

Nietzsche and the Knowledge of the Child at Play: On the Question of Metaphysics

Johannes F. Welfing
University of Lethbridge

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

Recommended Citation

Welfing, Johannes F. "Nietzsche and the Knowledge of the Child at Play: On the Question of Metaphysics." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.3 (1999): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1042>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1042)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 1 Issue 3 (September 1999) Article 3
Johannes Welfing,

"Nietzsche and the Knowledge of the Child at Play: On the Question of Metaphysics"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/3>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1.3 (1999)**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol1/iss3/>>

Abstract: In his article "Nietzsche and the Knowledge of the Child at Play: On the Question of Metaphysics" Johannes Welfing raises the question of a Nietzschean metaphysical presence (did Nietzsche define the essence of life and of being and thus also implicitly establish an imperative about the way in which one should lead one's life, or did he refrain from all definition, truth, system or law whatsoever?). The controversy continues: while for some critics Nietzsche's philosophy is animated by a desire for truth, others emphasize the novelty of a philosophical project that questions the very premises on which it is based. In particular, the author attempts to establish, by referring to a specific excerpt from the Nietzsche text, that the paradigm of the Nietzschean child at play on the "beach of life" -- argument of an important, contemporary brand of Nietzsche interpretation that situates Nietzsche beyond the metaphysical tradition -- cannot be said to be truly based on the Nietzsche text. While focusing on both Alan Schrift's and Mihailo Djuric's argument that Nietzsche attempted to escape the metaphysical tradition by emphasizing the knowledge of the child at play, Welfing argues that for Nietzsche -- if knowledge is to secure the escape from the belief in metaphysical essence on the level of practical life -- this knowledge is generated by the body rather than by the rational mind..

Johannes F. WELFING

Nietzsche and the Knowledge of the Child at Play: On the Question of Metaphysics

There is no consensus in Nietzsche criticism. In fact, the views on Nietzsche are not just simply divergent but often diametrically opposed. The contentious issue is often metaphysics or his belief in essence. For some critics Nietzsche is just one thinker among the many, while for others he is the first true philosopher. This polarization of opinions raises some interesting questions about Nietzsche's philosophy: why is it that controversy continues on whether Nietzsche believed in essence or on whether he attempted to define existence? Or even beyond the question of metaphysics: why are the opinions so polarized?

It is possible to establish a classification of Nietzsche critics based on the question of metaphysical adherence. For some critics his philosophy centres around one unifying idea, while for others this centralizing unity is not just lacking, but precisely something Nietzsche never intended to achieve. For some he remains a seeker of truth, while for others he offers a clear set of premises to overcome the need for universal truths. The least one can say at this stage is that Nietzsche's philosophy lacks clarity at crucial points, and that it somehow offers room for this collection of rigorously dissenting views. Thomas Mann, for instance, in his *Nietzsches Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung*, speaks of Nietzsche's philosophy as being conditioned by "einem einzigen, alles durchdringenden Grundgedanken," and of Nietzsche himself as an aphorist without centre (45). David Allison <<http://www.sunysb.edu/philosophy/faculty/allison/dallison.htm>>[inactive], however, in his preface to *The New Nietzsche*, argues for pretty much the opposite: "[Nietzsche's] use of metaphor, aphorism, apothegm, styled ambiguity all stands apart from the very system of Western thought that demands specific unity and identification. The text of Nietzsche no longer is constrained to a foundation of univocal meaning, discrete cause, unifying origin, to the principle of identity and specific difference" (xxiv). Another set of difficulties follows from this ambivalence in Nietzsche criticism, namely the difficulty of defining metaphysics itself. A clear definition is often lacking in those interpreting Nietzsche's work, and this creates additional problems exactly where the question of a successful transcendence is raised. Heidegger <<http://www.webcom.com/paf/ereignis.html>> defines the concept of metaphysics as the forgetting of being with a capital B (or, to be more precise, as Ando Takatura in his *Metaphysics: A Critical Survey of its Meaning* explains, the forgetting of the "'to be' of being, or the inquiring into the 'to be' qua 'to be'" (104)). Metaphysical longing is defined in terms of nostalgia for essence and substance beyond the "to be" of being itself. Herman Berger, however, in a more recent study entitled *Wat is Metafysica: een studie over transcendentie*, argues for a different understanding of the concept of metaphysics, one that according to Berger is closer to Aristotle's original definition of the term, and which does not separate (or forgets to separate): "das Sein" from "das Seiende," precisely because it focuses on "das Sein" *in relation to* "das Seiende" (41).

