

Nietzsche's Doctrines, Nietzsche's Signs

Werner Stegmaier

University of Greifswald

1. Nietzsche's¹ influence in the 20th century was based mostly on his doctrines ('Lehren'). After a hundred years of research, the sense and coherence of these doctrines are not yet clear. Therefore, Nietzsche's philosophy is regarded by now as incurably contradictory or ambivalent. Contradiction and ambivalence has become the trademark of Nietzsche's philosophy.

Nietzsche's doctrines of the death of God or of Nihilism, of the Will to Power, of the Overman, and the Eternal Recurrence of the Same, are among the most powerful doctrines European philosophy has hitherto produced. They include a critique of metaphysics more severe than any before, a critique of morals more severe than any before, and a critique of logic more radical than any before. Together, as Nietzsche himself claimed more and more insistently, they make the sharpest of cuts into Occidental thinking from Plato onward.

Each of these doctrines seemed to be in itself easily understandable. In their outlines they have been understood like this:

1.1. According to Nietzsche's doctrine of "the death of God" or "nihilism" the supreme values of European thinking (in particular, the values of an absolute Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, the unity of which has been thought in the theologico-philosophical concept of God.) have lost their value. If this God does not mean anything anymore, as one dared more and more to admit in the 18th and 19th centuries, "Existence" on the whole has lost its "sense and goal" (KSA 12, 5 [71]). Nietzsche's doctrine of the death of God or of Nihilism has left a "desert"³ into which (as critics have objected⁴) 'postmodern arbitrariness' subsequently settled.

1.2. According to Nietzsche's doctrine of the Will to Power, the law of the more powerful alone prevails; every living thing endeavours to overpower others, and ought to do so. Law and morality, according to that doctrine, are means of Wills to Power, too—namely, those of the weaker ones, the "ones who came off badly"

¹For the purpose of lecturing rewritten and revised version of the treatise "Nietzsches Zeichen", in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 29 (2000).

³*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), IV/DD, The Desert grows

⁴See especially Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne. Zwölf Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt am Main 1985.

("Schlechtweggekommenen"), who could in this way overcome the stronger ones. Law and morality, as critics say, have thus lost their legitimacy.

1.3. According to Nietzsche's doctrine of the Overman, strong individuals ought to rule the mass of weak ones. This doctrine particularly recommended Nietzsche's philosophy to rascism, and remains politically dangerous, as critics object.

1.4. According to Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same everything as it is now and as it is connected with everything else will return in an eternal circulation. The meaning of this doctrine, which Nietzsche called his "hardest" ("schwerste[n]) thought" (KSA 11, 26[284]) and the "basic conception"⁶ of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is something he never made clear himself. It is notoriously controversial both in itself and in its relation to the meaning of the other doctrines. The only thing that is clear is that, insofar as it makes an assertion about everything for all eternity, it is metaphysical itself—no less metaphysical than all the former doctrines of European philosophy. That is true for Nietzsche's other doctrines, too. Intended to criticize metaphysics, they contradict themselves; and, lacking recognizable systematic connections, they do not even measure up to the metaphysics they are meant to criticize.

2. Nietzsche therefore has failed as a teacher ('Lehrer'). And he himself allowed his character Zarathustra to fail as a "teacher."

Nietzsche avoided teaching directly himself. In this he followed Plato, who made use of the character of Socrates "as a semiotic," and of the dialogue as a literary form that suspended all doctrines—even the doctrine of "Ideas" attributed to him.⁷ Nietzsche used the character of Zarathustra and invented his own literary form combining the sound of the "gospel"⁸ with the "language of the *Dithyrambus*"⁹ and making speeches ("Thus spoke Zarathustra?") with dramatic action. He made his "son" Zarathustra proclaim those doctrines (besides many others), but denied him any success as a teacher. He did not want to be mistaken for him. He therefore wrote to his sister, whom he feared would

⁶*Ecce Homo* (EH), *Why I Write Such Excellent Books*: Z 1.

⁷EH, *Why I Write Such Excellent Books: Untimely Meditations*, 3. See Werner Stegmaier, "Philosophieren als Vermeiden einer Lehre. Inter-individuelle Orientierung bei Sokrates und Platon, Nietzsche und Derrida," in: Josef Simon (ed.), *Distanz im Verstehen. Zeichen und Interpretation II*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, 214-239.

⁸Cf. Nachlaß Sommer 1886 - Frühjahr 1887, KSA 12, 6[4], 234 ("Zarathustra-gospel" ["Zarathustra-Evangelium"]), and the letter to Paul Deussen, 26 Nov. 1888, KSB 8, 492 ("bible of the future" ["Bibel der Zukunft"]).

⁹EH, *Why I Write Such Excellent Books*: Z 7.

do so: "Do not believe that my son Zarathustra expresses *my* opinions. He is one of my preparations and intermezzos."¹⁰

Nietzsche makes even Zarathustra proclaim only one of the doctrines mentioned above himself—the doctrine of the Overman, at which the crowd laughs. The doctrine of the “Death of God” he presupposes as well known.¹¹ An allegory, "Life itself" speaks to Zarathustra about the "secret" of life, the Will to Power.¹² And the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same is babbled by Zarathustra's animals, who immediately make a "barrel-organ-song" ("Leier-Lied") out of it.¹³

Before *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche had put the doctrine of the Death of God into the mouth of a mad man (GS 125). After *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he did not speak of the doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence any longer in his published works except *Ecce Homo*. The doctrine of the Overman is mentioned only in passing; and the doctrine of the Will to Power appears only in “polemic writings.” Their goal was, avowedly, not truth, but effect. The more his philosophy is considered ambivalent, the more one cannot be sure on what one can rely.

3. Instead of teaching Nietzsche makes Zarathustra give "Signs" ("Zeichen") and follow Signs. He himself trusted in his "manifoldest art" to "communicate by Signs" (sich "durch Zeichen mitzuteilen") [EH Books 4]. So Zarathustra's doctrines, including their failing, are to be understood as Signs.

Nietzsche notes for the fourth and last part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

—to speak through pictures, dances, sounds and taciturnities: and what would be the world for, if the entire world were not signs and parables!¹⁴

In order to make all the world into signs and parables Nietzsche designs *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a work of fiction, and lets it come to an end by a section entitled: "The Sign." He fashions Zarathustra as a character able to "understand" the signs of others

¹⁰Letter to Elisabeth Nietzsche, 7 May 1885 (KSB 7, 48).

¹¹"... nothing heard about, that *God is dead!*": Z, Preface, 2. Cf. *Gay Science* (GS) 125.

¹²Z II, On Self-overcoming

¹³Z III, The Convalescent. - Cf. Werner Stegmaier, "Anti-Lehren. Szene und Lehre in Friedrich Nietzsches *Also sprach Zarathustra*", in: Volker Gerhardt (ed.), *Klassiker auslegen: Friedrich Nietzsche, Also sprach Zarathustra*, Berlin 2000.

¹⁴Nachlaß Winter 1884-85, KSA 11, 31[51]. Cf. already Nachlaß Ende 1883, KSA 10, 22[3], 627: "And what for is all nature created, if not so that I have signs with which I can *talk* to the souls!"

better than anyone else, and to “give” signs to others, enabling them to create new "laws" and new standards of thinking and acting on their own.¹⁵ He makes Zarathustra act on behalf of signs, wait for *his* sign he only is able to understand in his way.¹⁶ In that respect, his Zarathustra is similar to Socrates, and Jesus too.

Not only *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but also Nietzsche's kind of philosophy as a whole ought to be understood therefore less in terms of his doctrines than in terms of his use of signs. It is our first hermeneutic duty to attribute contradiction not to others, to the texts, but to our own interpretation of the others, of the texts. I will try to make clear that there are no contradictions in Nietzsche's philosophy on the level of signs. Nietzsche himself, who kept on being a severe critic of his own philosophy, also never found contradiction in it.

