calls a “carnival of cruelty” (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 65).

In order to become a social animal — and thus a regular participant in the economy of the social contract — we have had to renounce our own stake in life as will to power. Specifically, in the human animal will to power turns in upon itself — makes itself its own victim — paradoxically for the sake of survival. In his explanation of this process, Nietzsche anticipates Freud’s theory of repression and the Oedipus Complex, only here rather than castration, the master-type faces extinction:

I regard the bad conscience as the serious illness that man was bound to contract under the stress of the most fundamental change he ever experienced — that change which occurred when he found himself finally enclosed within the walls of society and of peace... in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their “consciousness,” their weakest and most fallible organ! (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 84)

The drives that once ordered the life of the master-type now go to ground, resorting instead to covert means of satisfaction: “as a rule they had to seek new and, as it were, subterranean gratifications” (1989b, p. 84). Nietzsche’s explanation of this process again resonates with Freud’s account of the vicissitudes of the drives:

All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly *turn inward* — this is what I call the *internalization* (*Verinnerlichung*) of man: thus it was that man first developed what was later called his “soul.” The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was *inhibited*. (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 84)

When we are compelled *not* to act, we turn the charged drive inward as thought. The soul, or consciousness, thus constitutes a reservoir for the conversion of active force into

an internalised reactivity. For Nietzsche, we create an inner world to the extent that we *fail* to create in the outer world. The expansive economy of will to power — which wants only increase, so that it can then squander itself in a grand gesture of expenditure — carves out its new domain within its own flesh (as the unconscious), so that an economy of sameness can operate at the level of consciousness.

The above passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals* clearly resonates with Freud's psychoanalytic insights. Indeed, Freud uses the term *Verinnerlichung*, 'internalization,' to explain the manner in which we incorporate aspects of the outside world to form components of our own psyche: in particular, the internalization of outside authority in the case of the super-ego (Freud 1930, p. 72). Indeed, later in *Genealogy* Nietzsche also provides the germ for Freud's theory of sublimation:

... the sweetness and plenitude peculiar to the aesthetic state (is) derived precisely from the ingredient of "sensuality"... so that sensuality is not overcome by the appearance of the aesthetic condition, as Schopenhauer believed, but only transfigured and no longer enters consciousness as sexual excitement. (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 111)

For Freud, too, sublimation represents a diversion (through repression) of the drives from their primary, sexual, aim, to produce creative works such as art, writing, and music. The aesthetic state is then for Freud, as for Nietzsche, the outcome of sexuality that no longer

enters consciousness as such. However, in order to appreciate the significant differences between Nietzsche and Freud, I wish now to turn to Freud's energetic account of the drive which, I argue, lacks the *largesse* of Nietzsche's economy, because Freud's drive is not a vital force that emerged from the primordial chaos with other drives to produce the organism. Rather, Freud comprehends the drive in terms of a physicalist doctrine, and thus imports the metaphysics of *ressentiment*, or the slave perspective.

While Nietzsche — the philologist — turned to the discourses of philosophers, artists, politicians, musicians, and writers in order to construct a theory of will to power, Freud began life as a medical student, and so his first speculations about the drive pertained directly to the body. In 1895 Freud wrote a letter to his friend Wilhelm Fliess that is now published under the title 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (1966). This paper is significant because it sketches his early thinking on the origin and nature of the drives in the language of neuroscience. Freud describes 'Project' to Fliess as a 'psychology for neurologists' (Freud 1985, p. 127). His description of the origins of the drive is, indeed, thoroughly embedded in the positivist discourse of neurology. Freud's account relies upon two principles that come into competition as the human infant becomes better able to deal with her environment, and her own body. The first is the principle of neuronal inertia, whereby "neurones tend to divest themselves of quantity" (Freud 1966, p. 296). The said quantity is invested in the neurone by stimuli which impress themselves upon the body. The nervous system, in accordance with the principle of inertia, deals with

incoming excitations by attempting to discharge quantity (excitation) to the point at which the degree of stimulation equals zero. According to this model, feelings of pleasure and pain represent the level of excitation, or quantity, within the neurone. Pain indicates the presence of an excitation, and generally the neurone is able to deal with pain through the reflex of flight, whereby the energy invested in the nerve-cell by the external source is used directly to counter that stimulus: the quantity is projected back outside, and so equilibrium is restored immediately to the nervous system. Accordingly, pleasure refers to the absence of stimulation, and is achieved once the neurone has divested itself of quantity.