Yet another question is that of the possibility of escaping or going beyond metaphysics itself. The concept of doing without essence has had a strange attraction for many thinkers -- it certainly fascinated Nietzsche -- and it will perhaps always continue to do so. In the following, I will attempt to address some of these questions. I intend to demonstrate that it is extremely difficult to provide any conclusive answers to the question of Nietzsche's antimetaphysical stance and that any attempt at doing so can be undermined in a relatively easy fashion. The starting point in this article will be that Nietzsche's philosophy is ambiguous on the question of metaphysics, and that it is this essential ambiguity which causes the controversy to continue. My task is not to condemn any of the existing Nietzsche camps, but rather to investigate the reasons why this polarization of opinions has taken place -- and still is -- in Nietzsche interpretation today. To prove this, we need only refer to works such as *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays pro and contra* (see Koelb), which is a collection of interpretations behind which looms the dark cloud of the metaphysical question. As the title indicates, the choice is either for or against, within or beyond metaphysics. Similarly, my study, too, will be a dialogue with interpreters and critics such as Paul de Man, Alan Schrift, and others for whom Nietzsche's work means theory beyond metaphysics. I will investigate the paradigm of the child at play in the sand and attempt to demonstrate that this metaphor speaks much less definitively in favour of freedom from metaphysics than contemporary thinkers would have us believe.

My approach in this article is based theoretically background in philosophy and comparative literary theory: Nietzsche is an intellectual authority who is approached from all kinds of literary and cultural angles and writers, philosophers and critics from all over the world have commented on his writing. Nietzsche's writing may be there, solidified on paper, yet the interpretations are constantly changing. In this article, I will focus on Nietzsche and the metaphysical tradition and on how different authorities, belonging to different cultural and literary traditions, have interpreted and explained the question of metaphysics in relation to Nietzsche.

Contemporary Nietzsche interpretation centres around one complex yet basic problem --that of metaphysics. To what extent are we to consider Nietzsche as a philosopher who not only attempted to escape the constraints of traditional metaphysics, but who actually succeeded in doing this? Who believed that metaphysics, with whatever nuance in meaning one would define this, was something that could be conquered or transcended (the term transcendence may be inappropriate here since, if anything, Nietzsche's project of liberating himself from metaphysics is directed against any form of transcendence in the traditional sense of the word). Perhaps one should argue that Nietzsche's stand is more skeptical and reserved. Is the real tragedy of his writing not so much the end of religious transcendence as the realization in his heart of hearts that escaping metaphysics proper is impossible, and that any attempt at doing so is ultimately an act of self-deception and misplaced human arrogance? Are human beings inherently religious, the concept of religion being more subtly defined here as a constellation of metaphysically preestablished particulars that constitute the human mind and body and presuppose its working? Can one survive a life without meaning, essence, or a perception of the self as a unified entity, while at the same time giving in to a playful economy of truth alternating with lie? In other words, does the Nietzschean infant truly escape metaphysics in that it enjoys both the creation and destruction of the sand castle it has built, or has the child only imagined that it does?

Nietzsche may criticize the metaphysical tradition, yet it remains to be established what exactly is being proposed to overcome it, and how convincingly this is done. Heidegger's claim of Nietzsche's adherence to a full-fledged metaphysical tradition often stands as a point of reference: Nietzsche may have attempted to escape the tradition, yet because of the rigour of the attempt itself, he entrenches himself even deeper in the metaphysical swamp of essence. Heidegger, while defining metaphysics in terms of essence ("essentia" or "Seiendheit"), argues that Nietzsche's thought, just as any other philosophy since Plato, is metaphysical in nature: "Das Denken Nietzsches ist gemäss allem Denken des Abendlandes seit Platon Metaphysik," (Heidegger, II, 257). Contemporary critics, however, often emphasize that Nietzsche does provide important directions and directives with regard to an alternative conception of reality. Nietzsche's critique of logic, that of substance, of identity, of a distinction between thought and being all point at a rejection of the old metaphysical tradition. His notions of play, of reason and logic as aesthetically justified and his experiments with language, style and genre all refer to a world beyond the world of substance.

Yet, it is also true that even the most vehement defender of Nietzsche as a new thinker must remain tentative when it comes down to defining the practical reality of Nietzsche's antimetaphysical project. Indications how the new creative human being should live and understand life are at best vague, and on the overall rather modest in scope. Mihailo Djuric, for instance, in his *Nietzsche und die Metaphysik*, speaks of Nietzsche's "creative act" (*der schöpferische Akt*) as something that Nietzsche opposes to metaphysics, yet also as something which as a practical reality remains largely "undetermined" (*unbestimmt*) and "ungraspable" (*unfassbar*) (148). Underlying the problem of metaphysical adherence is the difficulty of definition. If going beyond metaphysics means doing without all distinctions between appearance and substance, it is questionable whether Nietzsche fully complies with this definition. Heidegger, for example, considers Nietzsche's truths of will to power and eternal recurrence as an attempt to arrive at the essence of being. Heidegger argues that beyond the layer of appearances Nietzsche discovers things as stable and permanent as the will to create truth or time, or even reality itself to be circular: "Nietzsche denkt im Gedanken des Willens zur Macht den metaphysischen Grund der Vollendung der Neuzeit voraus. Im Gedanken des Willens zur Macht vollendet sich zuvor das metaphysische Denken selbst" (I, 479-80).

