

Nietzsche, Beyond the Subject

Georges Bataille's essay "The 'Old Mole' and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words *Surhomme* [Superman] and Surrealism" contains some of the most illuminating (and historically influential) pages on Nietzsche.¹ Here Bataille turns his attention to the meaning of the prefix *über*, whose sense is crucial for understanding the concept of *Übermensch*, which is central for the later Nietzsche. On his part, Heidegger also, both in his seminars on Nietzsche and in his essay "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" contained in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954), places at the heart of his reflection precisely the meaning of "overcoming" implied in the notion of *Übermensch*, according to him one of the five well known *Leitworte* of Nietzsche's thought. These are but two examples of the importance that the problem of the *Übermensch* has for both the proper reading of Nietzsche and the recognition of its vast theoretical implications. Even the question of Nietzsche's affinity with the ideologies of fascism and Nazism, which for years weighted on Nietzsche studies, is tightly linked with the sense we attribute to the notion of *Übermensch*, as both the preceding and the ensuing discussion is based precisely on the question of the prefix. The idea of a Nietzsche precursor of Nazism presupposes, in fact, that the superman (*superuomo*)—or, as I believe we should say, the overman (*oltreuomo*)—can be portrayed in relation to a pure and simple overturning of all *Humanität* ideals handed down to us by European humanism.

The problem, however, does not concern just or primarily Nietzsche's position in the humanistic tradition of Western thought. It concerns also and perhaps above all his relation to the philosophic dogmas of that

nineteenth- and twentieth-century form of thought that has condensed in an exemplary way the values of the European humanist tradition, that is to say, Hegelian-Marxian dialectics. Under the form of the materialist conception of history, to this day dialectics avers to offer the only valid interpretation of the conditions of human existence in the world, indeed it claims to be perhaps the only still feasible philosophy of history (and as such it is still widely practiced in our culture). It is precisely against dialectics that we must measure Nietzsche's effort to diagnose the evils of modern culture while suggesting some remedies. The question of the meaning of the *über* becomes thus a crucial factor in the discussion of the relation between Nietzsche's thought and dialectical thought (which, for example, takes up much of Deleuze's work).² This factor in turn is decisive for anyone who looks to Nietzsche with theoretical expectations—that is to say, seeking answers still pregnant with a future.

In our efforts to figure out the sense of the *über* that defines the overman, and with it the sense of Nietzsche's rapport with the humanistic and metaphysical tradition of the West, we cannot but run into the problem of the subject. I think there is reason enough to state that the overman of which Nietzsche speaks beginning with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* can be characterized as a "reconciled subject" (*soggetto conciliato*), a subject thought within the horizon of dialectics.

We can speak of a reconciled subject provided we conceive of it as the endpoint of a movement of *Aufhebung* (resolution), as an overcoming. But this concerns consciousness, as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as institutions, as in the *Philosophy of Right* and, more broadly and radically, in Marx's idea of the revolutionary suppression of alienation. Now, in a certain sense, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* undoubtedly manifests traits that bring him close to a reconciled subject. When, in fact, Nietzsche links him to another locus of his doctrine, namely the eternal recurrence of the same, the *Übermensch* is distinguished from the human being of the preceding tradition, the *bisheriger Mensch* (previous man), insofar as he no longer lives the tension between existence and sense, being and having to be, fact and value. Rather, he realizes in each moment of his existence a perfect coincidence of the two terms. The meaning of this can best be grasped if we think of medieval theology and its thesis of the coincidence of essence and existence in God and in God alone, whereas in all finite creatures finiteness is expressed precisely in the never perfect unity of the two terms. Nietzsche's description, in

aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*, of the individual capable of wanting the eternal recurrence of the same—and therefore of an individual who can be considered as the model for the *Übermensch*—is that of a happy person, someone who may want the repetition of the present moment because in it such a person experiences happiness, the coincidence of the event with its sense.³ Seen in the context of a broader and deeper analysis, the eternal recurrence cannot be coherently defined in Nietzsche's text other than as the condition of an existence no longer severed from sense (Deleuze 1985 [1962]). In existence thus understood, the structure of temporality is profoundly altered. For temporality has always been experienced by Western human beings as a movement toward transcendent values, goals, and objectives, which confer meaning to becoming only inasmuch as they withdraw from it. Yet this coincidence of sense and event, which following our hypothesis is what Nietzsche is thinking with his doctrine of the eternal recurrence, can it not be understood also as just another name for the self-transparency of spirit as Hegel theorized and imagined it realized in (his own) philosophy? Or even, as another name to indicate the unalienated subject, emancipated from the division of labor and the fetters of ideology, as was expected from the communist revolution—so suggestively described, in the tracks of Marx, by Ernst Bloch in his philosophy of hope?⁴

If such a coincidence were to obtain, we could legitimately think that the Nietzschean overman, and with him the proposal of the rebirth of a tragic, Dionysian culture, are still bound to the preceding tradition by means of a rapport of dialectical overcoming which is suppression, though also conservation and fulfilment. Now, the most reliable definition of Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* remains the one that thinks of him as identity of event and sense. There are, however, also solid reasons to believe that this identity cannot justify the identification of Nietzsche's *Übermensch* with the "reconciled subject" of dialectical thought. Above all, the *Übermensch* cannot be understood as a reconciled subject because it cannot be thought as *subject*. The very notion of subject is in fact the constant target of Nietzsche's unmasking of the contents of metaphysics and Platonic-Christian morality. As he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, paragraph 34: "Is it not permitted to be a bit ironical about the subject no less than the predicate and object?" This is an irony that, in Nietzsche's development, surfaces most strongly in his mature writings, right about the time when he is outlining the doctrine of the overman. This irony

is justified by the superficial, non-originary character of the subject. One cannot speak of certain “things in themselves,” writes Nietzsche in some note for the *Wille zur Macht*, because no things are given without reference to some horizon of sense that makes their self-giving possible. If this is how matters stand, we must then say that things are the work of the subject that represents, wants, and experiences them. Yet the subject also is something that is similarly “produced” (*Geschaffenes*), a “thing” among things, “a simplification with which to designate the *power* which posits, invents, experiences, distinguishing it from all other single positing, inventing, even thinking. That is, the faculty characterized in its difference from any particular. Ultimately, doing (*fare*) understood from the point of view of all the doing which we might still expect.”⁵

A power, however, he writes in another entry from the same period, “has not yet been able to come into being as such, what we get rather are its effects. But when these are marked as effects of a power they are as if translated into a completely different language.”⁶

In these and similar texts, one can gauge Nietzsche’s distance from any sort of empirical or transcendental idealism, as well as from any dialectical perspective. The power or force which we discover underneath the traditional notion of the subject is nothing comparable to the transcendental subject and its being distinct from the empirical subject, which makes it possible for dialectics—or for history itself—to exist as process of progressive identification of the two terms. For Nietzsche, the very term power is already a translation, or better: power is given only through its *Wirkungen*, which are ultimately translations. With respect to effects, the pointing to a power, a *Vermögen* which remains while distinguishing itself from all its changeable positions, is once again but an act of translation, a metaphor. Everything happens according to Nietzsche’s example in a page from *Twilight of the Idols*. A distant cannon shot is heard while sleeping; in the dream, we link it to a story which *a posteriori* seems to be its cause and explanation.⁷ Now, the will, consciousness, and the I as causes or subjects of what we happen to be doing or suffering, “are merely after-products, obtained after causality had, on the basis of will, been firmly established as a given fact, as *empiricism*” (*Twilight of the Idols*, par. 3). The subject is not a *primum* to which we can dialectically return, for it is itself a surface effect and, as the same paragraph states, has become “a fiction, a play on words.” It could not be, or it did not have to be, considered as such (a fiction) for a long period in our history because at