The second principle, the principle of constancy, comes into play with the emergence of the drive. Within Freud's neurological account, the drive (*Trieb*) can only be understood as a stimulus that originates within the somatic substance itself. However, the drive problematizes the principle of inertia, as the neurone is unable to deal with the impulsive excitation (*Triebreiz*) by means of the reflex of flight: rather, the drive must be satisfied at its very source, by means of complex behaviours that manipulate the external world. In the case of hunger, for instance, the stimulus can only be removed once hunger is sated, and so the organism must motivate the presentation of food. The demand for work (*Arbeitsanforderung*) placed upon the nervous system by endogenous stimuli is thus far greater than with external stimuli, and a level of tension must be endured by the nervous system, as a store of quantity adequate to motivate the drive is

accumulated. Freud writes:

... the nervous system is obliged to abandon its original trend to inertia (that is, to bringing the level [of $Q\eta$] to zero). It must put up with [maintaining] a store of $Q\eta$ sufficient to meet the demand for a specific action. Nevertheless, the manner in which it does this shows that the same trend persists, modified into an endeavour at least to keep the $Q\eta$ as low as possible and to guard against any increase of it — that is, to keep it constant. (Freud 1966, p. 297. Strachey's square parentheses)

Constancy serves a dual purpose for Freud, as a pivot between a simple, reacting life-form, and the complex and dynamic human behaviours that commonly fall under the rubric of 'culture.' For, the principle of constancy *overrides* the principle of inertia, and thus Freud explains how neurones are able to compromise their tendency to divest themselves of quantity, and rather *store* energy, in order to initiate actions that alter the external world for the satisfaction of the impulsion stimuli. But the principle of constancy also *preserves* the essential value of the principle of inertia for Freud. Insofar as the neurone fails to divest itself immediately of energy accumulated to it from stimuli, *it does so only provisionally*, keeping the quantity of intercellular energy "as low as possible" and guarding "against any increase of it" (Freud 1966, p. 297). Freud's position here is therefore conservative. He seeks merely to explain how organisms with nervous systems are capable of anything more than simple reactivity, while maintaining a

theoretical apparatus that is based upon the principle that all action is a reaction *to* something.

The neurological apparatus with which Freud explains the function and origin of the drives in ‘Project’ clearly provides a poor model, when it is compared with Nietzsche’s rich account of the drive as will to power. There seems to be a chasm between the drive of Freud’s first musings, and the psychoanalytic theory expounded in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Caught within the physicalist framework, the drive is reduced to nothing but an effect of excitation. It is difficult to find a way from this point to the complex behaviours that characterise the spectrum of culture for which Freud wanted to account. In his later writings Freud renegotiates his commitment to neurology, and to the discovery of the origin of the drives in the body, stating instead that “every endeavour to think of ideas as stored up in nerve-cells and of excitations as migrating along nerve-fibres, has miscarried completely” (Freud 1984a, p. 177), and that “[o]ur psychical topography has *for the present* nothing to do with anatomy” (1984a, p. 177. Original emphasis). I assume that the endeavours to which he refers in the above quote were his own, in ‘Project,’ and that Freud himself was less convinced by this work than he needed to be to accept the neurological model as the definitive explanation of mental events.

In the psychoanalytic writings his focus shifts from the body to language. Taking the

discourse of the analysand as his object, Freud shows that the unconscious is structured like a language. The drives assert themselves into consciousness through parapraxes (i.e., slips of the tongue or pen, or errors in the hearing or reading of words),⁸ hysterical symptoms, and dreams, and Freud interprets each of these signs in terms of a language of metaphor. Yet despite Freud's turn from a language of neurology to a psychoanalytic discourse, he clearly looks forward to a time when psychical entities, such as the drive, can be physically located, lapsing every now and then into a speculative discourse that demonstrates nostalgia for his early neuroscientific researches. Freud's psychoanalysis, born of the necessity for a discourse pertaining to psychical, rather than physical, phenomena, is littered with biological and neurological analogies, and digressions⁹ that demonstrate his desire to return to the nerve-cell in search of the foundations of language, art, and culture.