Other critics emphasize, however, that Nietzsche's concept of will to power escapes the traditional language of philosophy in that it defies description and does not refer to any kind of substance or

essence, but to a playful plurality of ever-changing manifestations. Yet, even if this is true, it might be argued with the same degree of legitimacy that Nietzsche does favour the life-affirming manifestations of will to power over those which negate, thus imposing the criterion of life, and ultimately, perhaps, the subjective truth that to capture the true essence of life it should be lived in a certain way. And this, strictly speaking, must reflect a metaphysical conception of reality in which essence may be concealed yet is not absent. Escaping metaphysics, in the sense of taking being purely as being, appearance without substance, or existence as a perpetual flow of random events, may be impossible in the very literal sense of the word. In *Zur Genealogie der Moral* Nietzsche speaks of "das souveräne Individuum" as the "ripest fruit" of all humanity, and as a being freed from conventional morality (*das autonome übersittliche Individuum*). The sovereign individual feels the need, deep down inside (*ein stolzes, in allen Muskeln zuckendes Bewusstsein*), to lead humanity to its state of completion (II, 2). Nietzsche states: "Dieser Freigewordene ... wie sollte er es nicht wissen ... wie ihm, mit dieser Herrschaft über sich, auch die Herrschaft über die Umstände, über die Natur und alle willenskürzeren und unzuverlässigeren Kreaturen notwendig in die Hand gegeben ist? Der 'freie' Mensch ... hat in diesem Besitz auch sein *Wertmass*" (II, 2) ["This man who is now free ... how could he remain ignorant of his superiority ... and how could he, with his self-mastery, not realise that he has necessarily been given mastery over circumstances, over nature and over all creatures with a less durable and reliable will? The 'free' man, the possessor of a durable, unbreakable will, thus has his own *standard of value*" (Nietzsche 1994, 40)]. In fact, our understanding of metaphysics may be largely filtered through Nietzsche's own interpretation of the metaphysical tradition as characterizing the pretence of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) through logic and discourse. For Nietzsche, metaphysical investigation in the traditional sense of the word goes hand in hand with the belief in obtaining essence through the faculties of the spirit as opposed to those of the body, and from this perspective it is clear that Nietzsche is not a metaphysician. Nietzsche, it would be hard to deny, is the philosopher of the body rather than of the conscious mind.

Yet, again, if metaphysics is defined in more narrow terms as being based on the belief that essence exists, and that somehow the fulness of existence can be sought, acquired or revealed, Nietzsche's escape from metaphysics may be less evident. If knowledge or essence can be acquired through a more intuitive type of reason, or through any faculty other than those of the spirit, would that make Nietzsche someone who escapes or precisely belongs to metaphysics? Nietzsche's superman may be the playful child sunk into oblivion, yet is it not this god-sent child, who in Nietzsche's own words is the "ripest fruit" of all, and whose position is the most exemplary and perfect in all humanity, secretly pledging allegiance to metaphysics in that it constitutes the embodiment of life that is lived to the fullest? Perhaps one should say that going beyond metaphysics proper is the radical rejection of any substance, essence or higher value whatsoever, since only then, when a truer world behind the merely apparent is being negated, and some sort of essence no longer secretly thought to be out there, is it possible to speak of something radically opposed to metaphysics. Irrespective of whether Nietzsche escapes or in some ways still belongs to the metaphysical tradition, he himself is aware of the difficulty of the task. While vehemently advocating Dionysian rapture, he informs us at the same time that this type of liberation from the all too human compulsion of seeking truth behind illusion is not for the meek and gentle soul. Nietzsche emphasizes often enough that it takes a special human being who is equipped with a superhuman quality, as if to illustrate that escaping metaphysics proper belongs to a higher level of reality, different from the one we, ordinary souls, know.

The above theoretical remarks, however tentative, demonstrate that the metaphysical question is not so easily resolved. Nietzsche's theory on eternal recurrence, as an example illustrative of this type of complexity, may defy traditional metaphysical conceptions of how reality is to be defined, yet it does not abandon the concept of a knowable reality itself. In the following, I will focus on a number of the arguments used by those who situate Nietzsche in a tradition that moves away from a metaphysical conception of reality. I will attempt to demonstrate that these points remain contentious on the basis of Nietzsche's philosophy itself, and that a certain degree of disagreement is therefore inevitable. Attributing to Nietzsche the quality of escaping metaphysics implies making choices where Nietzsche himself has remained silent, unclear, or ambiguous. In his *Nietzsche und die Metaphysik*, Djuric concedes that Nietzsche's concept of play is anything but a fully developed system: "Nietzsche

expressed himself on play with no more clarity and accuracy than on the creative act. In [his theory of play] there are as many gaps and contradictions; thus everything remains experimental" (150).