a certain point in this story “causality established itself as given.” Much like the other great errors of metaphysics and morality, belief in the I also goes back, by means of the belief in causality, to the will to find someone responsible for the events. The structure of language and above all the grammar of subject and predicate, of subject and object, together with the notion of being that metaphysics has built on such a structure (with principles, causes, etc.), is entirely modeled on the neurotic need to attribute a responsibility to becoming (ibid., par. 8). But “meanwhile we have thought better. Today we do not believe a word of it” (ibid., par. 3). The “meanwhile” to which Nietzsche refers here stands for the entire arc of the history of thought in which the constitution and destitution of metaphysics is consumed: It is that history of the death of God which makes superfluous any ultimate explanation, principles, and even the responsible subject. Dominated by the category of *Grund* (foundation), the universe of metaphysics is shaped by the superstitious belief in the subject. And it is this superstition that makes us see everything on the basis of what to do and what to endure.⁸ This perspective is formed following the will to find someone who is responsible, a will conditioned by the sentiment of fear, which in turn finds its justification in a reality where nature, not yet subdued by technique, shows itself as a permanent threat. This fear causes the institution of a complex metaphysical view of reality (by attributing causes) only by means of the complex mediations of the social realm. This is precisely what we see, for example, in *Twilight of the Idols*, in the concluding paragraphs of the section on the four great errors, where belief in causality is linked with belief in responsibility, and this leads to the “priests placed at the top of the ancient communities” who wanted to find at all costs those who were responsible in order to impose and inflict penalties, that is, in order to exercise one of the most basic aspects of power.

The “produced” aspect of the subject harks then back to a series of acts of metaphorization and interpretation that are determined by the social relations of power. These relations, however, do not falsify or distort anything: rather, they *posit* (*pongono*) the world of things, of causality, of the subject-object relation. As it is given to us today, this world does indeed have a history, however, and it is the one provisionally sealed off by the death of God, in other words, by the realization that when it comes to subject, responsibility, or causes, “we do not believe a word of it.” From this perspective, however, we are not compelled to turn to

less superficial, truer and originary structures—the very notion of force is only a *Bezeichnung*, a characterization by means of a sign, that is to say, a play on words and a linguistic effect, again much like the subject.⁹

The reasons for excluding the possibility of calling the Nietzschean *Übermensch* a subject are lodged within the destitution of the notion of subject as a notion tied to morality and Platonic-Christian metaphysics. We have, therefore, a better reason yet not to call the *Übermensch* a reconciled subject. (It would not be difficult to show, even in detail, that the notion of reconciliation is closely knit with that of subject; insofar as reconciliation is the removal of a conflict, it entails also a substantial conservation, the conservation of a substrate . . . a *subiectum*, to be precise.) This, however, does not mean that the notion of *Übermensch*—much like other late Nietzschean *Leitworte* connected to it, such as eternal recurrence, will to power, nihilism—is an untranslated, *nonmetaphorical* notion, a word endowed with its own “ownmost” sense, in other words, an essence that somehow falls outside the general law of interpretation, metaphorization, translation. Quite the contrary, it is precisely the theoretical status of Nietzsche’s philosophical *Leitworte* to furnish us the key to understand the sense of the prefix *über* in the term *Übermensch*, as well as and more broadly the non-dialectical character of its overcoming of the Western metaphysical tradition.

The surfacing of the metaphorical, produced, character of metaphysical notions such as thing and object does not lead to the recovery of more fundamental structures of production, but to the overt generalization of production itself. It is this, I think, that makes for Nietzsche’s peculiar position with respect to the philosophical tradition, and for the radically ultra-metaphysical character of his thought. Affirmations such as the one we cited above, according to which what happened in the meantime is that we no longer believe in the dogmas of metaphysics, or we believe in the thesis of the *Gay Science* whereby “God is dead,” which is not a poetic way of saying that God does not exist but rather the strong acknowledgement of an event that has occurred—these affirmations disclose one of the fundamental mechanisms of Nietzsche’s thought: the idea that the emerging of the nihilistic essence of becoming is an event that derives from the very logic of the development of metaphysics; and moreover, that becoming aware of this represents a real change in the history of metaphysics itself (but not because we thus recover the true essence of being against false and alienated theories). What happens, rather,

is what I think we can call an obvious generalizing, and intensifying, of metaphoric production itself. This is basically what we find described in the most pointed manner in the ample fragment on European nihilism from the summer of 1887.¹⁰ Or even in the long paragraph 9 of the third section of *On the Genealogy of Morals* (“What Is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?”), where we read of the condition of the human being who has come to understand the erroneous traits of the ascetic ideals and in general of the metaphysical view of the world. The condition of this person, who is the modern human being insofar as such an individual comes to terms with the death of God, is not the condition of the one who might have finally found peace in the acknowledgement of truth. Rather, this condition is marked by hubris, a sort of violence against oneself and things:

