
Translation
Circulus Vitiosus

by Pierre Klossowski

translated by Joseph D. Kuzma

Preface

A hundred years after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, amidst the decadent splendour of the Château of Cerisy-la-Salle, the fabled lineage of French Nietzscheanism enjoyed what might arguably be considered its apotheosis; a single event whose significance to the history of ideas is perhaps overshadowed only by the undeniable philosophical incandescence, as feverishly intense as it was brief, which captivated its famous participants. If the colloquium at Cerisy, held during July of 1972, still elicits interest from us today, over thirty-five years later, it is perhaps because there has developed around it something of a mythos in the intervening years. Imagine two generations of Europe's greatest thinkers, from across the spectrum of political and philosophical persuasions, coming together over the course of two weeks for the sole purpose of discussing Nietzsche. Indeed, to speak of Cerisy is quite simply to evoke the convergence of a veritable pantheon: Derrida, Deleuze, Lyotard, and Nancy—all of whom, alongside their German counterparts, Eugen Fink and Karl Löwith, as well as a plethora of others—delivered papers and joined in open discussion. Cerisy represents, then, a high-water mark for those movements in European philosophy which recognised, in the figure of Nietzsche, a spokesperson and emblem for the valorisation of difference, life, and creativity. And if these movements of thought still matter to us today, then we would do well to acknowledge the one individual who, from the 1950s onward, did perhaps more than anyone else to facilitate and promote the French reception of Nietzsche's work. That individual is Pierre Klossowski.

As a philosopher, translator, and scholar, Pierre Klossowski's contribution to the development of the distinctively "French" Nietzsche is difficult to over-state. Though his intellectual engagement with the works of Nietzsche dates back to the 1930s, when alongside his friend Georges Bataille he recognised in Nietzsche's *oeuvre* a conceptual repertoire capable of displacing the Hegelian-Marxist narrative of teleological completion, it was with his translation of *The Gay Science* in 1954 that Klossowski unmistakably established himself as one of the central figures in French Nietzsche studies. Klossowski's translation was followed in 1958 with the seminal essay, "Nietzsche, le polythéisme et la parodie," which would come to profoundly influence an entire generation of philosophers and critics, radically reconfiguring the entire paradigm of

Nietzsche scholarship through its innovative and controversial reading of the death of God – an event which, for Klossowski, entails the inexorable dissolution of personal identity.

By 1964, Klossowski's reading of Nietzsche had taken a number of provocative steps forward, as evidenced by his stunning contribution to the Royaumont Nietzsche Conference (organised by Deleuze) held in the same year. The essay, "**Oubli et anamnèse dans l'expérience vécue de l'éternel retour du Même,**" would later be reworked for inclusion within Klossowski's most significant and enduring contribution to philosophical discourse—the 1969 text, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*. **The work chronicles, with scholarly acuity, the relationship between Nietzsche's oscillating valetudinary states and the fortuitous emergence of the thought of the eternal return, a thought which, quite literally, demanded the destruction of the very organ (Nietzsche's brain) which rendered it possible in the first place.**

Klossowski's Cerisy paper, "Circulus Vitiosus" (published below in English translation for the first time) is the author's final published writing on Nietzsche. Though closely related to his previous works, and in some ways a continuation upon the themes introduced in *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*, it also contains a number of themes and accents not previously elaborated upon. Key among these is the notion of *complot*, or conspiracy. To follow Deleuze's explication featured in the discussion that follows Klossowski's paper, a conspiracy can be understood as "a community of singularities." Taken in this light, much of Klossowski's paper constitutes an attempt at subtly outlining the complex tension that arises between precisely such a community and the pervasive cultural forces seeking to *regularize* it, particularly those various mediocrising forces belonging to the institutions of psychoanalysis and late capitalism.

By raising the question of the community in this context, Klossowski's paper presciently anticipates both Nancy's *La Communauté désœuvrée* (1982) and Blanchot's later *La communauté inavouable* (1988). For all three thinkers, the question of community demands, rather aporetically, that we attempt to think relationality outside the scope of restricted expenditure and the reciprocity of exchange. Or more precisely, to follow Deleuze's adept commentary on Klossowski's essay, "the problem which we now inherit from him is to know if it is possible to conceive of links between singularities which would have as their criteria the eternal return, insofar as it implicates the loss of identity, not just for individuals but also for societies and groups."

I would like to thank Leslie Hill, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and Sarah Jane Barr for their valuable comments and suggestions on the translation. Any mistakes that remain are wholly my own.

Translation

“When one makes his way towards a goal, it seems inconceivable that the absence of goal in itself could be a principle of belief.