Poststructuralist thinkers have generally considered Nietzsche as escaping metaphysics. Jacques Derrida, for instance, while focussing on texts that no longer have the pretension of reflecting reality, speaks of the fluidity of Nietzsche's writing itself as defying the traditional conception of how texts should be interpreted. For Derrida Nietzsche's writing is set up like a textual hymen, which can be penetrated yet not possessed, and ultimately presents the reader in search of meaning with nothing but the reflection of his or her own metaphysical longing. That is, a longing for essence and truth exactly there where these entities are absent. The text thus tricks the reader: it plays a playful game with the mind that wants to possess the true essence of the text. The concept of play is generally considered as the key by means of which Nietzsche attempted, if not fully succeeded, to liberate himself from the metaphysical prison of essence. In the following, I will take up on this element of play in Nietzsche's writing, and will attempt to demonstrate that with Nietzsche's notion of play, it is problematic to speak in terms of something that escapes metaphysics only. Play with Nietzsche may subvert traditional notions of the usefulness and purpose of life -- Nietzsche's *Weltspiel* has no *Zweck* or *Ziel* in the religious or scientific sense of these notions -- yet at the same time it must be acknowledged that Nietzsche speaks of the seriousness with which one should play the game, and that, consequently, he is no less concerned with a renewed restoration of metaphysics as with its "deconstruction." That this restoration or recapturing of a sense of essence is part of a sublimated type of metaphysical longing is not the issue here. The point is that Nietzsche was concerned with a metaphysical anchoring of or within play at least as much as he was with the play itself. Nietzsche explicitly speaks of play in relation to *Unschuld* and *Ernst* as if to metaphysically ground illusion. *Unschuld* and *Ernst* are the two metaphysically sealed doors that bar the vortex of nihilism, that keep Nietzsche from falling into the void of playful yet endless illusion. This does not contradict the observation that Nietzsche attempts to escape metaphysics or that he emphasizes play. What it does indicate, however, is a difference in emphasis: Nietzsche's definition of play is that of play as a new type of seriousness. In contrast, poststructuralist interpreters would rather emphasize Nietzsche's play as a new type of (creative and free) play.

Alan D. Schrift quotes Zarathustra's speech on the child: "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills *its own* will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers *his own* world" (68) ["*seinen Willen will nun der Geist, seine Welt gewinnt sich der Weltverlorene*" (*Zarathustra*, I, 1)]. The point here is not so much the creation of new values as the play *with* these values. The child now is the conqueror *of*, and ruler *over*, his own world (to conquer may be too strong a translation of (*sich*) *gewinnen*, which is more to gain or acquire and which seems to me less active), and it is precisely this superiority over the newly created which constitutes the element of play. Only the creation acknowledged as creation can generate a sense of play. The realization of act as artifice is the prerequisite of the leap towards freedom from metaphysics. And precisely this is the pivotal point around which turns the question of a ludic alternative to metaphysics. Schrift states, "the seriousness of Kinderspiel is qualitatively different from the all-too-heavy seriousness of the metaphysical comforters who preach salvation. It is the seriousness of the child building castles in the sand, meticulously creating a world in the full knowledge that the sea may rise up at any moment and wash this world away" (68). The significance of Schrift's suggestion does not lie so much in the meticulous creation of the child's new world, as in the suggestion of the child's realization that the creation exists as creation. The child realizes that nothing is permanent, since it is in the "full knowledge that the sea may rise up at any moment and wash [its] world away" (68). The child's seriousness is a sublimated seriousness -- qualitatively different -- in that the child recognizes the play as play, and its seriousness at the time of play as the seriousness with which one plays.

The image of the child building sand castles on the beach is powerful and the idea of a transcendent type of playful seriousness is all too tempting. Djuric, in his chapter on Nietzsche's "Umwandlung der gesamten menschlichen Tätigkeit in Spiel," focuses on this same point of a playful seriousness characterized by the player who preserves a certain distance towards the game. Similarly to Schrift, Djuric suggests that devotion (*Hingabe*) to the game is never totally complete, since

Nietzsche's player nevertheless always simply somehow knows that the game is a game. The bolt on which hinges the promised construct of freedom from this world of essence is the "irgendwie weiss" mind frame of the player, the "somehow knowing" that the game is illusion. Yet, precisely here, in the indeterminate state of the "somehow knowing" lies the weakness of the argument. The quotation marks, in which appears the player's "knowing," betray the speculative nature of this knowledge at, and during, play. The inverted commas subvert the argument that knowing in play is simply knowing that play is play, or simply equal to any other act of knowing or knowledge. The commas are the old and all too visible metaphysical cogs that make the anti-metaphysical argument tick. The assertion of knowing that the world is play is the too-rational approach to something which escapes reason -- our devotion to the game of life. Giving in to play requires, if only temporary, a loss of the sense of play as play. We might still "know," rationally, yet beyond reason, there may be something in us that still, while playing, does not or should not know that play is play. Schrift's child, who is fully aware that the castle it has built is going to be swept away, may be real, but only then when the waves are part of its game. The child is real only when it has willed the destruction of its own castle. At the end of the day, the parent of the child -- although Nietzsche's child plays in blessed solitude with and by himself -- breaks down the metaphysically established illusion of the game, a game which the child, if only for a moment, has taken for real. The child's tears mark the awareness of the loss of the essence of the game. The waves of reality are absent if the child truly wishes to meticulously create his own world and build castles in the sand. The child's joy in a game is to take it, in its most literal sense, for real, and not as play.