Our whole attitude toward nature, the ways in which we violate her with the aid of machines and the heedless inventiveness of our technicians and engineers, is *hubris* . . . our attitude toward *ourselves* is *hubris*, for we experiment with ourselves in a way we would never permit ourselves to experiment with animals.¹¹

Though there is no documentable etymological link here, nevertheless I think that the most illuminating reference for understanding Nietzsche’s *über* is precisely the notion of hubris as theorized in these pages from *On the Genealogy of Morals*. What constitutes the passage to the overhuman condition, as well as what constitutes the passage from passive nihilism to active nihilism, is not therefore the establishment of a condition of spiritual wellbeing, clarity, reconciliation, and end of conflicts but, rather, a freeing of the forces at play, an intensifying of the whole vital sphere which consists, as Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in “estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different.”¹²

Is the ideal of a humanity reconciled through possession of truth and the explicit assumption of reason as the guide for historical existence here contrasted with a vitalist vindication of biological forces, of the struggle for life and for domination? Or better said: Are we thus opposing, against the humanistic-metaphysical tradition (which was most recently expressed in the belief in the dialectical unfolding of history), the reduction of existence to the hubris of the manifold technical procedures

of control and organization of reality (as Heidegger holds when he considers Nietzsche, precisely in this perspective, as the philosopher of the conclusion-triumph of metaphysics, which has now turned entirely into scientific organization of the world)?

In both these interpretations of Nietzsche, and especially in the first one, we are witness to the individuation of a “force” called “vital force” (or impulse of conservation and expansion) in the first case, while in the second it appears as force of technical rationality effectively ordering the world (force which, as Heidegger says, can in no way be mistaken for vitalism as celebration of the murky swirl of the biological). Against both interpretations, however, I suggest we take seriously those texts of Nietzsche’s in which he excludes that force can in any way be named and identified, and transforms it instead into a fundamentally hermeneutic fact. The discovery of the senselessness (*insensatezza*) of becoming which takes place with the unfolding of nihilism is also, and inextricably, an affirmation of hubris. But this hubris, though, precisely because it arises as the recognition of the hermeneutic character of all alleged facts—there are no facts, only interpretations—cannot but give itself as interpretation *in progress*. Contrary to what may appear at first, then, we do not want to suggest a fleshed out version of Nietzsche’s exaltation of force and power; rather, we want to think to its ultimate consequences the sense of the dissolution undergone by the notion of thing in itself to the benefit of the affirmation of the interpretative structure of being. In such a structure—which is so named only as a metaphysical metaphor, since it is nothing that can be fixed and recognized as a datum; rather, it is the result of a “hybrid” affirmation, of an interpretive act—in such a structure, there is no room for a reconciled subject in which the attained identity of sense and event means also the fulfilment and conclusion of the dialectical movement. *Übermensch* should therefore be translated, more than with “overman” (*oltreuomo*), with “man of the beyond” (*uomo dell’oltre*), conferring to the prefix an adjectival function. What characterizes the *Übermensch* as his most proper attribute is the act of overcoming (*oltrepassamento*) as an exercise of hubris. But if we take seriously that dissolution of the thing in itself which Nietzsche meant to produce with his own very work, then hubris cannot be understood other than in a hermeneutic sense.

