

## The Logic of the Mask: Nietzsche's Depth as Surface

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Amie Leigh Zimmer

### Introduction

By developing what I call the logic of the mask, I aim to show the import of appearance—of the *shallow*—to Nietzsche's thinking. A paradigm of truth which locates it in the metaphysical realm far beyond the sensible world renders the shallow as that which is merely opposed to the deep. On this paradigm, depth is effectively correlated with the meaningful and surface with the meaningless. Philosophical aesthetics, which has appearance as its sole point of investigation, has elided meaningful discussions of fashion and dress with few exceptions. The rejection of dress as a "superficial" topic is predicated on a dualism between shallow and profound linking depth with meaning, and surface with inessentiality. My aim in this paper is to suggest that Nietzsche's rejection of the appearance-reality distinction (and with it, a metaphysical conception of truth) subsequently results in an affirmation of appearances which itself reorients philosophical attention to the "shallow." In their respective works on Nietzsche, Lou Andreas-Salomé and Gilles Deleuze both highlight the significance of the mask and its relationship to Nietzsche's thinking; I use Salomé and Deleuze to develop this interpretation.

### Nietzsche's Masks

Nietzsche's claim in the *Genealogy of Morality* that "philosophy would have been absolutely impossible for most of the time on earth without an ascetic mask and a suit of clothes" emphasizes the significance of theological metaphysics in sustaining the history of Western philosophy. Asceticism for Nietzsche comes to signify the maintenance of a harmful metaphysical dualism between this world and another: a dualism which ascetic morality comes to forcefully maintain. What the comment indicates then is a conception of the mask, and of dress more broadly by extension, as "mere" appearance, where "mere" indicates the existence of a deeper, more "truthful" self. Nietzsche's critique of asceticism would take me beyond the scope of this paper, but suffice it to say here that his critique inculcates philosophy's obsession with metaphysical depth and with interiority. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God in *The Gay Science* is perhaps the

most well-known example of Nietzsche's critique of origins, and is exemplary of his rejection of a depth conception of truth: that rejection of a metaphysically "true" world undergirding the world of appearances. This hermeneutics of suspicion certainly implicates a theological metaphysics as the culprit for an enduring, trans-historical conception of truth.

To say that philosophy itself would have been impossible without a suit of clothes suggests to me that philosophy as a practice is and has been enabled by two beliefs: first, the distinction between appearance and reality, and second, the existence of truth as residing beyond the world of "mere" appearances, which is to say, as a robustly metaphysical conception of truth. This denigration of appearances—and with it, the world and the fleshly—is what leads both to asceticism as a value, and to Nietzsche's eventual critique of asceticism as a value. Nietzsche's critique of asceticism is the foundation for his later philosophy of self-overcoming; the critique of metaphysical loyalty to depth as both origin and value is imperative to the cultivation of self-creating, or, said otherwise, to self-fashioning. The implication here is that the affirmation of the world of appearances is the pivotal moment of Nietzsche's positive philosophy. If asceticism for Nietzsche is the height of passive nihilism, then his critique of asceticism and subsequent affirmation of the earthly world of appearances would seem to render the world, at the least, a source and site of nihilism's overcoming. Ironic, since clothing and dress are at least in a colloquial sense considered to be rather meaningless or empty objects. Undergirding the ascetic on Nietzsche's critique is the appearance-reality distinction upheld by theological metaphysics. The undermining of this distinction, then, is crucial to Nietzsche's project of the revaluation of values.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes that "mystical explanations are considered deep; the truth is, they are not even shallow" (121). Walter Kaufmann suggests that this distinction between the shallow and the profound is meant to indicate two ways of reading his work. This means that the shallow becomes associated with "appearance" (with every day, common, shared reality, and the profound with the "masked truth...accessible only to higher men)."<sup>1</sup> This reading of the appearance-reality distinction, as David H. Fisher points out, is incongruent with Nietzsche's own critique of the distinction throughout his work. If we are to make sense of Nietzsche's comment in *Beyond Good and Evil* that "everything profound loves masks," then we must make sense of it alongside, and not in spite of, his rejection of the two truth theory, i.e., the distinction between appearance and reality. David Fisher suggests that, since Nietzsche had rejected the theory by the

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<sup>1</sup> This is how David H. Fisher puts it in "Nietzsche's Dionysian Masks."

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time he wrote *Beyond Good and Evil*, “the words must be taken ironically rather than literally” (522).