The point here is that the antimetaphysical argument suffers from metaphysical speculation exactly where play is said to be seen as play, that is, where the anti-metaphysical pretension of the argument reaches its highest point. Schrift speaks of the child as being "in the full knowledge" of play as play, yet the "irgendwie 'weiss'" of Djuric is already considerably less confident on the question of what exactly one "knows" when play is seen as play. The knowledge Djuric is referring to might be something different from conventional knowledge since this knowledge is also somehow, if only temporarily, a forgetting. Nietzsche speaks here of a "sacred Yes" or the child's "innocence" in play, but it is rather ironic that Nietzsche should appeal to the old metaphysical notions of "sacredness," "seriousness," and "innocence" to elevate the argument into the higher realms of precisely this freedom from metaphysics. This may have been his intention, of course, but even then it is rather ironic that his use of the old metaphysical (or even religious) concepts should demonstrate his very incapacity to even fathom a life beyond metaphysics, or to find an appropriate terminology to describe it. Djuric's semantically invalidated knowing, as demonstrated by the inverted commas of "weiss," indicates that knowing might not be knowing in the conventional sense at all, but rather something one does not know, or at least does not know how to describe. To know in the sense of rationally knowing that the game of life is a game seems hardly sufficient in our attempt to elevate our state of being to a level where essence has become a playful game. Appealing to reason in something that escapes reason, that is, our devotion to what we call life, is missing the point. The child's first gasp of air is grounded in metaphysics: it is a gasp not for breath but for essence where, always and already, reason is irrelevant. The breath it takes is commanded by an authority whose realm is beyond any sanctioning of breath as play. The mother's final push to bring her child into the world is grounded in an essence that is prior to, without and beyond, knowing.

Schrift's powerful image of the child building castles in the sand is taken from Nietzsche's text, and it is rather significant that the emphasis in Nietzsche is more on the laws of the game than on the laws of the child. While for Schrift it is obvious that the child "actively *plays with* will to power" instead of being played by it, Nietzsche speaks of a type of play in which the child is being played with as much as he/she is the creative observer of the game. Establishing difference here may seem a fastidious undertaking considering that in this particular section Nietzsche also speaks of the contemplative nature of the player at play, yet it is important to see that the difference indicates that the freedom with which the child can choose to play, or be master of his own game, is considerably reduced. Nietzsche speaks of play in terms of the "drive to play" (*Spieltrieb*) and the "need [that] compels" ("*das Bedürfnis zwingt*"), thus at least partially subjecting the child to a force that is more powerful than the child itself, a force that beyond whatever degree of mastery compels the child to create essence. The play has ceased to be just play if the child, over and over again, must take play for real

by its own inner urge to seek essence, by its craving to act as if play is real. Nietzsche states that the child creates essence "according to inner laws" ("*gesetzmäßig und nach inneren Ordnungen*"), yet if there is a set of laws that both compels the child to play and defines the way in which it has to play, how can it claim to be master of these laws, which after all govern it rather than vice versa? Nietzsche emphasizes the child's ever-permanent state of innocence at play ("*Ein ewig gleicher Unschuld*") yet innocence refers to more than the lack of a sense of guilt or morality only: the child is innocent precisely because it allows itself to be fused with the game, because it lacks, if only for a moment, this sense of play as play. Nietzsche's innocence is a far cry from the artist's irony: "Und so, wie das Kind und der Künstler spielt, spielt das ewig lebendige Feuer, baut auf und zerstört, in Unschuld -- und dieses Spiel spielt der Äon mit sich. Sich verwandelnd in Wasser und Erde, türmt er wie ein Kind Sandhaufen am Meere, türmt auf und zertrümmert: von Zeit zu Zeit fängt er das Spiel von neuem an. Ein Augenblick der Sättigung: dann ergreift ihn von neuem das Bedürfnis, wie den Künstler zum Schaffen das Bedürfnis zwingt. Nicht Frevelmut, sondern der immer neu erwachende Spieltrieb ruft andre Welten ins Leben. Das Kind wirft einmal das Spielzeug weg: bald aber fängt es wieder an in unschuldiger Laune. Sobald es aber baut, knüpft, fügt und formt es gesetzmässig und nach inneren Ordnungen" (*Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter* 7).