4. Before Thus Spoke Zarathustra Nietzsche had conceived Thinking (Denken) in the perspective of Signs (Zeichen). He developed this philosophy of Signs afterward continually. According to It, Signs are the only accessible "Surface" ("Oberfläche") of all Geschehen (becoming or happening), which is as such inaccessible. This Geschehen includes Thinking, too.

The standpoint of signs is not present in Nietzsche's work from the beginning. In his early period he foregrounds images, metaphors and symbols, which he supposes to be the sources of concepts.¹⁷ Image, metaphor, symbol, and sign here are interchangeable. In

¹⁵ Cf. Z I, The New Idol (“This sign I give you ...”), Z II, The Child with the Mirror (“Truly, all to well I understand the dream’s sign and admonition”), Z II, The Priests (“And once Zarathustra gave his disciples a sign and spoke these words towards them...”), Z II, The Land of Culture (“Truly, you could not wear a better mask, who you are present, then your own face! Who could recognize you! – Covered by the signs of the past, and also these signs over-painted by new signs: so you have very well hidden yourself from all sign-interpreters” – except Zarathustra. About “sign giving” (“Zeichen geben”) cf. already earlier *Daybreak* (D) 96, D 341, D 348.

¹⁶ Cf. Z III, Involuntary Bliss (“So everything shouted to me in signs ‘it is time!’ ...”), Z III, Old and New Tables (“That I now wait for: because now the signs first have to come, that it is my hour ...”), Z IV, The Sign (“To my work I will get, to my day: but they do not understand, which are the signs of my morning, my pace ...” – “The sign comes’, said Zarathustra ...”).

¹⁷ Nietzsche here is strongly oriented at musical expression, following Schopenhauer and many other sources. Cf. the initial works of Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche et la métaphore*, Paris 1972, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Der Umweg” [frz. Or.: Le détour, 1971], in: Werner Hamacher (ed.), *Nietzsche aus Frankreich*, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin 1986, 75-110, chaining to her Paul de Man, “Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche)”, in: id., *Allegories of Reading*, New Haven, London 1976, then the monographs of Claudia Crawford, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language*, Berlin, New York 1988 (Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung, Bd. 19), and Thomas Böning, *Metaphysik, Kunst und Sprache beim frühen Nietzsche*, Berlin, New York 1988, finally the contributions of Ernst Behler, Tilman Borsche, Diana Behler, Rudolf Fietz und Detlef Otto in: Tilman Borsche/Federico Gerratana/Aldo Venturelli (eds.), ‘*Centauren-Geburten*’. *Wissenschaft, Kunst und Philosophie*, Berlin, New York 1994 (Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-

his middle period the concept of symbol—which in Nietzsche is closely linked to the Schopenhauerian metaphysics of Will—is increasingly replaced by the concept of sign. A "symbol" was in Nietzsche's mind something "extensive" ("umfassend") which is bound to "make out an entire world of profundity, power and beauty" (HL 6, KSA 1, p. 292). He does not attribute such an aura to the "signs". They are "just" ("nur") signs to him, as abstract and pale as concepts, and are not to be distinguished from them—not even in the sense that signs denote concepts. Concepts *are* signs, according to Nietzsche, and signs are not signs *for* something, but *of* something. In autumn 1880 he noted:

The thought itself, as well as the word, is only a sign: A congruence of the thought and the real is out of question. The real is some kind of instinctive movement (KSA 9, 6[253]).

And a bit later:

The feeling of subjectivity is growing to such an extent as we are building the world of the same things by memory and imagination. We are inventing ourselves as a unity in this self-constructed world of pictures, as the remaining in the fluctuation. But it is an error: We are equating signs and signs and conditions as conditions. (KSA 9, 6[349])

According to Aristotle, who dominated the thinking of Thinking for millennia, signs are signs for "ideas" by which "the real" is thought.²⁰ According to Nietzsche they are signs of something which itself is incomprehensible, signs of "some instinctive movement" ("irgend einer Triebbewegung"). A hint for that was a phenomenological study that Nietzsche recorded in a later note titled "The Involuntary in Thinking" ("Das Unfreiwillige im Denken"):

The thought just appears, often mixed up and obscured by a crush of thoughts. We are pulling it out, we are cleaning it, we are putting in on his feet and we are looking, how it *walks* -- everything very quickly! We are then holding court about it: thinking is a kind of exercise of justice, in which there is an examination of witnesses. What *does it mean?*, we are asking and are calling for other thoughts. This means: The thought is not taken as directly certain, but only as a *sign*, a question mark. The experimental fact of every observer not remaining on the surface is that every thought is first ambiguous and alternating, and itself only an *occasion* for multiple interpretations and arbitrary fixing. —The origin of the thought is hidden to us; there is a great probability that it is a *symptom* of a more extensive condition, like every feeling -: in

Forschung, Bd. 27), and after all Detlef Otto, "(Kon-)Figurationen der Philosophie. Eine meta-
phorologische Lektüre von Nietzsches Darstellungen der vorplatonischen Philosophen", in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 27 (1998), 119-152, in each case also indicating further literature.

²⁰ Cf. Aristotle, De int. 1, 16a1-18.

the fact that just this one comes and no other, that just this one comes with this bigger or lesser brightness, sometimes secure and imperious, sometimes unsecure and needing support, all in all always worrying and disturbing, asking -- for the consciousness each thought is a stimulant—in all this something of a total condition expresses itself in signs."²¹

If all thoughts are "only signs," the thought of "subject", of the "ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der transzendentalen Apperzeption" that thinks, according to Kant, "the real" ("das Wirkliche") is also just a sign—but a special sign: the sign for that which uses signs on its own. While Kant passed over from the ontological to a transcendental point of view, Nietzsche now passes over from the transcendental point of view to a semiological one. Compared with both Aristotle and Kant, he differs in his attitude toward certainty (Gewißheit).²² While both tried to save the unambiguity of thoughts and by this their teachability, Nietzsche declares himself for the ambiguity of signs: he primarily conceives them as "marks" ("Anzeichen"), "indicating signs" ("andeutende Zeichen"), "question marks", "symptoms."²³

The cardinal point of his philosophy of signs is the concept of "surface" ("Oberfläche"). Nietzsche uses it in the way one speaks today about the surface of a computer program: signs on a screen, with which the user works. *How* —by which means and processes—the signs appear on the screen usually remains unknown to him, and can—even must—remain unknown to him as long as he is working with them. In that sense the "world" of conscious thinking, according to Nietzsche, is "a surface- and sign-world" ("eine Oberflächen- und Zeichenwelt") [GS 354]. "Consciousness", he emphasizes at last in *Ecce homo*, "is a surface."²⁵

²¹ Nachlaß Sommer - Herbst 1884, KSA 11, 26[92]. Slightly elaborated repetition in: Juni - Juli 1885 (KSA 11, 38[1]).

²² See Nachlaß April - Juni 1885, KSA 11, 34[249]: "I think differently about ignorance and uncertainty."

²³ Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE) 32; Nachlaß Sommer - Herbst 1884, KSA 11, 26[92]; Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Frühjahr 1886, KSA 12, 1[61], 7[1]). See already earlier *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT) 14 ("a sign of doubt about the boundaries of logic nature" ["Zeichen einer Bedenklichkeit über die Grenzen der logischen Natur"), BT 23, UM I, 12 ("sign of their reign" ["Zeichen ihrer Herrschaft"]), UM II, 8, DW 3 ("sign of truth" ["Zeichen der Wahrheit"], "symptom" ["Anzeichen"]), DW 4 ("indicating sign" ["andeutendes Zeichen"]), UM IV, 8, UM IV, 11 ("sign of Wagner's art"), *Human All To Human* (HH) 35, HH 45 ("sign of benignity" ["Zeichen der Güte"]), HH 326 ("sign of disdain" ["Zeichen der Verachtung"]), HH 341 ("sign of little notice" ["Zeichen von geringer Beachtung"]), HH 348 ("sign of power" ["Zeichen von Macht"]), HH II WS Prologue ("sign of consent" ["Zeichen des Einverständnisses"]), D 91 ("all kinds of ambiguous signs" ["allerhand vieldeutige Zeichen"]), D 371 ("sign of suffering" ["Zeichen des Leidens"]), GS 83.