Everywhere I look, I see nothing but the subsistence of the very people who compromise life and the value of life.”—*Anti-Darwin*

To begin with, I shall give a quick overview of what might be called Nietzsche’s authentic thought (this term, “authentic,” of course, is very problematic). If it can be permitted, however, we wish to employ it in the sense that over the past forty years the intricacies of Nietzsche’s supposed system have become increasingly accessible, leading us to the certainty that from now on, no one will dare to separate, oppose, or consider mutually exclusive (as was commonplace during the half-century following Nietzsche’s death) the notions of the eternal return and the will to power. But if Nietzsche is indeed the philosopher of will to power precisely *because* he is the advocate of eternal return, then this indisputable Heideggerean delimitation can now, on the basis of Nietzsche’s own declarations, find itself interpreted more diversely, and more problematically. Based upon these declarations, we can trace the following stages by which—leaving behind the ecstatic instant of Sils-Maria, having converted the lived experience into a concept, or into what he calls the thought of thoughts—Nietzsche tried to give a scientifically elaborated version of it, and subsequently introduced it as the impulsion [*ressort*] behind the will to power when he revealed the eternal return as the secret instrument in his doctrine of selection, or to speak purely in historical terms, as that which facilitates the passage from passive to active nihilism whose sign and figure is the *circulus vitiosus deus*.¹

The figure of the vicious circle leads (as I ventured to show in my earlier study) to an analysis which I find absolutely indispensable to an understanding of the Nietzschean criteria of decline and ascent, health and sickness, gregariousness and particularity, and more specifically, as far as the vicious circle is concerned, the fortuitous case. For my part, I have allowed myself to be guided by a constant thread (*un fil conducteur*), one that seemed to me most reliable for overcoming the feeling of strangeness that, *prima facie*, Nietzsche’s affirmations inspire—in other words, that which suggests, in Nietzsche’s affirmations and projects, the preparation of a conspiracy [*un complot*]. One is forced either to turn away from this aspect of Nietzsche’s writing as if it were an absurdity irreconcilable with his authentic thought, or one can choose to accept what this thought tells us at first glance, that is, that we have no adequate criteria for judging what is aberrant and what is not, other than the possibilities and impossibilities of living on the basis of a certain thought. Neither the doctrine of selection, nor the notion of conspiracy, allow us to deal with the terms “overhuman,” “master and slave,” and “sovereign formation” as pure metaphors.

Nietzsche’s conspiracy is hatched against the secret collusion between institutional morality and Darwinian theory (“selection is not necessarily favourable to the exceptions, but only to the mediocre”). However, it only comes to fruition at the moment when the thought of eternal

¹ The phrase *circulus vitiosus deus* appears in aphorism 56 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

return becomes explicit. The doctrine of the vicious circle has the effect of abolishing the principle of identity, the identity of the individual, and therefore also of those subjects of power who never use their power unless they can imagine, in advance, a goal and a meaning for their action. Because the vicious circle abolishes, once and for all, alongside identity the meaning of acts and demands their infinite repetition in a complete absence of a *telos*, it becomes the selective criteria of experimentation within the conspiracy itself.

What sovereignty will ever dare to abandon the notions of sense and purpose, from which an established power authorizes itself to dominate?—What sovereignty will use any other form of violence than that of absurdity?

This sovereignty, or these sovereign formations (*Herrschaftsgebilde*), which Nietzsche evokes, would necessarily merge their domination with their own disintegration if, indeed, they take the form of an institution, or a State, in the traditional sense. There can be no question, in Nietzsche's thinking, therefore, of instituting a political regime in any traditional sense. Nietzsche's conspiracy is thus only conceivable insofar as it would be led by some secret, elusive community, whose actions would resist suppression by any regime. Only such a community would have the ability to disperse itself through its action whilst maintaining a certain efficacy, at least until the inevitable moment when gregarious reality appropriates the community's secret in some institutional capacity.

Nietzsche speaks about the advent of a power which would be, in effect, that of a secret society comprised of experimenters, scholars and artists, in other words, *creators* who will know how to act according to the doctrine of the vicious circle and who will make it the *sine qua non* of universal existence. Hereby, he introduces the theme of eliminatory terror [*la terreur éliminatrice*], which would arise from the thought of eternal return.

How, we might ask, is this thought alone capable of evoking such terror? Nietzsche would reply: merely by its contents—for this thought would not interest the masses. Indeed, it could only be taken seriously if the fear which is implicit to it comes to be translated into consecutive acts the content of which would have no other goal or purpose than to return *ad infinitum*. No political regime could ever adopt such a thought, and the individuals and the masses who would be incapable of living under this sign, without purpose or meaning, will begin—he supposes—to disappear.

Nietzsche, in his own speculations, not only takes into consideration the concrete probability of realising such a scenario as being utopian, he also analyses the empirical data, contextualising his theory within the evolution of modern economy. The complete management of the Earth, the planetary planning of existence [*la planification planétaire de l'existence*—obeys the law of an irreversible movement. The economic movement which consecrates the reigning mentality of the false, Darwinian selection, leads to a mediocrisation of man, and demands a reaction in the form of a counter-movement.

It may be helpful to consider the following passage, which more or less all of you will

know, and which is useful to reread in light of the developments that I will subsequently try to develop:²

To demonstrate that an increasingly economical use of men and mankind, a ‘machinery of interests’ and actions ever more closely entangled, *necessarily implies a counter-movement*. I designate this the *elimination of the luxury surplus from mankind*: which will bring about the emergence of a *stronger* species, a higher type whose conditions of emergence and survival will differ from those of the average man. My concept, my parable for this type of human, as is well known, is that of the ‘overhuman.’