An instance of this reinscription of the neurological discourse into psychoanalysis 'proper' is found in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*. As the title suggests, for the most part this text is concerned with the 'vicissitudes,' or destinies, of the drives: or in other words, what the drives do when their path to immediate gratification is blocked and diverted, and how this process culminates in perversity and culture. The drives whose vicissitudes Freud describes in this later work appear like the vital drives of Nietzsche's philosophy. For instance, he writes:

They are numerous, emanate from a great variety of organic sources, act in the first instance independently of one another and only achieve a more or less complete synthesis at a late stage. (Freud 1984b, p. 122)

This imagery is highly evocative of Nietzsche's will to power, and is far more conducive to explaining psychological phenomena such as repression and sublimation than his earlier neurological model. However, in the first part of the paper, where he is concerned with defining the basic concept with which he works, Freud attempts to transpose his seminal thoughts in 'Project' into the language of psychoanalysis. The fit between the two styles is not altogether cosy, and the text shows signs of strain at a number of pivotal places. Freud begins the paper by laying down some basic terms of reference for his discourse of psychoanalysis which, because of the infancy of the science, he says, "necessarily possess some degree of indefiniteness" (1984b, p. 113). The most fundamental concept, he writes, is of course the drive (*Trieb*), whose various possibilities he traces in the second part of the paper. However, he then proceeds to discuss the nature of the drive as a sub-class of stimulus, and so returns us to the logic of his earlier physicalist perspective. The fundamental concept is not the drive after all, but stimulus, and all action stems from the stimulus, as reaction.

Furthermore, if we look to the original German for 'stimulus,' *Reiz*, we find numerous — and at times conflicting — possibilities. *Reiz*, indeed, does mean 'stimulus,' but we can glean a great deal about the difference in perspective between Freud and Nietzsche when

we consider its less scientific meanings. *Reiz* could also be translated as ‘irritation,’ ‘excitation,’ ‘provocation,’ or else ‘attraction,’ ‘fascination,’ ‘charm.’ Freud clearly interprets *Reiz*, stimulus, only in its most negative connotation, as an irritation that the body would want to avoid, and thus as the antithesis of pleasure. Within this paradigm, Freud understands the drive itself in a most equivocal sense, as both the irritant and the panacea, in a system that essentially wants nothingness. This clearly puts Freud at odds with Nietzsche, who, on the basis of this account of drive, would count Freud among the ascetic priests who preach flight from all sensuality and life. Nietzsche would have exploited the more positive connotations of the term *Reiz* (charm, attraction, fascination), advocating the confrontation of unpleasure and pain in order to achieve a greater pleasure, as a heightened sense of power. Certainly, he would not accept Freud’s definition of pleasure, the pleasure of the masses that he calls “wretched contentment,” or “miserable ease” (*erbärmliches Behagen*) in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1969, p. 42).

In terms of Nietzsche’s genealogical method, it is clear that Freud’s theory of drives — reliant as it is upon a prior conception of ‘stimulus’ as irritant — falls into the category of a slave evaluation. Freud’s account situates the body as a *victim* to external pressure, and the drive as *requiring* a hostile outside world for its existence. Freud’s problem, at least in the narrow terms of Nietzschean genealogy that I have chosen for this paper, is the difficulty in straddling the mind-body divide with a discourse that still purports to be

scientific. Attempting to negotiate the transition between the first, physicalist, portion of *Instincts and their Vicissitudes* and the second properly psychoanalytic part, Freud characterises the drives themselves as the pivotal term between mind and body, repeating Descartes's 'pineal gland' gesture:

If now we apply ourselves to considering mental life from a *biological* point of view, an 'instinct' appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body. (Freud 1984b, p. 118)

By way of contrast, in his own accounts of the relation between mind and body, Nietzsche steered clear of anything but the most speculative and playful use of scientific discourse. In accordance with his philosophy of perspectivism, Nietzsche held that science lacked the capacity to provide the kind of knowledge needed for humanity's convalescence from slave morality. On the contrary, according to Nietzsche science found itself firmly embedded in slave morality, having internalised the perspective of passivity, the effect, but being particularly ill-equipped for comprehending *active* force, the cause.¹⁰