²⁵ EH, Why I am So Clever, 9.

The surface, however, is only visible as a whole; there is, as Nietzsche writes, always "a whole surface of the whole consciousness." Therefore you cannot trace back single signs to single sources, nor can you determine what they are signs for. Nevertheless the *Geschehen* is "really" ("eigentlich") connected there -- not in Thinking, as European philosophy wished to believe. In his notes Nietzsche further writes:

The really connected events happen below our consciousness: The appearing series and one-after-the-others of feelings, thoughts, etc. are symptoms of the real events! -- Under each thought lies an emotion. *Each thought*, each feeling, each will is *not* born from One particular desire, but it is a *all-over-condition*, an entire surface of the entire consciousness, and it is the result of an immediate power-fixing of all the desires constituting us, i. e. of the at the moment ruling desire as well as of the obeying or the resisting one. The next thought is a sign, how the total power-condition has shifted in the meantime. (KSA 12, 1[61])

According to Nietzsche Thinking is superficial, but not in a pejorative sense: as far as thoughts come up as "a whole surface of the whole consciousness." Thinking has its own laws, and in that respect is autonomous; but as far as it is initiated and orientated every time anew by something which is inaccessible to him and which Nietzsche (and Kant) call "Affekte" (emotions), it is heteronymous. By using its signs *for* something else, symbolizing something, it is at the same time sign *of* something else, it is symptomatic. The surface therefore is no lack of depth, it is not (using an expression of Heidegger) deficient (defizient). It is both sufficient and necessary for orientation and communication, that is: their necessary and sufficient condition.

5. *Thinking as a use of signs is, according to Nietzsche, an "art of schematizing and abbreviating" ("Schematisir- und Abkürzungskunst"), even in science and logic.*

Nietzsche looked upon Thinking in a consequently pragmatic way. "The whole apparatus of cognition," he wrote in his later notes, "is an apparatus of abstraction and simplification - not pointed at knowing but at *seizing* things [?]" ("ist ein Abstraktions- und Simplifikationsapparat - nicht auf Erkenntniß gerichtet, sondern auf *Bemächtigung* der Dinge [?]") (KSA 11, 26[61]). Everyday orientation always is toward action. It is less important what "things" are, than how to cope with them, and to cope with them quickly. Therefore, orientation usually keeps to rough, extremely simplified schemes. Nietzsche proposes to "relearn" and to conceive the shaping of concepts and the memory from that point of view. He tries to understand both of them as *abstracting* in the literal meaning of the word: as a skinning, removing, "emphasizing and ever anew underlining [a] basic scheme and leaving out the secondary features" (KSA 11, 26[94]).

Abstracting then is "a wholly **active making-up**" ("Zurechtmachen"),²⁹ a simplifying for the surface of acting. This is possible only by means of signs, of a "sign-apparatus" ("Zeichen-Apparat").³⁰ It reduces the *Geschehen* which is "complicated in an unspeakably different manner" ("unsäglich anders complicirt"),³¹ to clues (Anhaltspunkte) for the orientation or, as Nietzsche says, for the "total-perspective" ("Gesamt-Überschau"),³² which makes it possible to "get a handle on" what is happening (das Geschehen 'in den Griff zu bekommen').

So the main effort of Thinking is not—as the European philosophy supposed with scientific thinking in mind—determining and systematically ordering concepts as thoroughly as possible in order to open up the truth of things, but—on the contrary—a resolute passing over, leaving out, "shooing away" ("Wegscheuchen") of differences and "single facts" ("Einzel-Tatsachen"), in order to seize or to "command" ("Befehlen") what is going on (das Geschehen).

As a general does not want to and must not hear about many things for not losing the total perspective, there must be also in our conscious mind *above all* an excluding, a shooing away desire, a selecting one, which makes appear only *some* facts. The consciousness is the hand the organism grasps the most far with: it must be a firm hand. Our logic, our sense of time, sense of space are enormous abilities of abbreviation, with the purpose of commanding. A notion is an invention, to which nothing does *completely* correspond, but many things a little bit. Such a sentence: "two things, identical to a third one, are identical themselves", takes 1) things 2) identities for granted: both of them do not exist. But with this invented, fixed world of notions and numbers man gets an instrument to take possession of enormous quantities as if he used signs, and to write it into his memory. This apparatus of signs is his superiority, just he because goes away from the single facts as far as possible. The reduction of the experiences to *signs*, and the always bigger quantity of things which can be conceived like this, is his *highest power*. Intellectuality as the ability to be the master of an enormous quantity of facts by signs. (KSA 11, 34[131])

Nietzsche here sums up the abstraction and simplification of the *Geschehen* in the expression "ability to abbreviate" ("Abbreviatur-Fähigkeiten"), later just as

²⁹ Nachlaß Sommer - Herbst 1884, KSA 11, 26[114].

³⁰ Nachlaß April - Juni 1885, KSA 11, 34[131].

³¹ Nachlaß April - Juni 1885, KSA 11, 34[249].

³² Nietzsche uses the notion 'orientation' only marginally. Cf. about KSA 12, 7[1]. This applies also to Wittgenstein, who works with the notion of "clear display" ("übersichtlichen Darstellung") : "The notion of clear display is of fundamental meaning for us" ("Der Begriff der übersichtlichen Darstellung ist für uns von grundlegender Bedeutung" (*Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, §122).

"abbreviation" ("Abkürzung").³⁴ According to that, Thinking is an "art of schematization and abbreviation, a coping of the diversity by an art of expression, —no 'Understanding' but a denoting for the purpose of *communication*."³⁵

"Understanding" would be the insight into the *Geschehen* itself, its "nature," its "truth." Such an insight is, according to Nietzsche, beyond the reach of Thinking as an "art of schematization and abbreviation."

This does not mean we could not distinguish "true" from "false." The distinction of true and false is constantly used in science as well as in every-day communication. The sign approach does not make it impossible but rather, on the contrary, and for the first time, makes it plausible. As "adaequatio rei et intellectus" "truth" means an alignment of Thinking and that which is thought about, concept and object, proposition and fact. Such an alignment is paradoxical, for Thinking and the thought-about, concept and object, proposition and fact are at the same time supposed to be of a different kind. The sign approach instead makes, as Nietzsche notes, the distinction of "false" and "true" conceivable as "*abbreviations of the signs*" in contrast to the signs themselves.³⁶ This sort of abbreviation goes on by "the invention of signs for entire kinds of signs," in this case first by the invention of language-signs or language-schemes for schemes of perception, and then of language-signs for language-signs: While it remains unclear how to compare and align facts and propositions, signs can be no doubt applied to signs, aligned to signs, abbreviated by signs.

"Truth" presupposes language, language-signs. It is a special criterion of orientation relevant only in special situations, and language, language-signs, words are not sufficient to communicate easily and quickly. Communication essentially belongs to orientation; orientation always includes orientation by orientation *of others*: this is how Nietzsche, as I will argue later, mainly conceives of orientation. To communicate, it is not enough, he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil* 268, "to use the same words in order to understand one another: we must also employ the same words for the same kind of internal experiences, we must in the end have experiences in *common*."

³⁴ Nietzsche uses the noun "abbreviation" ("Abkürzung") first Nachlaß April-Juli 1885, KSA 11, 34[249] and 38[2].