That first path, which we now clearly see, entails adaptation, levelling-down, a higher Chinesehood, modesty in instincts, contentment in the diminishing stature of mankind—a kind of *stagnation in the level of the human being*. Once we encounter the inevitable economic and administrative totalization of the earth, humanity will *be able* to discover its greatest significance as a piece of machinery within that economy: as an enormous clockwork of ever increasingly smaller, and more subtly ‘adapted’ cogs; as an embodiment of the increasing superfluity of all dominating and commanding elements; as a totality of forces, whose individual factors represent minimal forces, minimal values. In opposition to this levelling-down and adaptation of men to an increasingly specialised usefulness, a counter-movement is needed, namely, the engendering of a *synthesizing, amalgamating, and justifying* man for whom this mechanisation of mankind is precisely the condition of his existence, and the basis upon which he is able to invent for himself his superior form of existence . . .

Furthermore, he needs the antagonism of the levelled-down masses, the pathos of distance in relation to them; he raises himself over them, he lives off them. This superior form of *aristocratism* is that of the future.—Or, to speak in moral terms, this total machinery, the solidarity of all cogs, represents the maximum *exploitation* of man: but this presupposes a species of man for whom this exploitation has meaning. Otherwise, this scenario would merely constitute an overall *value* reduction of the human *type*—a *regressive phenomenon* in the grandest style.

One can now see that to which I am opposed, namely, *economic* optimism: it is the notion that an increase in costs for everyone necessarily leads to an increase in everyone’s profits. To me, it seems that the contrary is rather the case: *the costs of everyone add up to an overall loss*; the human being is *devalued* so that one is no longer capable of justifying this enormous process. A ‘Justification,’ a *new* ‘Justification’—that is what humanity needs...”

Posthumous Notes 1887, 10 [17]

And following from this we come to another text, entitled “The Strong of the Future,”

2 In translating the following passages from the *Nachlaß* I have attempted to reconcile, wherever possible, Nietzsche’s original text with the French version quoted by Klossowski. In the process, a recent English translation by Kate Sturge, which appears in *Writings from the Late Notebooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), has also been consulted.

which points us directly toward the heart of the conspiracy:

The emergence of a *stronger species*, which up to this point has proceeded partly out of hardship and partly out of chance, can now finally be comprehended and deliberately *willed*: we are capable of producing the conditions under which such an elevation of humanity is possible.

Up until now, education was conducted strictly for society's profit: *not* for the greatest possible profit of the future, but for the benefit of the present moment. Everything was relegated to strictly instrumentalist usage. Supposing the *wealth of forces* were in excess, then one could imagine some *forces being siphoned off* for the sake of benefiting a society not of the present, but of the future.

The urgency of this task would be better appreciated if it were understood that society in its present form is in the midst of a powerful transformation, and that in the future *it will no longer be capable of exiting for itself*, but only as an instrument in the hands of a stronger race.

The levelling-down of mankind is precisely the impetus for leading us to think about the breeding of a stronger race, which would discover that its particular excess lies in precisely those areas where the species-at-large is subject to diminishment (will, responsibility, self-assurance, the power to set itself goals).

The *means* would be those taught by history: *isolation* through *interests* of preservation which are the inverse of those which prevail in the present; practicing the revaluation of values; distance as pathos; a free conscience with regard to all that which is today least esteemed and considered most reprehensible.

The *levelling-down* of the European man confronts today as a great, irreversible process—one that should be even accelerated.

The necessity of an *abyss opening*, of a *distance*, of a *hierarchy* is thus given: it is precisely *not* a matter of impeding the process.

This *levelling-down species*, from the moment it is realised, requires *justification*: a justification which is brought into play by a sovereign individual who stands over it and uses it as a platform for elevating himself.

What I am describing is not merely a master-race whose task would be to govern, but a race with *its own sphere of life*, with an excess of force for beauty, courage, culture, manners, right up to the highest spiritual realm; an *affirming* race which can accord itself every luxury . . . powerful enough not to need the tyranny of the virtue-imperative, neither parsimonious nor given to pedantry, beyond good and evil; a hothouse for strange and exotic plants.”

Posthumous Notes 1887, 9 [153]

What is not as clearly stated here as in the other passage, and yet does form part of Nietzsche's vision, is the notion of excess [*surcroît*].³ What Nietzsche discerns in the actual state of

3 Literally, “growing-out-of.”

affairs is that men of excess, those who create, now and from the outset, the meaning of the values of existence (a very paradoxical configuration for Nietzsche) form, so to speak, an occult hierarchy for which the supposed hierarchy of current labourers does all the work. They are precisely the real slaves, the ones who do the greatest labor.

Therefore, for Nietzsche, the human species, from the moment that it first articulates itself, through production, in order to maintain itself at the level of humanity, can only do so through the absurdity of a total reduction of its moral resources achieved through work itself. To reverse this annihilating condition of the absurd into supreme meaning, this meaning must coincide with total iniquity [*la totale iniquité*].

I now shall pose my first question. In what measure would the Nietzschean description of excess not simply be an abbreviated, non-dialectical, version of the notion of class-struggle and infrastructure in Marx? It must be said that Nietzsche's thinking culminates in considerations on economy only by way of the utilitarianism of John Stuart-Mill. He sees in Darwinian selection and Anglo-Saxon systems a reigning gregarious mentality that turns into a moral conspiracy, and tends to render impossible and incomprehensible his vision for the future. Nonetheless, it is upon this terrain that Nietzsche develops his own conspiracy. Of course, in the process, he completely ignores the progression of thought, in Marx, proceeding from the inversion of the Hegelian dialectic—and if he had been aware of it, were he to have been familiar with it, he would have nonetheless thought the same. Notwithstanding his historical incomprehension of the master and the slave, the notion of excess deployed in opposition to the mediocrisation process leads him to a terrain similar to that which is occupied by Marx. Both meet, so to speak, back-to-back [*dos à dos*].