The *über* of the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, therefore, does not allude to an overcoming of a dialectical kind, nor does it hark to the exercise

of the will to life which is manifested in the struggle for existence or, less grossly, in the scientific-technological programming (*pianificazione*) of the world. The *über* is thought instead on the basis of the characteristic structure of the hermeneutic experience. This experience is conceived by Nietzsche in a way that is radically anti-metaphysical, not as access to being through the removal of the masks that being has adopted or were imposed on it, but as a tried and true event of being (*accadere dell'essere*) (and ultimately, as an expansion of being). It is such an ultra-metaphysical vision of hermeneutics that Nietzsche attempts to define by means of the notions of force and will to power. In fact, traits of hubris belong to interpretation as such, insofar as “forcing, adjusting, abbreviating, omitting, padding, inventing, falsifying” are constitutive of all interpretation.¹³ All this obtains precisely because interpretation cannot be metaphysically legitimated as the grasping of the essence proper to a thing. Whereas the notion of hegemony (which entails an idea of sovereignty as understood by Gramsci, the idea of a deep correspondence between master and subject) can be considered typical of a metaphysical-dialectical vision, Nietzsche’s insistence on force and on hubris excludes precisely this reconciled ideal of sovereignty as hegemony. Interpretation is constitutively injustice, superimposition, violence. The *Übermensch* exercises hubris with full awareness, whereas the traditional human being has always refused out of choice but more often through the masks imposed by the logic of social domination, to recognize this fact, developing as a result into a wretched being, a neurotic coward. The history of culture manifests an interpretative, hybrid structure, but this is also what for Nietzsche constitutes its permanent value. The history of the previous periods of humanity is not to be refused as history of violence, of the bloody “mnemotechnique” through which human beings became capable of living in a society and of organizing social work on the basis of rational schemes. What has become recognizable specifically through this mnemotechnique is the violence implicit in all interpretative processes. Yet, once it is recognized explicitly as constitutive of the givenness of things, violence changes meaning also: it becomes, much like all metaphysical terms (cause, principle, substance, subject, etc.), an explicitly hermeneutic term. The names it took on in the past (that is, the names of metaphysical entities), as well as the very name of force, are given explicitly as fictions (*finzioni*)—the true world, or the metaphysical *ontos on*, has become a fable, as Nietzsche writes in *Twilight of the*

Idols. God is dead, now we want the *Übermensch* to live. The overman however can only live as the human being of the *über*, or also, according to the beautiful image in *The Gay Science*, as the human being who knows how to continue to dream aware that he or she is dreaming.¹⁴ Not as a reconciled subject because there is no identity between *appearing* and *being*. The Nietzschean subject is appearance *only*, and is no longer defined in relation to being. The term indicates solely that the self-giving of something as something is a perspective, violently superimposing itself on other perspectives which, only on the basis of an inner exigency of interpretation, are identified with the thing itself. In Nietzsche's thesis, according to which the will to power means conferring to becoming the traits of being, the emphasis should be placed on becoming, and not on being.¹⁵ For it is not a question of finally attributing to becoming, also, the strong traits of being, but, rather, it is to becoming that one must give—with everything that this entails—the attributes that earlier belonged to being. On this we shall return in order to assess the ontological implications of Nietzsche's hermeneutics. Within the discourse on *Übermensch* and subject, this means that everything that is disclosed as being is actually becoming, and that is, interpretative production. As the bringing out of the constitutive *hubris* of all experience, of the universality of appearance and the impossibility of an identity between being and appearing, Nietzsche's doctrine of the *Übermensch* is here given in its most theoretically relevant light, and that is, as the extreme development and liquidation of any philosophy of reflection (*filosofia della riflessione*). With everything such a closing out implies, for example, in terms of the dissolution of the notion of *Bildung*.

As it turns out, the reference to *Bildung*, or to the idea of the formation of the individual which, within idealist historicism, attains crucial importance as the itinerary of the rise from empirical consciousness to transcendental consciousness, to the self-transparency of absolute spirit, this reference is no mere marginal note to the consequences of Nietzsche's dissolution of the notion of subject. Nietzsche's never ending effort to define through the *Wille zur Macht* the avenues for an explicitly planned and programmed breeding (*allevamento*) of the *Übermensch* is not only an "application" aspect of his philosophy, but is essential to the very definition of the contents of this thought.