³⁵ Nachlaß Sommer 1886 - Herbst 1887, KSA 12, 5[16]. – For the current systematical meaning cf. Werner Stegmaier, "Weltabkürzungskunst. Orientierung durch Zeichen", in: Josef Simon (ed.), *Zeichen und Interpretation*, Frankfurt am Main 1994, 119-141.

³⁶ Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Frühjahr 1886, KSA 12, 1[28]. Cf. to this note Josef Simon, *Philosophie des Zeichens*, Berlin/New York 1989, 131 f.

Only where we have experiences in common can we express ourselves easily and quickly: "when people have lived long together under similar conditions (of climate, soil, danger, requirement, toil) there *originates* therefrom an entity that 'understands itself' - namely, a people."

We understand each other "more and more quickly" ("schnell und immer schneller") the more we have experiences in common, and find a language that does an ever better job of abbreviating them: "the history of the language" can so be understood as "the history of a process of abbreviation". In that process the "meanings" ("Bedeutungen") of the signs usually remain undefined; the signs are given no general meaning that could be fixed in dictionaries and learned there. Instead we have learned from common experiences and common life-conditions to use the signs in a way that enables us to learn and to respect the minds of other individuals or, in brief, to use the signs inter-individually.

This would be impossible if general meanings of signs were explicitly defined. Science, which works on such definitions, is a special case, and not the ideal case, not the standard of orientation and communication, as European philosophy would have it. Nonetheless science fits into Nietzsche's sign approach. For working on orders of signs that can be explicitly defined, science has to be kept free from the urgency that every-day orientation to action entails: only by means of special institutions is there free play and time for definitions. Nevertheless science cannot cut loose completely from every-day orientation and communication: it needs them internally and externally to introduce its signs. In any case it can not get beyond signs: even science, Nietzsche says, has only signs, and its explicitly defined "sign-language which puts together all observable 'laws' does not *explain* [?] *anything*—it is just a sort of *shortest* (most abbreviated) *description* of the *Geschehen*" ("Zeichensprache, welche alle beobachtbaren 'Gesetze' zusammenbringt, *erklärt* [?] *nichts*—es ist nur eine Art *kürzester* (abgekürztester) *Beschreibung* des Geschehens") (KSA 11, 26[227]). Explicit definitions of the meanings of signs do not open up the "true" *Geschehen*, they only create different conditions of abbreviation, by which the use of the distinction "true" and "false" now can be explicitly defined.

The greatest brevity of abbreviation, Nietzsche says, is achieved by logic as means of science. "Its nature" ("[I]hr Wesen"), he notes, is "not discovered"; most likely it seems to him to be the "art of *denoting unambiguously*" ("Kunst der *eindeutigen Bezeichnung*").³⁸ Its "apparatus of simplification" achieves a "*sign-script* and *communicability* and *rememberability* of the logical occurrences" ("*Zeichenschrift* und *Mittheilbarkeit* und *Merkbarkeit* der logischen Vorgänge"); it creates completely unambiguous signs that do not derive from individual experiences in any way.

³⁸ Nachlaß Ende 1886 - Frühjahr 1887, KSA 12, 7[34].

Nietzsche appreciates logic. "Logic and applied logic (like mathematics)" belong "to the tricks of the ordering, overcoming, simplifying, abbreviating power [?] called life." They too are "something practical and useful, namely life-keeping, but therefore not yet in the least something 'true' [?]" ("etwas Praktisches und Nützliches, nämlich Leben-Erhaltendes, aber ebendarum auch nicht im Entferntesten etwas 'Wahres'").³⁹ As soon as we consider logic to be more than just an "art of *denoting unambiguously*", it becomes the "model of a complete *fiction*" ("Muster einer vollständigen *Fiction*").⁴⁰

Philosophy as a whole does not aim at creating special sign-languages such as the sign-languages of logic, but creating abbreviations by means of signs in general. According to Nietzsche a first task of philosophers is "to overcome the present or past world by summarizing the *Geschehen* by signs: they are concerned to make things easy to survey, to think over, comprehensible, handy—they serve the task of man to use all things for his benefit."⁴¹

Philosophers are, in a word, "artists of abstraction" ("Abstractions-Künstler"). They excel if they "create", "invent", "make up" new "means of abbreviation" ("Abkürzungsmittel") which become "laws" for Thinking itself, become "categories". In that case, whether they want to or not, philosophers become "powerful" ("Mächtige"),⁴² "law-makers of the future."⁴³

Eventually Nietzsche wonders whether he should try to "consider" all movements as signs of mental *Geschehen*" ("alle Bewegungen als Zeichen eines seelischen Geschehens zu fassen") and to carry out "science as a symptomatology" ("Naturwissenschaft als eine

³⁹ Nachlaß Sommer 1886 - Frühjahr 1887, KSA 12, 6[14].

⁴⁰ Nachlaß April - Juni 1885, KSA 11, 34[249], slightly elaborated repetition in Juni - Juli 1885, KSA 11, 38[2], further continued August - September 1885, KSA 11, 40[27], and again Sommer 1886 - Herbst 1887, KSA 12, 5[16].

⁴¹ Nachlaß Sommer - Herbst 1884, KSA 11, 26[407] = Vs. to JGB 211. Note from Sommer-Herbst 1884, elaborated repetition Juni - Juli 1885, KSA 11, 38[13]. In JGB 211 Nietzsche does not use the notion sign. - Cf. Nachlaß Juni - Juli 1886, KSA 11, 36[27] - "Philosophy, in the only way I still value it, as the most common form of history, as an attempt to somehow describe the Heraclitian becoming and to abbreviate in signs (to at the same time *translate* and mummify into a kind of seeming being)" ("Die Philosophie, so wie ich sie allein noch gelten lasse, als die allgemeinste Form der Historie, als Versuch das Heraklitische Werden irgendwie zu beschreiben und in Zeichen abzukürzen (in eine Art von scheinbarem Sein gleichsam zu *übersetzen* und zu mummifizieren)") – about this topic Martin Stingelin, "Historie als ‚Versuch das Heraklitische Werden [...] in Zeichen abzukürzen‘", in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 22 (1993), 28-41. Stingelin also provides references to Derrida's and Foucault's following to Nietzsche's Philosophy of signs.

⁴² Nachlaß Sommer 1886 - Frühjahr 1887, KSA 12, 6[11].

⁴³ Cf. Nachlaß Sommer - Herbst 1884, KSA 11, 26[407], and BGE 211.

Symptomatologie").⁴⁴ The "mechanistical-atomistical mode of thinking" ("mechanistisch-atomistische Denkweise") will one day, Nietzsche supposes, "end with the creation of a system of signs" ("mit der Schaffung eines Systems von Zeichen endigen").⁴⁵ In the perspective of signs something seems possible to him that he denies in the perspective of things: a "system," an order—now consciously worked out and explicitly defined—of the whole.

In an often-quoted note of 1886-87 Nietzsche writes that we think in a "*lingual constraint*" ("*sprachlichen Zwange*") and that the "*rational thinking*" ("*vernünftige Denken*") is "*an interpreting according to a scheme we can not get rid of*" ("*ein Interpretieren nach einem Schema, welches wir nicht abwerfen können*").⁴⁶ Nietzsche rewrote this note in spring of 1888, at that point taking signs into consideration. Our "scheme", our "means of expression", he now notes, is a "semiotic":

It is not up to us to change our means of expression: It is possible to conceive in what way it is just semiotic (KSA 13, 14[122]).

6. *Geschehen itself, including Thinking, according to Nietzsche, is best understood as a Zeichen-Geschehen, and the Zeichen-Geschehen as a Wille-zur-Macht-Geschehen. [GM II 12]*

In consequence Nietzsche tries to conceive every *Geschehen* as a *Zeichen-Geschehen*:

all movements are to be taken as gestures, as a kind of language through which the forces understand themselves (KSA 12, 1[28]).