One might establish, then, a parallel between what Nietzsche calls the mediocrisation of individuals in proportion to the accumulation of wealth, and the alienation of the proletariat described by Marx—but the important divergence, which is fundamental, lies in their differing notion of value [*valeur*]. Marx's analysis with regard to the mystification of the exchange of goods coincides, if it can coincide in a negative sense, with Nietzsche's notion of value, and goes contrary to what he puts down as the source, or basis, of any affirmation; namely, knowledge that the only valuable thing is the mystification of life by itself. Any demystification coincides with a decrease in the value of life, any remystification with an increase. A production that does not derive from an active mystification will always remain less important for existence. It is the affects that engender the obligation to produce. Production will only ever be a replication of this obligation and any division of the labour of the affects will always aim at the diminishing of their own production force. For Nietzsche, this is one way of demystifying the fact of life.

All in all, we encounter at precisely this point the commentary of the concept, not to say the criterion, of the *Will to Power*. Any domination must generate a creation which transforms pure violence into pleasure [*jouissance*], as much on the part of those who create this violence—and this, as much on the moral level as on the material level (be it merely through the fact of

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communicating, which Nietzsche always identified with a violent act)—as for those who are subjected to this violence. The affective and material exploitation, in whatever form it takes, can only be practised as long as the need to be exploited exists. The necessity to transvaluate values comes from the fact that the moral resources of a specific form of exploitation are exhausted; hence, one must find in people another level where the desire to be exploited would provide them the benefit of pleasure. A form of domination collapses as soon as it overlooks this principle of creating implements of pleasure constituted by a given value. Violence and pleasure have no foundation as soon as creation disappears. The violence of absurdity can only crumble back to the same level as the absurdity of violence.

The second question would be to inquire into how matters stand with the possibility of adopting a Nietzschean comportment in relation to our current upheavals, no longer from the point of view of power, or potency, but from the perspective of the vicious circle, which is a manifestation of the nihilist judgment passed upon all acting. Let me remind you once again of the genesis of the thought of eternal return. As I have insisted, this thought, as the theme of Nietzsche's highest contemplation, becomes the instrument of a conspiracy. It is from this stage onwards that the *god of the vicious circle* can truly be considered the blossoming of a delusion [*délire*].⁴ The question that I now pose is whether delusory or deranged behaviour, in this sense, when confronted with reality, can become in any way efficacious, or if, more generally, any deranged comportment might be said to constitute an efficient resistance in the face of a determined adverse force.

How, in any case, does the vicious circle, as a selective dilemma, become the instrument of a conspiracy? That is, do you recognise or not that your actions have no sense or purpose, other than the fact that they are always nothing but the same situations infinitely repeated? What follows from this is the following exigency: act with no remorse. The worst, if it has not yet been attained, never shall be. Here we begin to see the basis upon which Nietzsche, with all the terror alluded to earlier, introduces his experimental programme of conspiracy. And yet, the terror of the thought of eternal return, in this form, may very well be nothing other than a parody of the real terrorism of industrial modernity. The god of the vicious circle, as the pure simulation of a universal economy, is still only an appearance. Even if the thought of the circle were also merely a parody, the parody would remain, nonetheless, a deranged creation in the form of a conspiracy. If the conspiracy suggests certain acts to be accomplished, then the thought of the vicious circle demands that these acts, once accomplished, become necessarily the never-ending simulation of an action emptied by repetition of all its content, which will never be established once and for all.

⁴ The noun *délire* (meaning frenzy or delirium) and its adjectival form *délirant/e* are used by Klossowski as terms intended to be juxtaposed—though by no means in a straight-forwardly dialectical manner—with the notion of gregarious, or everyday, reality. The word *delusion* seems to carry this particular connotation most effectively, as long as it is understood to operate within the economy of what Klossowski elsewhere refers to as the *fantasm*.

Who, or what, therefore, would be the simulating agent [*l'agent simulateur*]? Nothing but the pathos that Nietzsche proposes as the simulating power *par excellence*. The thought of eternal return, which abolishes identity and empties all acts of their content, therefore implicates itself in the preparation of a conspiracy that essentially foretells a series of experimentations. Who wills the ends, wills the means, says Nietzsche. Moreover, experimentation, in this sense, is principally a type of act which reserves for itself the privilege to fail. The failure of an experiment reveals more than its success. Or more precisely, at the level of pathos, failure and success merge within a never-ending play of impulses. Here, major experimentation does not aim for the practical success of a conspiracy ending in the attainment of some goal; but rather, with the manifestation of a state, reigning clandestinely, eternally, that we can seek and pursue as a simulated end [*une fin prétendue*].