Rather than frame his theory of drives in scientific terms, and thus attempt to follow them back to their somatic source, Nietzsche exploits the ambiguity between the body

and language in his writings. Nietzsche uses the body as a metaphor for the intellect, and intellect for the body, such that the reader is left chasing him through the labyrinth of his thought, which refuses to stop on either side of the spirit-body divide. In order to comprehend Nietzsche's method here, we will need first to consider his particular definition of metaphor. In his early essay *On Truth and Falsity in their Extramoral Sense* (*Über Wahrheit und Lüge in aussermoralischen Sinne*) Nietzsche argues that all truth is metaphorical: "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses..." (Nietzsche 1972, p. 5). This is because for Nietzsche all language, far from picking out elements and structures in the objective world, operates entirely in terms of a logic of metaphor. Metaphor is not a subset of language: rather, metaphor *encompasses* language, as well as all thought and perception. Nietzsche bases this claim upon two suppositions, each of which recur often throughout his whole body of work: First, he contends that metaphor involves a carrying over (*Übertragung*)¹¹ — or projection — of meaning from one sphere to a completely other sphere:

A nerve-stimulus, first transformed into a percept! First metaphor!
The percept again copied into a sound! Second metaphor! And each
time he leaps completely out of one sphere right into the midst of an
entirely different one. (Nietzsche 1972, p. 4)

Second, Nietzsche holds that no two things are identical: rather, there always remains an

irreducible difference between any two things that are claimed to be the same:

Every idea originates through equating the unequal. As certainly as no one leaf is exactly similar to any other, so certain is it that the idea “leaf” has been formed through an arbitrary omission of these individual differences, through a forgetting of the differentiating qualities, and this idea now awakens the notion that in nature there is, besides the leaves, a something called *the leaf*... (1972, p. 5)

‘Truth’ becomes regarded as such by a people after the novelty and innovation of an association between two different concepts or things has worn off. Our specifically human creativity is to project a structure upon an unknown thing, in order to render it known. This experience of ‘making’ truth — of transforming the unfamiliar thing into something that we already understand — increases one’s feeling of power. Thus truth comes to be associated with this emboldening heightened sense of one’s own potency (*höhe Gefühlen*). Eventually, we forget about the act of creativity that generated a particular truth, and it is ‘canonised’: placed beyond question and *universalised*. The element of risk involved in leaping from one known sphere into the unknown is emptied from this canonised Truth: it comes to be felt as reassuring rather than power enhancing.¹²

When he uses metaphor to express the relation between thought and the body, then, Nietzsche transports the reader to a new perspective with which to understand, and thus

create anew, this connection. Nietzsche uses metaphor, as well as his theories of will to power and perspectivism, to connect corporeal processes with intellectual pursuits, such as philosophy. He argues, for instance, that the body processes the plurality of the world with which it interfaces in the same manner as it digests food. In this way, he continues, the intellect is subject to indigestion just as the gut is. Nietzsche discusses the need for the ability to forget in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

The man in whom this apparatus of repression is damaged and ceases to function properly may be compared (and more than merely compared) with a dyspeptic — he cannot “have done” with anything. (Nietzsche 1989, p. 58)

Here Nietzsche explicitly states that the comparison between the inability to forget and indigestion is *no mere comparison*. Rather, the process of digestion and mental life *are equivalent*, and thus may be described in precisely the same terms. Likewise, society, or culture, is also equated by Nietzsche with the digestive function:

... modern society is no “society,” no “body,” but a sick conglomerate of chandalas — a society that no longer has the strength to *excrete*. (Nietzsche 1968a, §50, pp. 31-2)

The society that retains more than it has the strength to accumulate, along with the man who hasn't the strength actively to forget, are constipated, sick bodies. Each is an

organised ‘body’ that in some sense is coming undone — returning to chaos — because it cannot completely assimilate that disorderly ‘outside.’