Thus they are considered as "*signs of an inner Geschehen.*" An inner *Geschehen* is one which is not observable and comes up only in "changes of the forms" ("*Veränderungen der Formen*") of signs (KSA 12, 1[28]). Nietzsche's hypothesis in his philosophy of signs is this: one can most easily understand that changes are observable at all if one considers *Geschehen* itself as *Zeichen-Geschehen*. He thus overcomes the conflict of semiology and ontology by integrating ontology into semiology.

⁴⁴ Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Herbst 1886, KSA 12, 2[69].

⁴⁵ Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Herbst 1886, KSA 12, 2[61].

⁴⁶ Nachlaß Sommer 1886 - Herbst 1887, KSA 12, 5[22].

Nietzsche gave only a hint to this in his published works; but in a central passage. Just in the centre of *On the Genealogy of Morals* (II: 12)⁵⁰ he links his idea of signs to his idea of the Will to Power. It happens, he writes there, even "in the organic world", that "something existing, somehow achieved, is constantly interpreted anew by a superior force for new perspectives, is monopolized anew, remodelled and rearranged for a new benefit" ("etwas Vorhandenes, irgendwie Zu-Stande-Gekommenes immer wieder von einer ihm überlegenen Macht auf neue Ansichten ausgelegt, neu in Beschlag genommen, zu einem neuen Nutzen umgebildet und umgerichtet wird").

The passage is about the change of function in the process of evolution. If one understands it in a mechanistic or organological manner, one has to presuppose separately and independently acting entities as Aristotle conceived them; but his metaphysical ontology would have to be presupposed along with it. Nietzsche instead, like Darwin, tries to comprehend a living being as something that becomes what it is only in a struggle with others, and is further continually transformed by this struggle. This again is best understood if one assumes that a living being *is* not something, but *means* something—but for each other such being it means something different, and always something new.⁵¹

Thus it is a sign for everything that has to do with it and with which it has to do—a sign in a process of a never-ending "new-interpreting" ("Neu-Interpretirens") in which "'sense' and 'purpose'" ("Sinn' und 'Zweck'") emerge ever anew.⁵² Insofar there are counteractions, the *Zeichen-Geschehen* is a *Will-to-Power-Geschehen*, and insofar the *Will-to-Power-Geschehen* goes on as a never-ending "interpreting anew," it is a *sign-Geschehen*. The *sign-Geschehen* becomes plausible as a *Will-to-Power-Geschehen*, and the *Will-to-Power-Geschehen* becomes plausible as a *sign-Geschehen*. In Nietzsche's unpublished scripts this is abbreviated as:

"All sense is Will to Power (all relation-senses can be solved into it)." (KSA 12, 2[77])

Thus there are no fixed identities as presupposed by logic. Instead there are ever new "making-ups" ("Zurechtmachungen") of identities, ever identifications:

("the entire history of a "thing," an organ, a custom can thus be a continuous sign-chain of always new interpretations and making-ups whose reasons don't have to be in

⁵⁰ Cf. Werner Stegmaier, *Nietzsches "Genealogie der Moral". Werkinterpretation*, Darmstadt 1994, 70-88.

⁵¹ Cf. Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Frühjahr 1886, KSA 12, 1[58], [59].

⁵² Cf. Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Frühjahr 1886, KSA 12, 1[128]: "- the essence of the organic nature is a *new interpretation of events*, the perspective inner plenty, which is itself an event."

connection with themselves, but which are possibly succeeding each other and taking over just by chance.")(GM II 12)

Geschehen is thereby deprived of all sort of fixations, definitions, of all which could be universal and teachable. But nonetheless there is something common. It imposes itself on men. Nietzsche calls it the "Gattung" (species, humankind, genus).

7. Consciousness) developed, according to Nietzsche, in the process of communication. Therefore consciousness is a consciousness of signs, and the consciousness of signs is a consciousness of the species (Gattung). Communication by signs inevitably makes individuals superficial ("Veroberflächlichung der Individuen").

In *Gay Science* 354 Nietzsche expresses the "extravagant surmise" ("ausschweifende Vermuthung") "that consciousness in general has developed only urged by the need for communication" ("dass Bewusstsein überhaupt sich nur unter dem Druck des Mittheilungs-Bedürfnisses entwickelt hat "). The "development of consciousness" must have gone "hand in hand" with the "development of language"; and the "faculty of communication" ("Mittheilungs-Fähigkeit ") must have grown as and to the extent that the "need for communication" ("Mittheilungs-Bedürftigkeit ") has grown.

So words, in which "conscious thinking goes on" (in denen das "bewußte Denken geschieht "), were—Nietzsche continues his surmise -- first of all "communication-signs" ("Mittheilungs-Zeichen"). But they include not only words, language-signs, but also "the gaze, the squeeze, the gesture" ("der Blick, der Druck, die Gebärde"); and they further are said to serve as a "bridge between man and man." At least the latter obviously are not based on reason but on a more elementary "power and art of communication" ("Kraft und Kunst der Mittheilung"): to "be able to fix sensory impressions by signs and, so to speak, to put them outward of us" (Sinneseindrücke in Zeichen "fixiren zu können und gleichsam ausser uns zu stellen").⁵⁵

⁵⁵Also according to Kant the "ability of signifying" ("Bezeichnungsvermögen") performs the "cognition of the present" ("Erkenntniß des Gegenwärtigen"), the 'presentation' of ideas. Cf. "Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht", in: *Akad.-Ausg. VII*, 191. - To introduce abilities ("Vermögen") is no "explanation" ("Erklärung"), as Nietzsche BGE 11 mockingly objects to Kant's "ability to synthetic judgements a priori" ("Vermögen zu synthetischen Urteilen a priori"), but "only a repetition of the question" ("nur eine Wiederholung der Frage"). As Nietzsche understands it, with signs more is not possible at all. One cannot explain their cause, but only underline them being questionable. Cf. the vs. of GS 354, the note KSA 11, 30[10], in which Nietzsche answers to the question "How is this consciousness possible?" ("Wie ist diese Bewußtheit möglich?") to himself: "I am far away from coming up with answers (e.g. words and not more!) to these kind of questions; at the right time old Kant occurs to me [...]" ("Ich bin fern davon, auf solche Fragen Antworten (d.h. Worte und nicht mehr!) auszudenken; zur rechten Zeit fällt mir der alte Kant ein [...]").

Man is man, Nietzsche continues, not by reason or by consciousness. He should be characterized as the "sign-inventing" being (der "Zeichen-erfindende Mensch"). Inventing signs is not the effect, but the cause for "becoming more and more acutely conscious of himself" (dass er "immer schärfer seiner selbst bewusst" wird). Yet insofar the signs as signs of communication are the signs of the *Gattung*, the consciousness is consciousness of the *Gattung*, too. It belongs, Nietzsche says,

not really to the individual existence of man [?], but to the community- and herd-nature which is in him

So he surmises

that it [sc. the consciousness] is also, as it follows from this, only finely developed in respect of the utility of the community and the herd, and that therefore each of us - much as he would like to *understand* himself as individually as possible, 'to know himself' - brings always only the non-individual of himself, the 'ordinary' up to consciousness.

If signs are signs of the *Gattung*, it is difficult if not impossible to communicate anything truly individual. In this respect – that is, with respect to communication, not representation—the "surface" of signs is the "superficializing" ("Veroberflächlichung") of what one tries to communicate. It is, according to Nietzsche, "a great and thorough corruption" ("eine große gründliche Verderbniss"), insofar it causes a "generalization" ("Generalisation") of the "infinitely individual" ("unbegrenzt-individuelle") experiences and actions of the particular person (Einzelnen):

Our actions are basically all personal, unique, infinitely individual in an uncomparable manner, there is no doubt, but as soon as we are translating them into consciousness, they get flat, weak, relatively stupid, general, they become signs, marks of the herd."