When Nietzsche says: he who wants the ends, also wants the means, he speaks in two registers—that of gregariousness and that of singularity, that of individuals identical to themselves and that of the fortuitous case [*cas fortuit*], that of common wisdom and that of delusion [*délire*]. But when this is comprehended at the level of institutional language, it is immediately denied at the level of pathos. The end, which is delirium, is here inscribed in the means, like phantasm within simulacra, which affirms itself as the means to impose in universal fashion the constraint, up until now hidden, of the phantasm. The anti-Darwinian protest, which denounces the false interpretation of natural selection, is in itself nothing of a delusion—it is essentially lucid, reasonable. It is precisely the anti-gregarious intervention projects and the criteria for these interventions, invariably aimed at raising humanity to a higher level, which convert the contemplative thought of the eternal return *as the instrument of conspiracy*, into a delusion. It is only from this point onwards, even though the thought of return seems to have been neglected in its contemplative prestige by the experimental project of the conspiracy, that pathos achieves its so-called delusory construction. The true motive behind the conspiracy was not the effective realisation of a material upheaval which, according to the vicious circle, is already inscribed in the economic fate of the world. Rather, under the sign of the vicious circle, anti-Darwinian conspiracy entails the coming to autonomy of productions that are primarily pathological as the very condition of a monumental upheaval in the relation between the social forces present. So it seems that the doctrine of the vicious circle passes through all the projects emanating from the initial psychological consequences of the *Will to Power*, as the practical devaluation of these projects, and by the same token, as a valorisation of the delusion which engenders them.

DISCUSSION

Léopold Flam: If one places oneself in what could be called the philosophical tradition, say from Thales to Hölderlin, don't you think that it would be necessary to say that the philosopher is someone who determines himself [*le philosophe est celui qui se détermine lui-même*]? Now autonomy, as a realisation of oneself and comprehension of the world, eliminates the delusion

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[*délire*]. Otherwise, all this drifts into fascism.

Pierre Klossowski: I have no response, other than to say that what I have described goes beyond philosophy as you define it.

Léopold Flam: If the thinker goes against the current, if in his solitude he dares to protest, it seems to me, that it runs contrary to the fantasm you have described. This is the reason why I dare to say it: I am against what you say, but not against you . . .

Pierre Klossowski: Well, I have no further response to your comments.

Norman Palma: One problematic point in Klossowski's interpretation is the supposed rapprochement between Nietzsche and Marx. For Nietzsche, it is precisely the universe of the bourgeoisie that he calls 'the last man,' the universe where there is but a single flock and no shepherd. For Marx, on the contrary, this universe is precisely where the opposition between the master and the slave is the greatest. Nietzsche's true objective is the restructuring, not the deconstructing, of domination. I fear that you have somewhat concealed this opposition in your treatment of value and alienation. From the passages that you read, which are redolent of the classic Nazi interpretation of Nietzsche, I expected an exegesis that justified the portrayal of Nietzsche as a libertarian.

Pierre Klossowski: For Nietzsche, the world cannot exist outside a constraint; if socialism triumphs—and, in this case, Nietzsche says it expressly, it can achieve with a considerable expenditure of energy the basis it requires—it is necessary to expect a new tension, because each time society, no matter which one, secretes an excess [*surcroît*], this excess will always be transformed into dynamite, it will blow-up the Whole.

Norman Palma: If there is an affinity between Marx and Nietzsche, it seems that this would not be at the level of theory, but rather, between what might be termed the Nietzschean exigency and the Marxist praxis. The exigency which Nietzsche accepts is the restructuring of domination. In all his works, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *The Antichrist* and *The Will to Power*, he rehearses it, however he never imagines, even in the slightest, this restructuring as a movement away from the domination of merchants, or capitalists—for him, this restructuring cannot be the work of a class that does not have control over the means of production.

Pierre Klossowski: Yes, this is similar to the Tibetan Society described by Bataille in *The Accursed Share*, where we see a class being supported by society-at-large. Which, according to Nietzsche, we have the power to critique because it is linked to an outdated sociology (that sees class as a static reality), but beyond which it is necessary to retain a lucidly observed process, a pertinent description of human pathology, in spite of an aesthetic conception of history of which Nietzsche was never able to rid himself, perhaps because it was common to his epoch.

Norman Palma: How can we reconcile the static nature of class structure with the will to power

which wants to blow up all barriers, and which you have called a delusion [*délire*]?

Pierre Klossowski: I said that the will to power can only become apparent if it is given the chance to be made manifest, which is already given by human nature.

Norman Palma: No doubt, but it still remains that this liberation of impulse that Nietzsche calls will to power cannot and does not find itself brought into play by the dominant class. If, in the world of the last man, the will to power cannot manifest itself, it is because the masters are nothing but slaves [*les maîtres ne sont eux-mêmes que des esclaves*].

Pierre Klossowski: Indeed.

Heinz Wismann: Could you situate your developments on conspiracy and class in relation to the Stefan George Circle which was intended as a reprise, at the same time, both poetical and political, of a kind of Nietzscheanism?

Pierre Klossowski: The George Circle already seems to me a falsification; it features a pontificating element that is absolutely unthinkable in Nietzsche. Nietzsche would have probably taken the same attitude with respect to the George Circle as he took with respect to Bayreuth. He reserved for himself the secret of histrionism, which is precisely to play, to mock. When one does not attain the level of the *pseudo*, one falls into nothingness, but both the ritualists of George entourage and the Wagnerians, would be incapable of achieving the doubling required for this histrionism. For Nietzsche, this belongs to the heritage of the great Romano-Occidental tradition: the notion of a theatre that does not exclude the divine. This is what Georges Bataille likewise wanted to realize by inscribing laughter amongst those attributes belonging to a divinity without divinity.