Nietzsche’s use of masks in *Zarathustra* is usually thought to indicate the tension brought about by Nietzsche’s own preface to the text: that *Zarathustra* is meant both for the all and the none.<sup>2</sup> That would mean that the mask is what allows for a kind of ironic distance when addressing an “audience suffering from failed desire,” to borrow Adrian Del Caro & Robert Pippin’s term (Caro & Pippin, xx). On this interpretation, the mask is both a tool of performance and an instrument for teaching the lessons of *Zarathustra*. With intended irony, I call this a shallow interpretation of Nietzsche’s use of the language and imagery of masks and masking. I realize that it might be rather odd that *The Birth of Tragedy* makes no cameo in this discussion of Nietzsche’s masks. After all, Dionysus is the *masked god* to whom Nietzsche claims he is a disciple. Given the very literal, theatrical associations of and with masking, especially as related to the figure of Dionysus, it is no surprise that the literature that has developed on Nietzsche’s “masks” tends to read the imagery along these lines. But the proliferation of “masks” in the later works indicates that a more complex account of masking is needed in addition to the line of interpretation which aligns masks with theatrical masking. Caro & Pippin’s interpretation is an extension of this analysis of the mask from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

The textual evidence in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* calls for a more nuanced interpretation of masks as other than a mere metaphor for a disguised or “hidden” self. In “On the Land of Education” Nietzsche says that the person of today “couldn’t wear a better mask ... than that of your own face! Who could *recognize* you? Written full with the characters of the past, and even these characters painted over with new characters: thus you have hidden yourselves well from all interpreters of characters!” (93). He later claims that the religious don “God’s mask,” into which a “horrid worm has crawled” (97). Even *Zarathustra* at times seems to be “like a beautiful mask of a saint ... like a new wondrous masquerade in which my evil spirit, the melancholy devil, enjoys himself” (241). The old magician sings: “Are *your* longings beneath a thousand masks/ You fool! You Poet!” (244). To say that the face is a mask is not to say that the visage is a mask of a true self which can only be found in psychological interiority, but to instead suggest an ontology of the mask. There is no true essence of a self underneath the mask of the face, but only another mask, and another under that, and so on. Since ontology is genealogical for Nietzsche—that is, there is no history of

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<sup>2</sup> Both Adrian Del Caro & Robert Pippin’s in their introduction to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2006), and Stanley Rosen in *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* (1995) make these claims.

ontology without a genealogy—Zarathustra is intimating the genealogical, even geological nature of the self: a self which grows out of and through present systems of values and virtues, continuing a process of masking *as* a kind of sedimentation.

The masks of “everyday” people are made with paint, and mirrors placed around the figures reflect their painted, masked images back onto themselves. This indicates both a mass-scale projection and reflection of their own ideals, understood to be that of the ascetic or of ascetic morality more broadly. The characters of the past are “painted over” with new characters, and so on, and so forth; people are “baked” from the colors of these paints. And yet, Zarathustra pronounces, “all ages and peoples speak from your veils; motley, all customs and beliefs speak from your gestures “(93). To briefly preempt the next section on Deleuze, being is its own history of contingent “forms,” which can and indeed do change through time. Referring to the “paint” passage quoted above, Luce Irigaray writes “I have washed off your masks and make up, scrubbed away your multicolored projections and designs...” (*Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 4). But for Nietzsche, “appearance *is* a form of being” (*KS A* 13:14 [93]). The masks don’t indicate a veneer, but instead point to the particular *form* of morality prevalent at the time. In the next section, I’ll say more about how the mask operates as a form.

### Salomé & Deleuze

For Lou Andreas-Salomé and Gilles Deleuze most explicitly, the mask is conceptually central to Nietzsche’s philosophy: and even more so to understanding Nietzsche. In his introduction to Salomé’s book, Siegfried Mandel writes that Nietzsche practiced what he called “dissimulation” [*Verstellung*] in an ironic adoption of masks, much as an actor uses them on stage in order to enjoy the pleasure particular to this form of artistic deception. He suggests that Nietzsche was stimulated by the tension created by the dual activity (which is to say, the activity of deception) and eventually craved and willed that tension as a necessary condition for his creativity (*Nietzsche*, xviii). Mandel’s suggestion here is that the mask *produces* the tension between realities: between immanent and transcendent, this world and another world, etc. I don’t disagree: in fact, it’s the production of these dualisms that constitutes, in part, the mask’s very logic. I would however extend the claim and suggest that the mask operates more as a form of productive emptiness rather than as that revelation of interiority (understood here as the mere inverse of exteriority). Mandel’s overarching belief here, that the mask merely “covers” and therefore allows for the play between inside and outside, self and other, etc., is similar to Adrian del Caro, Robert

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Pippin, and Stanley Rosen's claims that the mask functions more as a metaphor than as a rich concept—or even, as I'm suggesting here, as an operative logic.