One "sees", as Wittgenstein pointed it out later, "only the signs" of the other, and can never "know" what he "means" by them, just because they inevitably generalize the experiences of which they are signs. Even he himself, if he would try to *tell* what he means by them, "has" only his signs, too ("hat ja auch nur seine Zeichen").⁵⁶ We surely have the signs in common, but not their meanings. And we have to use them in an

⁵⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 504. For differentiation of "seeing" ("Sehens") and "having" ("Habens") signs cf. Werner Stegmaier, "Zwischen Kulturen. Orientierung in Zeichen nach Wittgenstein", in: Wilhelm Lütterfelds and Djavid Salehi (eds.): "Wir können uns nicht in sie finden". Probleme interkultureller Verständigung und Kooperation, *Wittgenstein-Studien* 3 (2001), 53-67.

individual manner and thereby relate as an individual to other individuals. Precisely here, for Nietzsche, lies the real challenge, of the skill (Kunst) of using the signs of the *Gattung* to communicate as a particular person (Einzelner), as an individual confronted with other individuals.

8. Becoming superficial is welcome to most human beings. They need doctrines—teachable and general meanings of signs that are independent of individuals. They want to get rid of individuality in the use of signs.

Nietzsche's philosophy of signs follows from the principle of economy of principles. It is "a moral of method" ("eine Moral der Methode"), Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil* 36, "not to assume several kinds of causality until the experiment of making do with a single one has been pushed to its utmost limit (to the point of nonsense, if I may say so)" ("[n]icht mehrere Arten von Causalität an[zu]nehmen, so lange nicht der Versuch, mit einer einzigen auszureichen, bis an seine äußerste Grenze getrieben ist (- bis zum Unsinn, mit Verlaub zu sagen)"). Signs are sufficient for purposes of orientation and communication. We don't have to assume a general reason, a transcendental consciousness and general meanings of signs. On the contrary: with the rejection of these assumptions, sense can more easily be made of individuals orienting themselves both as individuals and in common.

Individuals, to the extent that they have their particular point of view in the world under their particular conditions, must orient themselves in their particular manner from that standpoint. But for the purpose of communication they must use signs they have in common with those with whom they need to communicate. Thus they have to use these signs in an individual manner. Common signs have to be used in an individual manner, because one has to communicate by means of them on infinitely many and infinitely different occasions, but one is able to learn only a finite number of them in a finite time. Thus the signs must make allowances (Spielräume; leeway, latitude) for interpretation, and must have manifold meanings in order to be fit for inter-individual communication, which is an orientation with respect to the orientations of others. That their meanings are manifold is not a defect but the condition of their functioning in everyday orientation and communication. Nietzsche calls it the "leeway (or allowance) for misunderstanding" ("Spielraum zum Mißverständniß") which individuals provide for each other. They do it in an individual manner again: more to "good friends" than to others, and more on "good days" than on bad ones.⁵⁷

If signs must have leeway for interpretation in everyday orientation and communication, one can never really know what the other "means"—not even what I "mean" myself. So

⁵⁷ Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Frühjahr 1886, KSA 12, 1[182], and BGE 27.

one cannot really rely on anything. This is hard—and all the more, Nietzsche says, originates from it the need for something fixed, defined, universal, teachable, in logic, science, metaphysics and morals. And according to Nietzsche's premises there is nothing of the sort to be sought and found. The requirement of "easy communication of what is needed" ("*leichte Mittheilbarkeit der Noth*") presses and indeed forces itself upon us.

By the process of socialization, which Nietzsche talks about in *Beyond Good and Evil* 268, the individuality of the individuals is continually levelled down. Men are transformed "into the similar, ordinary, average, herdlike -- into the common which is the *vulgar*" ("in's Ähnliche, Gewöhnliche, Durchschnittliche, Heerdenhafte - in's *Gemeine*"). This process, Nietzsche goes on to say, appears to "be the most powerful of all the forces which have controlled men before" ("unter allen Gewalten, welche über den Menschen bisher verfügt haben, die gewaltigste gewesen sein"). Nobody can escape it, and usually we do not even want to escape it, as on the contrary we want to escape the individuality of the use of signs. One must, Nietzsche says, "call up tremendous opposing forces" ("ungeheure Gegenkräfte anrufen") to "cross" or counter ("kreuzen") the de-individualization of the use of signs (BGE 268).

9. The ethical aim of Nietzsche's philosophizing is to regain individuality in the use of signs. The leeway (Spielraum) required is opened by the double game of arrangement (Zurechtlegung) and interpretation (Auslegung) in any use of signs.

Logic, science, metaphysics, and morals invite individuals to resign their individuality and to feel comfort with the general; and beyond a certain point this becomes alarming and dangerous: above all, where it concerns their own responsibility. It has to do with people being "leveled" to "averageness," or, as Heidegger later put it, to an anonymous "One" ("das Man").⁵⁹ Here Nietzsche sees his own true mission: to make individuals attentive to their individuality anew. This can be only an individuality in the using of signs (eine Individualität im Zeichengebrauch); and he could draw attention to it only by means of signs.

In autumn 1880, when Nietzsche discovered signs, he remarked:

As soon as we want to define the purpose of man, we put a notion of man at the head of it. But there are only individuals; from the ones known *until now* the notion can only be obtained through the *slipping off* of the individual. So to proclaim the purpose of man would mean to instruct the individuals to become individual and to order them to become *general*. On the contrary: Could not each individual be the attempt to achieve a *species higher than man* through its most individual things? My

morals would be to *take* the general character of man more and more away from him and to specialize him, to make him to a certain degree more ununderstandable to others (and with it to an object of experiences, of astonishment, of instruction for them) (KSA 9, 6[158]).

Plato's character of Socrates is a prototype here again.⁶¹ The Socrates Plato introduces as a "semiotic" shows -- while insisting on general meanings of signs—an extremely individual use of signs, to such an extent that he is considered "atopos", even "atopotatos," outlandish, odd, strange, crazy.⁶² He is predictable to no one, not even to himself, as he is always ready to obey his "daimonion", an alien voice inside of him. In Plato's dialogues, which became a major source of European metaphysics, Socrates does not teach; nonetheless, he communicates in an emphatically inter-individual manner.⁶³ Plato has him discuss only certain questions and changes with particular interlocutors, and changes interlocutors when the talk proceeds to other topics. It is the skill of Plato's Socrates to talk as an individual with individuals, and thereby always to indicate that in the final analysis nothing beyond themselves is being presupposed. Even something like the hypothesis of "Ideas," when presented as a doctrine, does not withstand the objections raised to it, as Plato shows in the dialogue *Parmenides*. Plato's Socrates constantly makes evident that his interlocutors do not mean what they believe they mean, and on his part he never lets them see what he himself "really" means. The inter-individual talks staged by Plato call everything in question and leave it hanging in ironic suspension: understanding and misunderstanding,

⁵⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time/Sein und Zeit*, § 27.

⁶¹ Nietzsche notes early (Nachlaß Sommer (?) 1875, KSA 8, 6[3]): "*Socrates*, to confess it, is so close to me that I almost always fight a battle with him" ("*Socrates*, um es nur zu bekennen, steht mir so nahe, dass ich fast immer einen Kampf mit ihm kämpfe"). Even if he attacked him stronger and stronger for having given a fatal direction to the occidental thinking by reason of his urge for an over-individual common, he considered Socrates constantly as a "true thinker" ("wahrhaftigen Denker") and enjoyed his irony with "delicate sentiment" ("köstlicher Empfindung"). "But it is even more pleasant," ("Aber es ist noch angenehmer,") he writes in the late Nachlaß (April - Juni 1885, KSA 11, 34 [66]), "to discover, that all this is foreground, and that he actually wants something different and wants it in an a very bold way. I believe, that this was Socrates' magic: he had a soul and behind it yet another and behind that yet another one. In the one in the front Xenophon lied down to sleep, in the second Plato and in the third again Plato, but Plato with his own second soul. Plato himself is a man with many behind-caves and foregrounds" ("zu entdecken, daß dies Alles Vordergrund ist, und daß er im Grunde etwas Anderes will und auf sehr verwegene Weise will. Ich glaube, daß der Zauber des Socrates der war: er hatte eine Seele und dahinter noch eine und dahinter noch eine. In der vordersten legte sich Xenophon schlafen, auf der zweiten Plato und auf der dritten noch einmal Plato, aber Plato mit seiner eigenen zweiten Seele. Plato selber ist ein Mensch mit vielen Hinterhöhlen und Vordergründen").