Fauzia Assad-Mikhaïl: How does the selection of the eternal return relate to all of this?

Pierre Klossowski: This is precisely the dilemma that leads Nietzsche to write: “In a world whose reality depends upon *circulus vitiosus*, either you affirm or you perish ...”

Fauzia Assad-Mikhaïl: But if the conspiracy [*complot*] is a parody, would not the criterion of the selection also be parodic?

Pierre Klossowski: For sure, that is just what I have been saying...

Fauzia Assad-Mikhaïl: And this is its essential difference from the George Circle!

Norman Palma: Allow me to return to the problem of autonomy. For Nietzsche, it can only exist for the masters, for those who control and dominate within the Apollonian sphere. On the other hand, you mentioned that Nietzsche saw in socialism the possibility for an actualisation of his primary imperative. He does not so much want the masters to be merchants; rather, as an ad-

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versary of capitalist domination, wasn't he indeed dreaming of a new kind of domination which would be similar to what might be called 'oriental despotism' in which there would be no private ownership of the means of production? The means of production would be controlled, instead, by a specific class.

Pierre Klossowski: Your hypothesis is interesting; it is a possible extension of what I said, but which could also very well turn against what I said...

Alfred Fabre-Luce: It seems that at the limit, Nietzsche's thought can result in either the refusal of all politics, or, alternately, in the legitimation of any politics whatsoever. That is why your comments on histrionism struck me as very profound and very important. Let us not forget, however, that Nietzsche was constantly concerned with nobility. Other thinkers have had perhaps a similar attitude, but in a way that would have very much dissatisfied him. The word "histrionic" could perhaps be misleading here.

Pierre Klossowski: Nietzsche's position draws us away, in any case, from all that which has up to the present been called "political action"; it requires the creation of a new comportment with regards to conflict and strategising. It seems to me more and more—and here I allude to Gilles Deleuze—that we move towards a kind of anti-psychiatric insurrection (unfortunately this term has become over-coded), that is to say, the discovery of a species of pleasure [*jouissance*], on the part of psychiatrists or doctors in becoming the "object of investigation"—and moreover, the pathological case will feel more and more comfortable if he lives, and imposes himself, by subverting the institutional investigations which brand him pathological.

Christian Deschamps: You spoke about "delusory behaviour" [*comportment délirant*]*—taking this expression in the laudatory sense and contrasting it with reality. On the basis of what you have said, I think that one can understand the critique of the traditional political scene in terms of what was for a long time considered precisely this deranged behaviour which can certainly be formulated in terms of an exigency, and which is perhaps a radically new vision in relation to what had been called politics up until now.*

Pierre Klossowski: Yes, perhaps ... I use the term "delusory" [*délirant*] because I think everybody understands the sense in which I mean to deploy it.

Jacques Derrida: Could you add anything to what you have just said about the pleasure one would feel on becoming an object of investigation?

Pierre Klossowski: As long as knowledge maintains its prestige in comparison to the mere fact of existing, tribute will be paid to knowledge, but precisely as the condition of always subverting itself. It is, if you want, a division of labour: one lives, one does not have to justify one's existence, society will take responsibility for it.

Translation

Jacques Derrida: But then we must address the phrase “to subvert” the same question which we pose to the phrase “to parody.” You suggested that parody could become political, and that it was, ultimately, subversive...

Pierre Klossowski: To the extent that “politics” is taken to entail “strategy” or “comportment.”

Jacques Derrida: But how, in any case, does parody operate? Should one not distinguish between two kinds of parody: between the one which, on the pretext of being subversive, takes the risk of establishing a political order (which very much likes a certain type of parody and finds its own confirmation there) and, on the other hand, a parody which can really deconstruct the political order? Is there a form of parody which actually marks the body politic, in contrast to a parody which would be a parody of a parody, which would play upon the surface of the political order, playfully teasing [*chahuter*] rather than destroying it?

Pierre Klossowski: I think that in *the long run* nothing can resist such a parody.

Jacques Derrida: But someone who wants to transform the political order – can he really trust in the *long run*?

Pierre Klossowski: The time that is needed is a function of exercised pressure, and pressure depends, as a consequence, upon contagion.

Jean-François Lyotard: For Nietzsche, the “parody of a parody” consists in a kind of *ressentiment* against power; it goes no further, it is a condition of mediocrity or weakness in intensity. To differentiate it from the other kind, I think the fundamental criterion is that of intensity. However, it is impossible to determine beforehand what the effectiveness of a parody will be, that’s why Nietzsche says it is necessary to be experimenters and artists, not people who have a plan and try to realise it—that’s old politics. Nietzsche says it’s necessary to try things out and discover which intensities produce which effects.

Norman Palma: It reminds me of Plato’s *Republic*, that is to say, of the power of the thinkers, of scientists, etc., who should perform experiments on the slaves, but at a time when the morality of the slave still had none of the force which, according to Nietzsche, Christianity gave him.

Jean-François Lyotard: This is in no way what I said.

Christian Deschamps: It seems that in the United States a certain number of people who are not precisely philosophers, but who are linked to the hippy movement, use the figure of Nietzscheanism, notably his critique of “back-worlds,” for the sake of projects which they consider, in any case, to be political, but which make a mockery of these themes.