In this manner, Nietzsche measures an organism’s power in terms of the efficiency of its digestion. For instance, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, he imagines his hoped for ‘philosophers of the future’ “...with teeth and stomachs for the most indigestible” (Nietzsche 1989a, §44, p. 55). And in *Genealogy*, he writes:

A strong and well constituted man digests his experiences... as he digests his meals, even when he has to swallow some tough morsels. If he cannot get over an experience and have done with it, this kind of indigestion is as much physiological as is the other — and often in fact merely a consequence of the other... (Nietzsche 1989b, p. 129)

He then continues,

With such a conception one can, between ourselves, still be the sternest opponent of all materialism. (1989b, p. 129)

Nietzsche demonstrates here that his poetic method to communicate the necessary relation between mind and body is all-important. He does not *reduce* the mind to body, in the manner of materialism. Rather, the metaphor *equivocates* between the mind and body. According to Nietzsche, we can never depart from language in order to discover its

pure bodily source. The scientific materialist assumes that the body, as an object of observation, is that inert, unseeing body of the very mind-body dualism that he seeks to overcome. Rather, Nietzsche attempts to reveal the full dimensions of corporeality through a use of language that exploits the creativity of will to power instead of employing a *descriptive* language to reduce all thought to twitching flesh. Metaphor achieves this for Nietzsche, because, as *Übertragung* — “carrying over” — it exhibits the movement of will to power itself: the concept, sensory perception, nourishment, reproduction, all operate according to the logic of metaphor, according to Nietzsche.

If thought is depicted by Nietzsche in terms of the bodily metaphor of digestion, the body is also represented in terms of thought:

The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman.

Your little intelligence, my brother, which you call ‘spirit,’ is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and toy of your great intelligence. (Nietzsche 1969, pp. 61-2)

Furthermore, thought *in its actuality* is, according to Nietzsche, merely (*nur*) a metaphor for the body:

We are in the phase of modesty of consciousness. Ultimately, we understand the conscious ego itself only as a tool in the service of a higher, comprehensive intellect; and then we are able to ask whether all conscious willing, all conscious purposes, all evaluations are not perhaps only means through which something essentially different from what appears in consciousness is to be achieved... (Nietzsche 1968a, §676, p. 357)

For Nietzsche, the entire body thinks. Conscious thought, however, is a cheap reflection of the body: it is the ‘little intellect’ in contrast to the ‘great intellect,’ or unconscious.

Nietzsche’s ‘model’ of the relation between the bodily ‘origin’ and language, or thought, is metaphorical. Therefore, we cannot see this relation as causal: at least, not in any known sense of the word ‘causal.’ The relation is untraceable: we move from one sphere to an entirely different sphere, with no ability to scrutinise exactly what occurred in this movement. By utilising his bodily metaphors to refer to intellectual events, and intellectual metaphors to speak of the body, Nietzsche evokes for the reader the state of equivocation, between language and the body, upon which human being perennially hovers. Moreover, Nietzsche’s reliance upon metaphor to write his philosophy also mimics this interaction between language and the body, whereby multiplicity conceals itself by means of a condensation (metaphor), and continuous deferral (metonymy), of meanings.

We find the germ of Nietzsche's modelling of the body-language relation reflected in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Here Freud uncovers a "language of the unconscious," whereby dream images are overdetermined by the material that the mind processes by means of condensation and displacement and, according to Lacan, these mechanisms exhibit the same logic as metaphor and metonymy. Indeed, Freud uses the term *Übertragung* in that text to describe a process of "transcription," or "transference," whereby a memory is emptied of its significance and attributed a new meaning by the unconscious. Like Nietzsche's conception of metaphor as *Übertragung* — carrying over to another sphere — Freud's "transference" places a dream thought into a different context, so that the thought may get past the censor to consciousness. In this manner, body and thought are brought together through the dream interpretation.