And similarly, just as the child and the artist play, the eternally living fire plays, builds up and destroys, in innocence -- and this game the Aeon plays with himself. Transforming himself into water and earth, like a child he piles heaps of sand by the sea, piles up and demolishes; from time to time he recommences the game. A moment of satiety, then again desire seizes him, as desire compels the artist to create. Not wantonness, but the ever newly awakening impulse to play, calls into life other worlds. The child throws away his toys; but soon he starts again in an innocent frame of mind. As soon however as the child builds he connects, joins and forms lawfully and according to an innate sense of order (see Nietzsche 1964b, 108). The point is not that Nietzsche eliminated or even attempted to reduce the child's (or the artist's) superiority over the game, thus denying the possibility of human activity to ultimately transcend its own metaphysical illusion. What I am arguing, however, is that Nietzsche did emphasize the rigour of the play's metaphysical power at least as much as he emphasized the child's power to create and have control over his own game, thus demonstrating a definite hesitation in cutting a clear break with metaphysics. Emphasis on the sheer power of illusion, beyond whatever human interference, cannot but reduce the belief in the child's, artist's or just simply human possibility to break with metaphysics.

The above quotation makes clear that the child does not simply command the metaphysical power of the game to be unleashed by his own doing. Nietzsche states that the urge takes hold of the child, thus indicating the child's submission to his innermost needs, or, in fact, to a rather impersonal set of needs. Nietzsche uses the poetic "ihn ergreift das Bedürfnis" as a construct in which the impersonal and faceless "es" (*es ergreift ihn das Bedürfnis*) remains implicit and undetermined. *Es* takes over, or, in fact, takes "grip" of the child when words no longer suffice in describing what exactly takes place. In this context, Djuric condemns Eugen Fink for subjugating Nietzsche's importance of a practice-oriented break from metaphysics to the importance of a sheer cosmological one, thus emphasizing the crucial difference between the child instigating play itself and the child being played with, that is, the difference between a creative type of play and a play to which one just simply gives in (152-53). While the first is escaping metaphysics, the second is merely a succumbing to it. Djuric argues that for Fink Nietzsche's concept of play involves the "world as play" (*Weltspiel*) rather than "human beings as players," thus reducing the possibility of humans to effectively create their own play and preserve superiority over illusion. But the fact remains that, despite Djuric's effort to retain the human endeavour at the centre of Nietzsche's philosophy, Nietzsche himself, as demonstrated in this quote, wittingly or not, has reserved a much less superior and comfortable position for his playful child than Djuric would like us to believe. An additional difficulty is that speaking of knowing in terms of forgetting and knowing at the same time suffers from the metaphysical assumption that knowing at play is just simply like any other type of knowledge or knowing. Somehow we know that the game of life is a game, even though we might at times suppress the knowledge that play is play by forgetting and acting as if we do not know. Yet, as Djuric states, while forgetting, we nonetheless continue to somehow know. Schrift speaks of a "qualitatively" different type of knowing ("seriousness") (68). The fact, however, is that this new way of knowing at play, which is also somehow forgetting, defies the

traditional conceptions of what it is to know. Knowledge at play seems to take place on a subconscious level rather than anywhere else, and as something which does not coexist with forgetting but which is rather suppressed or concealed.

As I discussed previously, knowing in terms of a rational assimilation of pieces of knowledge or information according to which action is initiated, which is the traditional definition of knowing, hardly seems a sufficient explanation of what goes on when the participant of the game deals with the game of life. Related to this metaphysical speculation about knowledge in the game of life is the question of the insufficiency of the words with which to describe what exactly goes on when one knows during play. As indicated, Schrift speaks of a qualitatively different seriousness or knowing, yet the question of why one should still resort to inadequate terminology remains unresolved. Why refer to seriousness at all if this type of seriousness also incorporates the lack of it? Nietzsche speaks of the child's *Ernst* and *Unschuld*, and its sacred pledge to life, yet the falling back upon the old metaphysical definitions of how to approach life must indicate, beyond whatever expression of venomous irony, the impossibility to ultimately make a distinction between the efforts of the naive believer and the bad faith of the one claiming to somehow know.