Gilles Deleuze: This remark is very important. I think of the question posed by Derrida on the two kinds of parody. In some ways it evokes the two currents which emerge in recent debates

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on what might be called “popular justice.” One group says, roughly: the goal of popular justice is to make “good” what bourgeois justice makes “evil,” consequently, they institute a parallel court, then try the same case; it is a type of parody that defines itself as the copy of an existent institution, with jurors, accusers, lawyers, witnesses, but that considers itself better and more fair, more rigorous than the model. But another group might pose the problem in a very different way, saying that a popular justice, if there were one, would not proceed according to the formalism of courts because it would not merely be a copy which claims superiority to that which models it—it would be a parody of another type which would pretend, at once, to overthrow the copy and the model. It would be, therefore, a justice no longer prescribed by the courts. The efficacious parody, in the sense of Nietzsche or Klossowski, does not pretend to be a copy of a model, but rather, in its parodic act overthrows, in the same blow, the model and the copy. An example from another domain is pop art. People can always talk about copies of copies of copies, etc., but everybody senses that what is at stake is something altogether different, which, to speak like Klossowski, pushes the simulacral so far that its product goes against, at the same time, the copy and the model. It seems to me that this is exactly the criterion of effective parody in the sense that Nietzsche understands it. Indeed, I think that, politically, these things are extremely concrete, operating at the level of what can be called “justice.”

Jacques Derrida: May I simply ask: the value of justice, which you have kept in both cases of parody—is it not part of the model?

Gilles Deleuze: I’m not sure. It is not of the same value, otherwise the parody is just another copy.

Jacques Derrida: But why, then, do you still speak of justice?

Bernard Pautrat: In this debate on popular justice, we may encounter these two ways of understanding it, but the debate itself is in fact situated at the heart of a single political stream of thought. The key is to figure out where the greatest effectiveness lies. In some respects, the justice which maintains a certain number of forms waiting for revolution, it seems to me, at the level of intensity, at the level of combat, is more effective, more efficient. If you’ll excuse me for lingering over this question which only really comes up amongst political allies, but I would like to mention, for example, the notion of sequestration. It’s not a case of parody, and its efficiency lies precisely in the fact that it’s not merely a parody but rather a localised, temporary usurpation of power. There is perhaps here a copying of a certain power which installs itself, but I think this is a copy of a model which indeed has efficiency, but only for a certain period.

Gilles Deleuze: You say that sequestration is not a parody. It is not a parody in the ordinary sense, but we are referring to the meaning that Klossowski has given the word, and which is in no way its everyday meaning. In the sense accorded it by Klossowski, sequestration is obviously an emi-

nently parodic act. Jean-Luc Godard, who is a bit Nietzschean, shows this in “Tout va bien.”

Gérard Kaleka: Could we also admit of a “popular psychiatry” that would perhaps be the parody of actual psychiatry?

Pierre Klossowski: It would really blur the picture. Either psychiatry disappears or it goes on; there can only be a single anti-psychiatry, namely, the one that abolishes psychiatry. I cannot say how, it is not my concern at the moment, but this, in any case, is how I see the issue.

Eric Clémens: I would like to point out, *à propos* of pop art, that Deleuze forgot all about the museum because he’s so interested in the problem of popular justice – a bias which is, of course, not Nietzschean and which in fact obscures Nietzsche...

Hughes Labrusse: We are now in full-blown parody and the seriousness of the debate seems to me compromised. To maintain that Nietzsche would be a supporter of pop-art makes no sense! Moreover, Pautrat spoke of socialism and we then digressed toward the question of popular justice. It is a very suspicious use of Nietzsche, especially if one thinks of him writing on socialism under its most gregarious form...

Jacques Derrida: Nietzsche’s thoughts on socialism are problematic...

Hughes Labrusse: Then let us pose the problem!

Gilles Deleuze: The problem of justice is absolutely Nietzschean, it is everywhere in his work.

Pierre Boudot: In any case, Deleuze remains within the Nietzschean thematic when he speaks about a structure which would destroy, at the same time, the copy and the model. It is what Klossowski calls “insurrection”—a word which seems very important. In a society subject to complete uniformity, some people would have the possibility of affirming themselves, of “appearing suddenly,” subverting society as a result of simply being themselves. But I notice an ambiguity here, one which is disclosed by what Deleuze said, because to challenge at once the copy and the model is to challenge exemplarity, even if it is unintentional or “natural.”

Pierre Klossowski: Of course. But I don’t at all believe that once the project, as if through some miracle, has been achieved that Nietzsche would be tempted to search for a new model. On the contrary, he would turn in derision of these ideal products, these higher types, and nothing of this kind would, for even one second, resist his sarcasms. That’s why what we are discussing is ultimately subject to infinite regress. Such is the virtue of delusion [*délire*].

Jean-Noël Vuarnet: I think that we might pose, at this point, the question of the thesis and the myth in order to distinguish between those theses which are counter-theses, in other words, between those which aim at an immediately realisable change, and, on the other hand, experimentation with myths and other regulatory fictions. There is a whole utopian dimension here which

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exceeds the world of theses and which is not absent, even in Marx.