The formation of the *Übermensch* as the individual characterized by hubris cannot be configured as hermeneutic process in the sense of

the unmasking of the true essence of the human being and of being. However, it does contain this process as one of its inseparable aspects and moments. The object of the unmasking, in Nietzsche's writings—*Human, All Too Human; Dawn; The Gay Science*—is not some true ground (*fondo*) of things, but the interpretative process itself. The result of the unmasking, therefore, cannot be an appropriation of the true, but an explication of the production of lies. Zarathustra's most constant character trait is in fact that of being, at one and the same time, a solution finder and a creator of enigmas. Hubris is not only that which interpretation discovers behind the dogmas and values of metaphysical morality; it is also the very activity of this discovering. The values that have been handed down are not dismissed as apparent; rather, they are merely overcome through acts of superimposition, further falsification, injustice. In such a way, though, the reconciliation that was denied to the *Übermensch* insofar as impossible reconciliation between being and appearing seems to return as absolutization of appearance. But now, will not the hubris of the *Übermensch* be in fact the pure explosion of a free metaphorizing activity, the spreading about of the creativity of symbols, enigmas, metaphors, which would thus become, despite everything, the recovery of an authentic humanity freed from the limitations that metaphysics and morality have imposed on it? Reading Nietzsche along these lines finds broad support in contemporary culture, especially within French thought. Undue oversimplifications often occur, however, when one tries to identify a “desiring” current within such culture somehow connected to Nietzsche, as, for instance, in Deleuze's overly schematic theses. Beyond schematizations, though, it remains true that Deleuze's theoretical proposal—in *Difference and Repetition*, for example—entails a “glorification of the simulacrum” that falls neatly in line with the absolutization of appearance, which in its turn rests on the attribution to becoming of the strong, affirmative, imposing traits of being. Deleuze's position however does not entail taking up becoming as the sole unique being, which would thus find itself divested precisely of its metaphysical and in some way disempowered (*depotenziate*) connotations.



What lies hidden here is an extremely metaphysical misunderstanding (*equivoco*) in reading Nietzsche, which is doubly metaphysical, first, because

it still entails the identification of *force*, to which a name is conferred, namely, creativity and symbolic freedom opposed to social limitation, imposition of codes, etc.; and second, because in this identifying of force we find overlaid—albeit as attributed to the simulacra—the luminous, affirmative characters that have always belonged to metaphysical being.

Such a misunderstanding is countered by what we may label the *experimental conception* of the *Übermensch*. In the perspective of an over-humanness as emancipation of a limitless creative activity, what cannot be explained is the fact that the overman exercises *hubris* above all on himself: “We perform experiments on ourselves which we would never think of performing on animals” writes Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. The subject has no authentic constitution to emancipate, and this not even in the sense of a vital activity that one should set free, of impulses or desires that might be found beyond the removal or repression that would constitute culture. Nietzsche’s nominalism is total. The subject is nothing else than the activity of positing, overcoming, falsifying (*porre, oltrepassare, falsificare*). Therefore, its impulses and desires too are the products of positions and falsifications. The experiment does not consist in the act by which one discovers that at the ground of metaphysical moral values there is a “human, all too human” reality, but in asking oneself, at the end of this process of unmasking, if and “whether science can furnish goals of actions after it has proved that it can take such goals away and annihilate them.”¹⁶ Nietzsche calls this experiment “heroism.” However, to face this problem heroically means taking stock of the hermeneutic nature of being and of experience.

What remains indeterminate, in *The Gay Science*, is a crucial aspect of the experiment, and that is the criterion on the basis of which we can say whether it has succeeded or failed. Given that interpretation is an act of violence and superimposition, we cannot think of its success as measurable in terms of a greater or lesser correspondence with the essence of things. Essence is the name given to the result of the experiment, to the thing as it is constituted during the interpretative act. In the posthumously published 1873 writing *On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche had dealt with this issue in terms which it is interesting to compare to the hermeneutics of his later texts. In the unpublished 1873 text, the experience of human beings in the world is described in terms of the production of metaphors—the emotive reactions stimulated by the encounter with things are associated to images and objects, become

concepts and names for them, without there being between the ones and the others any objective link. The world of truth is constituted when, with the rise of organized society, a given metaphorical system is adopted as canonical and imposed on everyone (if one wants to communicate, that is, live within that society). There are also other metaphorical systems; however, they are confined to purely subjective validity, and constitute the sphere of poetry and of artistic production in general.