We know that Nietzsche was thinking in terms of an "instinctive" knowledge. The "irgendwie weiss" of Djuric and the "full knowledge" of Schrift refer to Nietzsche's "internalized knowledge" (*sich einverleibt[es] Wissen*). Nietzsche's awareness of play as play turns away from reason in that it is an embodied knowledge, an instinct (*Instinkt*), a drive (*Trieb*) (quoted in *Fröhliche Wissenschaft* 11). Yet, we should pay attention to the fact that the problem of metaphysical speculation remains. Nietzsche, although perhaps not explicitly, makes a distinction between knowledge of the spirit and that of the body, thus establishing a qualitative distinction between the two in favour of the latter. Yet, as Nietzsche at other times has stated himself, both the distinction and the qualitative differentiation between body and spirit are based on a false metaphysical premise. In a section on the prevalence of the body in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, for instance, Nietzsche argues "Leib bin ich ganz und gar, und Nichts ausserdem, und Seele ist nur ein Wort für ein Etwas am Leibe" (I, 39) ["body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body" (Kaufmann 34)]. We are nothing but body, and the soul is only a word. To speak of bodily knowledge in terms of knowledge is making the false metaphysical assumption that bodily knowledge is still somehow knowledge, though different from a rational type. In the final analysis, however, there can only exist one type of knowledge for human beings -- the knowledge of the conscious mind, the knowledge shaped by words, in Nietzsche's terminology: *das Wissen, die Vernunft, das vernünftige Denken*, etc.). Speaking of the subconscious knowledge of the drives is in itself an impossibility, since the drives and the subconsciousness are beyond and outside language and consciousness. True, language may define the unconscious in terms of knowledge, yet this is, strictly speaking, as Nietzsche has indicated himself, merely appropriating the unfathomable.

In a section entitled "to experience and to invent" Nietzsche states that consciousness is the interpretation of unknown physiological processes, and that to experience is to invent ("Erleben ist ein Erdichten"): "all unser sogenanntes Bewusstsein [ist] ein mehr oder weniger phantastischer Kommentar über einen ungewussten, vielleicht unwissbaren, aber gefühlten Text" (*Morgenröte* 119) ["all our so-called consciousness is a more or less fantastic commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text" (Clark and Leiter 120)]. Nietzsche also argues that drives do not think, simply because they cannot think: "Because all drives are unintelligent, "usefulness" ("*Nützlichkeit*") is of no importance to them" (qtd in Colli and Montinari X, 342). Knowledge in order to be knowledge is always already rational, converted into language, transformed into familiar imagery, summoned onto the plane of consciousness. In one of his unpublished notes, Nietzsche argues that human beings stop thinking when they try to think beyond language ("*im sprachlichen Zwange*") (*Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtzigerjahre* qtd. in Schlechta 862). Human beings cannot know what lies beyond the act of knowing. This means that Nietzsche's internalized knowledge is no knowledge, unless defined as such -- and perhaps inevitably distorted -- on a purely rational, linguistic, or epistemological level. Instincts and drives may exist, yet speaking in terms of instinctual knowledge must inevitably suffer from the human need to domesticate a force over which, literally speaking, human beings have no say. This force defies, by its very nature, the boundaries of human definition.

Nietzsche's inconsistency here may be said to reflect the complexity of the metaphysical question. For Nietzsche the task is to somehow make the child's knowledge at play more instinctive, and considering Nietzsche's impatience with reason we understand why. Yet, once again, making knowledge instinctive is impossible, unless the knowledge is no real knowledge but already somehow instinct or drive. Human beings cling to life, yet strictly speaking we do not know what it is that makes us cling to life. As Nietzsche states himself, to find a rationale may be possible, yet the rationale is made up of language, and language is a collection of fictions with which to grasp a reality we cannot know. We may be said, then, to understand life as play, to breathe to play, to breathe as play, to playfully breathe. Yet, understanding life as play is grounded in reason, and it is Nietzsche himself who denounces the faculty of the mind to approach something as unfathomable as the simple act of living or breathing. Living seems to be foregrounded in metaphysics and essence in that it compels human beings to move, ever forward, backward, create, destroy, struggle, believe and breathe, as if it all makes sense, as if there were no end to our days. My remarks here are not intended to triumphantly indicate Nietzsche's inconsistency, even if on a metaphysical level. Dismissing Nietzsche and pointing out inconsistency on the basis of a few carefully selected quotes would be missing the point. My intention in this study has been to primarily indicate that the metaphysical question with Nietzsche is not so easily resolved. Deciding on Nietzsche's successful transcendence of metaphysics, as Djuric argues, in his well-documented study, means making decisions where Nietzsche remains ambiguous or incomplete. It comes as no surprise that interpreting Nietzsche's text involves making choices, just like interpreting any other text. Yet, with Nietzsche the stakes are high and the questions on which decisions are to be made remarkably complex. We have seen that deciding on the metaphysical question is touching on something very basic and human. To decide on the successful transcendence of metaphysics is to be faced with the inevitable and perhaps unresolvable question of having to use an instrument which is grounded in metaphysics: our consciousness and our language.