Claude Vivien: I fear that we're slightly losing sight of Klossowski's original point of departure—namely, the dissolution of the principle of identity. In neglecting the consequences of this dissolution, some of which are indeed practical consequences, we have launched into a series of ambiguities which perhaps are interesting, but which correspond neither to the style with which Nietzsche poses certain problems, nor, especially, to the way in which Klossowski encounters them and transforms them. When one speaks about insurrection—and in Klossowski's texts it is rather about a particular type of insurrection, that is to say, a matter of forces destabilising the subject itself—these intensities dissolve the principle of identity, insofar as the subject can under no circumstances be held responsible. It is commonly said that, in a mediocre universe, only certain individuals are truly able to become who they are; but it is these, precisely, who will not have identity. To throw the principle of identity into ruin is therefore to give precedence to forces which will no longer operate within a restricted economy—to use Bataille's phrase—but which will be pure forces of expenditure, under no circumstances recuperable...

Hughes Labrusse: And by no means delivered into the frenzy [*frénésie*] of efficacy, or efficiency, at all costs...

Claude Vivien: On the contrary! The less they are recuperable, the more they are efficient.

Gilles Deleuze: Certainly the notion of the loss of identity is important, and on this point, for a long time now, we have been in Klossowski's debt. But today what Klossowski is developing is the notion of conspiracy. Undoubtedly it is linked to the loss of identity, but it is not the same thing. I would like to, at this point, sum up some aspects of the discussion that has just taken place: Klossowski introduced for us the notion of conspiracy [*complot*]; Alfred Fabre-Luce inquired: "But if there is a conspiracy, can it have an actual political meaning?" In response, I tried to say: "Why yes, certainly, in fact we are living this very problem." Then Labrusse intervened to say that if it's a conspiracy, it must not be spoken about, and so he remains sitting there horrified. There is a topic which Klossowski addressed, I believe, at the same time that he was addressing the loss of identity, namely, the topic of singularity, by which he means the "non-identical." A conspiracy, if one understands Klossowski's thinking, is a community of singularities. The question, then, configured in terms of the political (understood either in its contemporary or ancient sense) is this: how are we to conceive of a community of singularities? This is a subject very dear to Klossowski; his thinking on this matter follows upon the ideas of Fourier, and also Sade, which we can see clearly displayed in *La Monnaie Vivante*. What we call a society is a community of regularities, or more precisely, a certain selective process which retains select singularities and regularises them. In order to maintain the proper functioning of society it selects for regularisation, to use the language of psychoanalysis, what might be called paranoiac singularities. But a *conspiracy*—this would be a community of singularities of another type, which would not be

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regularised, but which would enter into new connections, and in this sense, would be revolutionary. It seems to me that Pierre Klossowski's thought has moved decisively in this direction and I believe, unless I am mistaken, that the problem which we now inherit from him is to know if it is possible to conceive of links between singularities which would have as their criteria the eternal return, insofar as it implicates the loss of identity, not just for individuals but also for societies and groups.

Jean-Noël Vuarnet: It also seems to me that, for Klossowski, any revolutionary thought involves a relation to the mythical or the metaphorical. Would he then suggest that a parody necessarily creates regulating fictions at the same time that it creates a thesis, or idea, leading to a sort of impure, incessant alternation between thesis and fiction?

Pierre Klossowski: One can formulate it in such a manner, as long as we stress the continuousness of this oscillation.

Jean-Marie Benoist: I wonder if the difficulty of articulating the politics of Nietzsche in relation to the politics of Marx does not come in part from their differing readings of Book VIII of Plato's *Republic*, concerning, in particular, the disintegration into timocracy up to the point of tyranny. Whilst Marx would want to pursue this movement to its limit, finding in it the dynamic of dialectical struggle between the classes (which Plato had of course omitted), Nietzsche, on the other hand, would react to these ideas by introducing something new—namely, the conspiracy, which would bring him to the second moment, namely, that of timocracy, and which corresponds to the will to power. So, on the one side, with Marx, there would a dynamic of the classes, whilst on the other hand, with Nietzsche, there would be stasis among the classes, both making use of, but in completely different ways, Book VIII of the *Republic* rather than, for instance, making recourse to the oriental model of class.

Pierre Klossowski: Yes, but I think that it is the vicious circle, precisely, which is the manner through which Nietzsche renews this notion by adding Plato to Manu⁵—all of this losing any cultural heaviness for him, thanks to the eternal return which is the splitting in two of all that I know, and of all that I do, and of all that was, so that there remains no possibility of grounding any installation. What you have just said is very sensible, but if one does not support this idea of a permanent solution, without which all the conclusions that we would draw from Nietzsche's words would become immutable, nothing would any longer make sense. What gives Nietzsche all his force is the affirmation of things that are then immediately refutable, but only by him.

5 In Hinduism, Manu is the primordial king of the earth. On May 31, 1888—in a letter to Peter Gast—Nietzsche writes: "I found *Manu's* book of laws in a French translation done in India under strict supervision from the most eminent priests and scholars there. This absolutely *Aryan* work, a priestly codex of morality based on the Vedas, on the idea of caste and very ancient tradition—not pessimistic, albeit very sacerdotal—supplements my views on religion in the most remarkable way. I confess to having the impression that everything else that we have by way of moral lawgiving seems to me an imitation and even a caricature of it..."

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