Compared to this structure in Nietzsche's unpublished, youthful work, the later hermeneutic thesis represents a key turning point. The turn is given by the introduction of the notion of force. In the 1873 essay, Nietzsche does indeed hold fast to the metaphoric, that is to say, interpretative, hybrid, character of all knowing and also to the thesis that the establishment of an interpretation as truth is the fruit of an intervention external to the metaphorical activity, therefore the fruit of an act of force. But it remains a rigid scheme, which in fact is resolved (albeit not explicitly, given the fragmentary nature of the writing), through a sort of counter-foisting between a free poetic activity (felt as natural and proper to the state of nature), and the obligation to lie on the basis of precise rules. The Rousseauian aspects in this Nietzschean theory of language have been pointed out, for example, by Bernard Pautrat.¹⁷ If followed to its ultimate consequence, while keeping it isolated from the developments and complications of Nietzsche's mature hermeneutics, the structure of the essay on truth and lying leads to a flattening of the idea of the *Übermensch* onto the idea of the freeing of an allegedly natural symbolic activity from any limit of a social-communicative character. The metaphorizing activity, the hermeneutic hubris, does indeed experience a process of emancipation when the true world becomes a fable, but this is in favor neither of the reestablishment of a hypothetical, idyllic state of nature, nor of a pure and simple introduction of chaos in social communication. It is true that the rigidity of the communicative codes, and of any kind of codes, has long been required by the exigencies of the organization of labor within a state strongly dependent on nature. This rigidity, today, can be slackened, and this is what takes place with the death of God and the fall of any metaphysical structure of the universe. But the social system turning elastic and metaphysics dropping out of

sight do not necessarily entail the pure, untrammelled explosion of a symbolic activity bound by no limit or need for validation (*validazione*). The whole activity of perpetrating violence and falsifying which goes into interpretation is thought of as an experiment. And this requires a tried and true self-transcending on the part of the interpreter: Nietzsche in fact speaks of *Selbstverneinen*, *Sich-selbst-überwinden* (self-transcending).¹⁸ The experiment is not, therefore, pure effusion, it requires an effort that somehow presupposes a normative criterion. Only in this way can we speak, as Nietzsche does, of experimenting above all with oneself.

When compared with the situation described in the essay on truth and lying, this notion of experiment is more attentive to the play of forces, putting out of range any Rousseauian reading of Nietzsche's philosophy. There is no metaphoric activity that escapes the play of forces, the impositions of codes. There is no symbolization at the state of nature. Both the metaphors and the subject therein expressed are constituted as always-already in a complex interpretative play. Introducing the notion of force in hermeneutics means not only underscoring the impositive, nominalist essence of interpretation, but also bringing into view its ever differential character. A force is never absolute, it is always measured and displayed against other forces. There is no struggle among supposedly ultimate subjects so that some could impose themselves on others; there is, instead, their coming into being as subjects within a play of forces which somehow precedes them. Nietzsche refers to this play when he speaks of how the *Übermensch* overcomes and negates himself in that experiment which is the very exercise of the hermeneutic hubris. If it is difficult to explicate exactly what this radical hermeneutic is, it is at least clear what it is not. It is not a doctrine of the will to domination (*dominio*), because the latter supposes in fact that the struggle takes place among subjects understood as ultimate metaphysical points. The mechanisms for the constitution-destitution of the subject as outcome of a complex play of metaphors, of recognitions and adjustments of forces, are what Nietzsche tried to describe in the monumental preparatory work for the *Wille zur Macht*, which configures itself as the sketch for a hermeneutic ontology in the double sense of this term: a knowledge of being which begins with the unmasking reconstruction of the human all too human origins of the supreme values and objects of traditional metaphysics; and a theory of the conditions of possibility of a being which is given explicitly as the result of interpretative processes. "To continue to dream aware

that we are dreaming,” according to the expression from *The Gay Science* to which we hark continuously from any point in Nietzsche’s thought.