I have attempted to demonstrate that in his texts about the playful child -- a premise of poststructuralist paradigm -- Nietzsche remains more ambiguous and tentative than some of his critics would have us believe. The texts demonstrate that escaping metaphysics proper is problematic in that the child is not always superior to the game, which is the condition of a successful transcendence. Nietzsche states that inner laws compel the child to play and to fuse with the game no less than that the child freely creates. I have attempted to demonstrate as well that the premise of the child "somehow knowing" (Djuric) that all is nothing but play is based on speculation if one continues to define this somehow knowing in terms of knowledge. This may appear a little vague, yet what I am trying to argue here is that considering play as play in the game of life can hardly be a sufficient criterion to escape metaphysics when this knowledge plays on a rational level only. Nietzsche's attempt to make this knowledge somehow instinctive proves that this has been a contentious point for Nietzsche also. Escaping metaphysics on a practical level is surely not the all too rational avowal of just claiming to consider life as play. That is merely bad faith. "fully knowing" (Schrift) that life is illusion to the extent of fully knowing what life is all about is problematic, in Nietzsche's view also: "Wir haben eben gar kein Organ für das *Erkennen*, für die 'Wahrheit': wir 'wissen' (oder glauben oder bilden uns ein) gerade so viel, als es im Interesse der Menschen-Herde, der Gattung, *nützlich* sein mag" (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* 354) ["Indeed, we have not any organ at all for *knowing*, or for "truth": we "know" (or believe, or fancy) just as much as may be of use in the interest of the human herd, the species" (Nietzsche 1964a, 300)]. We only know as much as we ought to know for our own well-being.

Eugen Fink states that "das dionysische Gipfelglück des Menschen liegt in der panischen Erfahrung, die uns die Nichtigkeit aller individuierten Gestalten kundgibt" (188). A free yet accurate translation would be: the most intense joy lies in our panic-stricken awareness of life as it is. This awareness may occur at times, to be sure. Yet, my argument has been that in order to live human beings must rather suppress than prolong this panic-stricken sentiment. That, in fact, living life itself is conditioned, over and over again, by the suppressing of its more terrifying realities. Ultimately, my argument is also simply that human beings are steeped in metaphysics, and that a sense of metaphysics or essence is the condition for all human life. Related to this is the difficulty of language, and the fact that language is perhaps inescapably metaphysical. And here I conclude with a quote. In one of the stories of Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones* (these precious testimonies to the complexities of the human mind), the

author speaks of his stammering acquaintance with "Funes the memorious," this "precursor of the supermen," this "vernacular and rustic Zarathustra" (59), this mannish boy gifted and cursed with the means to see and feel the world as it is (the title of the story is "Funes el memorioso" and Borges describes it as a metaphor for insomnia): "[Ireneo Funes] was ... almost incapable of ideas of a general, Platonic sort. Not only was it difficult for him to comprehend that the generic symbol *dog* embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse size and form; it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front). His own face in the mirror, his own hands, surprised him every time he saw them. ... Funes could continuously discern the tranquil advances of corruption, of decay, of fatigue. He could note the progress of death, of dampness. He was the solitary and lucid spectator of a multiform, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise world" (65). But the author also states that "[Funes] was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions" (66). I would like to argue with Borges' position that to think is to forget. Perhaps one "somehow knows," yet the knowledge does not interfere: thus we may know yet do not realize, we may argue and reason, yet, because of the urge to establish a set of metaphysical certainties, we cannot feel the intensity of what, who and where we are: "Ireneo was nineteen years old ... he seemed to me as monumental as bronze, more ancient than Egypt, older than the prophecies and the pyramids. I thought that each of my words (that each of my movements) would persist in his implacable memory; I was benumbed by the fear of multiplying useless gestures" (66).

Works Cited

- Allison, David B., ed. *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*. New York: Dell, 1977.
- Berger, Hermann. *Wat is Metafysica? Een studie over transcendentie*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Funes the Memorios." *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. Ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby. Trans. James Irby. New York: Modern Library, 1983.
- Colli, G., and M. Montinari, eds. *Friedrich Nietzsche. Sämtliche Werke*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1988.
- Djuric, Mihailo. *Nietzsche und die Metaphysik*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985.
- Fink, E. *Nietzsches Philosophie*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Nietzsche (I & II)*. Pfullingen: Neske, 1961.
- Koelb, C., ed. *Nietzsche as Postmodernist: Essays pro and contra*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1990.
- Mann, Thomas. *Nietzsches Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1948.
- Nietzsche, F. *The Joyful Wisdom*. Trans. Thomas Common. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964.
- Nietzsche, F. "Philosophy during the Tragic Age of the Greeks." *Early Greek Philosophy*. Trans. Maximilian A. Mügge. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964.
- Nietzsche, F. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson. Trans. Carol Diethe. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Nietzsche, F. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 1995.
- Nietzsche, F. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*. Ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Schlechta, K. *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke*. München: Hanser, 1965.
- Schrift, Alan D. *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Author's profile: Johannes Welfing received his Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Alberta in 1999. Following his dissertation -- entitled *Nietzschean Configurations* -- he received a DAAD (Germany) fellowship to conduct research at the University in Siegen 1997-98. Welfing has published on Nietzsche in *LUMIS-Schriften* (1998) and in *Slavica* (1999) and on film in *Studia Humanitas: Studies in Film and Popular Culture* (1999). Recently, Welfing accepted a term position in French literature at the University of Lethbridge.