Perhaps this moment in *The Interpretation of Dreams* best preserves Nietzsche's own concerns to think through the relation between the body and language precisely by *bringing them into a relation together*. Arguably, Freud's strongest work consists in his explication of the drives that reflects something of the manner in which language operates: his account of parapraxis, for instance, and his theory of the unconscious processes that function *like* a language. But we are able to learn a valuable lesson from the parts of his work with which Freud himself was least comfortable: that is, the neurophysical explanation of the drives. Especially when the question concerns the

relation between the body and language, the type of language we use directly influences the kind of truth we are able of produce. In other words, the *genre* of the discourse itself indicates a particular perspective. For the moment, then, Nietzsche triumphs over Freud. Whether Nietzsche could withstand a *Freudian* analysis of his own writing is another question, for another paper.¹³

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Notes

1. See Assoun (2000), Lehrer (1995), and the collection of essays in Golomb, Santaniello, and Lehrer, eds (1999).
2. For the writings on dreams in *The Birth of Tragedy*, see Nietzsche 1968b, §§1-6, pp. 33-56; §10, pp. 73-6; §12, p. 86; §14, p. 92.
3. For the writings on dreams in *Human, All Too Human*, see Nietzsche 1986, §5, p. 14; §12-3, pp. 16-9. See also Nietzsche 1982, §119, pp. 74-6; §128, pp. 78-9.
4. For the writings on *ressentiment* (repression) in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, see the whole of the Second Essay, Nietzsche 1989b, pp. 57-96. On sublimation, see 1989b, p. 111.
5. Assoun does not make a claim about the influence of Nietzsche upon Freud, so much as forging a constructive liaison between them, whereby he takes the term ‘instinct’ or ‘drive’ “as the intersecting term in the two discourses we are analysing, whose status we derive from the extraordinary number of occurrences of the concept in Nietzsche as well as in Freud” (2000, p. 53). Assoun is thus also as interested in the differences between the uses of these terms as he is in the similarities.
6. In a very significant passage in *Daybreak*, Nietzsche discusses the manner in which ‘drives’ seek self-expression through our organism:

“suppose a drive finds itself at the point at which it desires gratification—or exercise of its strength, or discharge of its strength, or the saturation of an emptiness—*these are all metaphors*—: it then regards every event of the day with a view to seeing how it can employ it for the attainment of its goal...” (1982, §119, p. 74. My emphasis)

He defines dreams as the satisfaction of drives that go “hungry” during the day, and thus “nourish” themselves in the dream by freely interpreting “nervous stimuli that we receive whilst we are asleep”:

“*very free*, very arbitrary interpretations of the motions of the blood and intestines, of the pressure of the arm and the bedclothes, of the sounds made by church bells, weather-cocks, night revellers and other things of the kind.” (1982, §119, p. 75. Original emphasis)

He then confounds the distinction between waking life and dreams, such that the ‘world’ becomes, in his own words, a “text” that the body — or particular drives of which it is composed — interprets. That our truths, then, are metaphors is in keeping with Nietzsche’s understanding of reality as text. (I thank Peter Ujvari for drawing my attention to this important passage).

7. Nietzsche makes much of this common etymology. See Nietzsche 1989b, pp. 62-3.

8. See Part One of the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, on Parapraxes (Freud 1974, pp. 39-108).

9. See, for instance, Freud’s claim in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that:

“an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.” (Freud 1984c, pp. 308-9)

In this text he also refers to examples in nature, such as fish (salmon) that “undertake laborious migrations at spawning-time” (1984c, p. 309) to return to the place from which the species originated; the migratory patterns of birds; and embryology. These narratives exemplify for Freud the work of the death drive, a will to repetition or return, that is also at work in the human psyche.

10. For an account of Nietzsche’s critique of science in terms of active and reactive force, see Deleuze 1983, pp. 44-6.

11. Here Nietzsche employs the original (Greek) significance of ‘meta-phor,’ as transport, or transposition.

12. For an excellent discussion of Nietzsche’s understanding of metaphor see Lawrence Hinman (1982).

13. A Freudian interpreter might read Nietzsche in terms of the importance of the figure of the father’s death (or murder) in his work, for instance, in the death of God (and that “we killed him”). His relation to Wagner and to Schopenhauer (and perhaps even Socrates) can also be configured in terms of Oedipal conflict. Other commentators have linked Nietzsche’s ‘eternal recurrence’ with the death drive, or compulsive repetition, of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1984c). See Chapelle (1999, pp. 37-71), and Assoun (2000, pp. 178-81).

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Joanne Faulkner is completing a Ph.D at the Philosophy Program, La Trobe University, Melbourne. Her work concerns the affective relation between reader and text, particularly with regard to the writings of Nietzsche and Sade.