Nietzsche’s relative failure, the incompleteness of the projected *Hauptwerke*, which the *Wille zur Macht* was supposed to be, the very problematic character of the key notions of his late philosophy, and the difficulty of ordering them in an all-coherent whole—all of this coincides simply with the difficulties confronting any contemporary project of a hermeneutic ontology. However, the study of the meaning of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* should allow us at least to clarify a few points, on which we think we can build further.

1. First of all, a radical hermeneutic ontology implies the abandonment of the metaphysical notion of subject understood as unity, even when this is thought of as the result of a dialectical process of identification. The normal condition of the *Übermensch* is scission. The philosophical sense of this Nietzschean view consists entirely in its placing itself at the extreme opposite of any philosophy of reflection as recomposition of the subject with itself, as *Bildung* in the sense this term has in modern culture. The philosophy of reflection captures indeed the divided character of the I, but at least in the dominant trend of nineteenth-century idealism, it exorcises it through the dialectic of self-identification.

The discovery of the constitutively split character of the subject links Nietzsche’s thought to various aspects of twentieth-century culture, which find in this connection a unifying feature. On the one hand, the split subject, the Nietzschean overman is certainly the “I” experienced by avant-garde art and culture (not only in its most emblematic manifestations such as expressionism, but also in more classical figures such as Musil. Musil in fact takes from Nietzsche precisely those aspects that allude to dissolution, in statements such as “*Das Leben wohnt nicht mehr im Ganzen.*”¹⁹ And yet, on the other hand, next to this more dramatic vision of the constitutive split of the *Übermensch*, we cannot forget another sense of the concept, which has unfortunately been left in the shadow by Nietzsche scholarship and which contains, to my way of seeing it, the greatest potential for development. It is the aspect of the question that Nietzsche develops especially in the works of the middle period of his production, in *Human, All Too Human*, in *Daybreak*, and in *The Gay Science*. The split *Übermensch* is also, and above all, the individual of “good character” mentioned in a page from *Human, All Too Human*, that is, the individual who has relinquished all metaphysical certainties

without reactive nostalgias, and is capable of appreciating the multiplicity of appearances as such. This overman is the human being that belongs to the world of intensified communication, or better yet, of metacommunication. I am thinking for example of the developments which hermeneutics has undergone through Habermas's recent work, with his theory of communicative competence, or, on a different ground, of the elaboration of a theory of games and fantasy as metacommunicative facts in the work of Gregory Bateson. The overhuman condition of the split subject does not configure itself solely as the experimental tension of the artistic, twentieth-century, avant-garde human being, but also and above all, I believe, as the normal condition of postmodern human beings in a world in which the intensification of communication—freed at both the political and the technical level—paves the road to an effective experience of individuality as multiplicity—to the dreaming knowing one is dreaming of which we read in *The Gay Science*.

2. Nietzsche's hermeneutic ontology is not only an anthropological doctrine, but also a theory of being that lists among its principles that of "attributing to *becoming* the character of being." As the critics who underscore the ultimately nihilistic traits of Nietzsche's thought can well perceive, the power which the will wants is possible only if this will has before itself being identified with nothingness. I would rather say instead that in order for the will—that is, the interpretative hubris—to be itself, it needs that being be weak. This alone makes possible that play of communication and metacommunication in which things are constituted and, together, also always deconstituted. As is the case for the overman, for the will to power too we need an interpretative commitment capable of eliminating all metaphysical misunderstandings. Even after the end of metaphysics, being remains still modelled upon the subject. But to the split subject that is the overman there can no longer correspond a being (*essere*) conceived with the traits—of power, force, definiteness, eternity, unfolded actuality—that tradition has always attributed to it. In the end, the theory of the will to power seems to lay the foundations for an ontology that repudiates precisely those elements of power which have dominated Western thinking and is actually pointed toward a weak conception of being. Thought in the light of a notion of the *Übermensch* as a hermeneutic-communicative fact, a weakened notion of being presents itself as the ontology adequate unexpectedly to account for some problematical aspects of human experience in the world of late modernity.