⁶² Cf. Platon, *Phaidros*, 229 c a. 230 c.

⁶³ Cf. Werner Stegmaier, "Philosophieren als Vermeiden einer Lehre", loc. cit.

consent and dissent, persuasion and conviction.⁶⁴ What is beyond question is only the fascinating effect this Socrates had upon the young Athenians by his skill of talking, and its repellent effect upon those who felt responsible for these young Athenians and who brought about Socrates' trial and execution.

Nietzsche however had to start up from a language shaped fundamentally by metaphysics and morals. He criticized (in *Beyond Good and Evil* in particular) its main concepts as a "Zeichen-Welt" we "project and mix into the things as a world of signs 'in itself'" (als "Zeichen-Welt 'an sich' in die Dinge hineindichten, hineinmischen") (BGE 21). But this is just his starting point for restoring individuality in using signs. For whoever uses those concepts, needs to use them, and thereby "reveals himself" ("verrät sich") (ibid.). Nietzsche makes this evident with respect to the "intentions" ("Absichten") of actions, upon which so much importance is placed especially in modern European moral philosophy.

Intentions are expressed for justification, and have to fit into the appropriate morally correct discourse. They are inevitably made up (zurechtgelegt), and every participant in the discourse knows that. Thus the more someone insists on a certain "intention" of his action and insists that no "decisive value" ("entscheidenden Wert") attaches to whatever "is *un-intentionally* about his action" ("was *nicht-absichtlich* an [s]einer Handlung ist"), the more there will be doubts and questions about whether the expressed intention is "sign and symptom" ("Zeichen und Symptom"), a "surface and skin" ("Oberfläche und Haut") "that, like any skin, reveals something, but that *conceals* much more" ("welche, wie jede Haut, Etwas verrät, aber noch mehr verbirgt").⁶⁵ For others it is only a sign, a "sign that means too much and therefore almost nothing for itself" ("Zeichen, das zu Vieles und folglich für sich allein fast nichts bedeutet") and thus "needs interpretation first" ("erst der Auslegung bedarf") (BGE 32). All signs, insofar they are simplifying interpretations of the *Geschehen* which is complex, fathomless and individual, can and must be interpreted anew in order to be understood. Thus signs always open up a double-game of interpretations -- an interpretation *by* signs and an interpretation *of* these signs (Doppelspiel von Zurechtlegung und Auslegung).

This double-game, however, that is staged in any use of signs, can on the other hand be intentionally used to conceal something. As Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil* 40, any individual "life-sign" is interpreted "always wrongly, namely flatly" owing to the

⁶⁴ Cf. Ernst Heitsch, *Wege zu Platon. Beiträge zum Verständnis seines Argumentierens*, Göttingen 1992.

⁶⁵ Cf. BGE 187, where Nietzsche denotes morals as a "sign language of affects" ("*Zeichensprache der Affekte*"), and BGE 196, where he calls it a "parable and sign language" ("*Gleichniss- und Zei-*

conventional signs in which it must be expressed. And thus one who "has something precious and delicate to hide" ("etwas Kostbares und Verletzliches zu Bergen hätte") can conceal it intentionally by "rude" signs. He can use "rudeness" as a "mask" of the "delicacy of his shame" ("Feinheit seiner Scham"). Masks are signs one holds in front of one's face for fear of everyone's seeing it. To this purpose all signs are masks: they enable one to present oneself as one "needs" and "wants."

It is Nietzsche's declared procedure in his entire philosophical authorship to use signs as masks, to use them in a way, that the "rude ones" can understand them in a rude manner and the "fine ones" in a fine manner. He calls it a "ruse" ("List")—which is not necessarily "guile" ("Arglist"): "there is so much goodness in ruse". There is goodness in the use of signs if it does not ask of others more than they can take.⁶⁶

10. A common use of signs exercises power over individuals. Exceptional individuals can confront this power by the power of an individual use of signs.

Power, according to Nietzsche, is first of all the power of giving signs. Those have the greatest power who dominate the usage of signs in the widest range and for the longest time. This power can be quite inconspicuous and does not have to be intentional. Nietzsche's best example -- which maybe given unintentionally on his part—is Christ, whom he calls the "Jesus type" ("Typus Jesus") or the "type of the Redeemer" ("Typus des Erlösers") in *The Antichrist*.⁶⁷ In considering him Nietzsche discloses at last what is the utmost in using signs. He understands (or misunderstands—this can be left open for now) this type of Jesus as a sign, the meaning of which he tries to "guess" ("errathen") from the few reliable clues the gospels provide—something which is, as he says, about "such alien and delicate things" (bei "so fremde[n], so zarte[n] Dingen") that it is only possible with a "loving and careful neutrality" ("liebvoller und vorsichtiger Neutralität") (A 36).

The type of Jesus makes evident for Nietzsche that the violent Will to Power of all living can be neutralized into a non-violent living in signs. He ascribes to his "Jesus-type" an idiosyncrasy against all that is fixed, and toward an "escape to the 'incomprehensible', to the 'inconceivable'" ("Flucht in's 'Unfassliche', in's

chensprache"), "by which plenty can be concealed" ("mit der sich Vieles verschweigen lässt") also from oneself.

⁶⁶ Cf. BGE 290: "Every deep thinker fears being understood more than being misunderstood. From the latter maybe his vanity suffers; but from the former his heart, his sympathy, which always says: "alas, why are *you* aiming at a hard time, as I have it?"".

⁶⁷ Cf. Werner Stegmaier, "Nietzsches Kritik der Vernunft seines Lebens. Zur Deutung von *Der Antichrist* und *Ecce homo*", in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 21 (1992), 163-183. S. there also hints to further literature.

'Unbegreifliche'), a "being at home in a [?] merely 'inner' world" ("Zu-Hause-sein in einer [?] bloss noch 'inneren' Welt"); and he interprets this world now as a perfect world of signs, as "a being totally floating in symbols and incomprehensibilities" ("ein ganz in Symbolen und Unfasslichkeiten schwimmendes Sein") (A 31). Every concept this Jesus accepts is to him no "more than a sign-talk, a semiotic, an occasion to tell parables" (nicht "mehr als eine Zeichenrede, eine Semiotik, eine Gelegenheit zu Gleichnissen") (A 32).

Nietzsche finds in his Jesus-type a "symbolic par excellence" ("Symbolik par excellence") (A 32) that clearly fascinates him—a "bliss" ("Seligkeit"), a "feeling of total transfiguration of all things" ("Gesammt-Verklärungs-Gefühl aller Dinge") in signs (A 34). His Jesus-type does not want to have any power. Arguing against Ernest Renan, who presented Jesus as a "hero," Nietzsche calls him -- taking a word of Dostojevsky—an "idiot".⁶⁸ His morality is precisely the "incapacity for resistance" ("Unfähigkeit zum Widerstand") (A 29)—a morality without any *will* to morality and without any Will to Power. And precisely this morality proved to have extraordinary power, which prevailed through all dogmatic commitments against which Nietzsche directed his polemics, and ever reasserted itself anew in the history of Europe and the world—a power that, according to Nietzsche, was "only" a power of signs ("nur" von Zeichen).

11. Nietzsche's use of signs fascinates or provokes his readers, and deprives them of the distance from which doctrines are possible. He "compromises" himself as an individual in order to bring his readers to compromise themselves as individuals in relation to him. They reveal themselves by associating Nietzsche's signs with doctrines.

Nietzsche realized more and more that this power to neutralize all *violent* Will to Power in signs was *his* power, too; and in the end he says it explicitly. In *Ecce homo* he calls it the "sense of all style" ("Sinn jedes Stils") "to *communicate* a condition, an inner tension of pathos by signs, including the tempo of these signs" ("[e]inen Zustand, eine innere Spannung von Pathos durch Zeichen, eingerechnet das tempo dieser Zeichen, *mitzuteilen*"). There is an "extraordinary diversity of inner conditions" in him ("die Vielheit innerer Zustände in mir ausserordentlich"), and therefore there are "many possibilities of style" in him, too, "the manifoldest art of style that ever were to a man's disposal" ("viele Möglichkeiten des Stils - die vielfachste Kunst des Stils überhaupt, über die je ein Mensch verfügt hat").⁶⁹ In *Ecce homo* he presents it as a Dionysian style, and

⁶⁸ *The Antichrist* (A) 29, cf. KSA 13, 15[9]. – For literature about the relation Nietzsche-Dostojewski cf. Andreas Urs Sommer, *Friedrich Nietzsches "Der Antichrist". Ein philosophisch-historischer Kommentar*, Basel 2000, 288 a. 317.

⁶⁹ EH, Why I Write Such Excellent Books 4.

explains it in religious terms as "revelation" ("Offenbarung"). In this state signs come "involuntarily" ("unfreiwillig"), speaking for themselves, needing no interpretation.⁷⁰

This "most manifold" art of style is, according to Nietzsche, the art of using de-individualizing signs in an individualizing manner. He gives signs that—still—fascinate some, provoke others, attract some, repel others, and often even attract and repel the same at the same time. The style of Nietzsche's writings does not allow one to concede any distance to him as an individual. One constantly comes down – deliberately or undeliberately—either for or against him. Concepts beyond the individuals (das überindividuelle Allgemeine) create distance between individuals; they can relate to it as a third party. Lacking such a third party, individuals are immediately confronted with each other, and facing each other as individuals, they are, according to Nietzsche, Wills to Power. In scientific writing the author is obliged to withdraw as an individual as far as possible. Nietzsche, on the contrary, exposes himself intentionally as an individual; he "compromises" ("compromittirt") himself as an individual:

I have never taken a step publicly that did not compromise me: that is *my* criterion of doing right (EH, Why I Am So Wise 7).

By compromising himself Nietzsche makes his readers compromise themselves toward him. In a note in his Nachlass he writes:

My writings are very well defended: Whoever takes them and makes a mis-take by doing so as someone having no right to such books, makes at once a fool of himself -, a small attack of wrath forces him to shake off his most inner and most ridiculous being: and who would not know what always comes out there.⁷²

And in *Ecce homo* he says:

My acquaintances include several guinea pigs who illustrate for me different reactions to my writings—different in a very instructive manner.⁷³

The doctrines someone derives from Nietzsche's signs are *someone's* doctrines. To find contradictions and ambivalences in *Nietzsche's* doctrines thus could be a way of compromising oneself about his signs.

12. Nietzsche's doctrines are anti-doctrines. They refer to the individuality of every use of signs. As such they are coherent.

⁷⁰ EH, Why I Write Such Excellent Books, Z 3.

⁷² Nachlaß Herbst 1885 - Herbst 1886, KSA 12, 2[79].

⁷³ EH, Why I Write Such Excellent Books 3.

Nietzsche understood his work, as he writes in his late notes, as an "anti-movement" ("Gegenbewegung")⁷⁴ and his immoralist concepts as "strong anti-concepts",⁷⁵ as concepts directed against deeply-rooted metaphysical and moral concepts. His concepts are not supposed to communicate doctrines but to attack doctrines and destroy them:

- the concept of Nihilism: the doctrine of a given, defined, universal meaning in *Geschehen*,
- the concept of Will to Power: the doctrine of an existing or valid universal, and
- the concept of Overman: the doctrine of a fixed essence of man.

Being anti-doctrines, these concepts refer to signs and their leeway for the individual's double-game of arrangement and interpretation. As such they are encouraging and constructive:

- the "doctrine" of Nihilism—or, better now: the sign "Nihilism"—gives one the courage to face the individuality of all use of signs and to recognize the meaning one finds in a sign as the meaning one has given it by oneself,
- the "doctrine" of Will to Power -- or, better now: the sign "Will to Power" -- enables one (as was argued) to consider all meaning as relational meaning, as a meaning that arises through particular communication between particular individuals; and
- the "doctrine" of the Overman -- or, better now: the sign "Overman" -- invites one to look upon oneself and others as individuals, not as instances of a general essence, and thus encourages one ever again to overcome anew all such putatively essential determinations.⁷⁶

The "doctrine" or the sign of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same remains difficult. If it is evident that Nietzsche's "doctrines" are signs that encourage one to abstain from all doctrines, it ought to be evident in respect of that doctrine too. If one takes it as a metaphysical doctrine, everything, as it is now and is connected to everything else returns in eternal circles. But this produces a (quite simple) aporia:⁷⁷ If everything returns as it is I can not know and therefore I can not teach that it returns. The doctrine destroys itself *as* a doctrine: if it is true it can not be taught. The doctrine Nietzsche found here is a doctrine that immediately becomes an anti-doctrine, that makes teachability as such paradoxical. Besides, Nietzsche presented it in *Beyond Good and*

⁷⁴Cf. above all Nachlaß Frühjahr 1888, KSA 13, 14[14], [35], [47], [72], [89], [117], [119], [123], [124].

⁷⁵ Nachlaß Oktober 1888, KSA 13, 23[3]3.

⁷⁶ Nietzsche notes about that in Nachlaß Juni - Juli 1883: "I know the word and sign of the Overman: but I do not show it, I do not show it myself." (KSA 10, 10[44], slightly edited repetition in 16[2]).

⁷⁷ Cf. already Felix Hausdorff alias Paul Mongré, "Tod und Wiederkunft", in: *Neue Deutsche Rundschau* 10.12, (1899), 1277-1289, here 1281 f.

Evil 56 once again, but without naming it, and in an explicitly ethical sense, encouraging one to accept and affirm oneself as the individual one is, under the conditions in which one finds oneself. On the other hand, he never published his attempts to spell out the idea in a scientific manner, as a doctrine.

In a Nachlass note Nietzsche formulated his "thought" (as he mostly calls it) of the Eternal Recurrence explicitly in terms of signs. In a very short sketch designing the fourth act of a Zarathustra-drama he wrote:

- he prophesied for them: the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is the *sign*. **He forgets himself** and teaches the Recurrence from **out of the Overman**: the Overman *endures* it and *punishes with it*. Returning from the vision he dies of it" (KSA 10, 10[47]).

The leeway for the interpretation of this passage is quite wide. In the perspective of signs it could mean:

- Zarathustra "forgets himself" ("vergißt sich"): he loses any concept of himself;
- he teaches "from out of the Overman" ("aus dem Übermenschen heraus"): starting from his sacrifice of all concepts of man, being able to leave signs just signs;
- he teaches the Recurrence: that such a doctrine neutralizes itself and remains only as a sign for leaving signs just signs;
- "the Overman endures it" ("der Übermensch hält sie aus"): *being* Overman, he is able to leave signs just signs;
- "returning from the vision he dies of it" ("[b]ei der Rückkehr aus der Vision stirbt er daran."): in the world, as it is and as it is usually conceived, the type of Zarathustra can not be borne, just as Socrates and Christ could not. For ordinary people it is *too* hard always to do without any fixation of things and men in concepts.