In Salomé's psychological-biographical monograph on Nietzsche, she suggests that his descent into "madness" was actually something like the logical conclusion of his own philosophy: that his thinking, and his person, were not separable. She says that "The more his [Nietzsche's] teachings seem to be generalized, the more they gain greater specific meanings as to his personal character ... Ultimately, the last secrets of his texts are hidden under so many masks that the theories he expresses emerge almost only through images from his inner life. Absent finally is any desire to reconcile one with the other..." (87). She draws on Zarathustra, where Nietzsche asks: "what is there except my self (sic)? There is no externality!" (Z:3 "The Convalescent"). By the time Salomé wrote this text, she was already well immersed in psychoanalysis and was establishing a formative relationship with Freud. This psychoanalytic alliance creates a philosophical tension between Nietzsche and Freud: where the former rejects the affirmation of a depth conception of truth, the latter affirms the existence of the reality of an "inner" life. In my view, Salomé's work is a clear attempt to reconcile these two positions within herself, but it seems that she upholds and maintains Nietzsche's critique of the appearance-reality distinction. The self "is no externality," as Nietzsche himself claims, but neither is it an "interiority" to be found underneath a mask.

Salomé accepts Nietzsche's critique of origins, and with it his rejection of truth as metaphysical depth which a metaphysics of origination necessarily entails. For Nietzsche, Salomé says, "everything which is objective reality becomes appearance—only a deceptive veil which the isolated depth weaves about itself in order to become a temporary surface intelligible to human eyes" (11). What appears, then, is the most real, and not merely its cover or shawl. To say that reality becomes appearance is to say that reality *is* nothing other than the changing sensibilities of appearance. This notion of reality as becoming, then, replaces a theological metaphysics with a process metaphysics highlighting the mutable forms of the sensible world.

The critique of metaphysics is related to what Salomé locates as the paradox of asceticism in Nietzsche. She says that: "On the one hand Nietzsche fights common morality because of its ascetic character and its denigration and condemnation of the animality which Nietzsche values so highly as a source of strength; on the other hand, he fights the reigning morality because it is insufficiently ascetic" (117). Nietzsche's philosophy is of course rife with what we might charitably call productive paradoxes. Nietzsche is critical, of course, of conventional morality, where it suffices for human beings to resemble a projected

image of the ideal. For Salomé, this results in an aesthetic veneer, but not a thoroughgoing change: the person would “sink to the level of an actor who merely dramatizes his own ideal” (think of the function of the mirrors in the passage quoted in the previous section) (120). Another productive paradox here is that the key to the overthrowing or critique of conventional morality rests dormant within it: namely, that human beings have first gained a capacity for superiority *through* their development within a reigning morality, art, and religion. This view is what permitted Nietzsche to believe in the possibility of a change in man’s “essence”; one’s “essence” transforms through one’s relationship to morality, art, and religion. Daniel Anderson says that “Dionysos was god of masks. But as god of masks his essence is *to be masked*; there can be no Dionysos unmasked” (*The Masks of Dionysos*, 8). Though Anderson is talking specifically about Dionysos in the Platonic context, the suggestion is applicable: this conception of masking as essence challenges any conception of masking which would merely uphold the dualisms between interiority and exteriority, and between appearance and reality. As an object, a mask does not *mask* on its own. However, a mask remains what it is despite its not having anything to “mask.” Masks, then, cover nothing, while simultaneously always in the act of revealing itself. Can a mask be masked? It cannot, for a mask *is* always what covers.

Of Nietzsche’s philosophy, Salomé says that “ethics unobtrusively merges with aesthetics” (121). The moral is no longer relegated to the realm of metaphysical intelligibility, but becomes indistinguishable from aesthetic sensibility. This is the key of Salomé’s insight. The depth conception of truth implied by Nietzsche’s critique of theological metaphysics implicates ethics in the form of ascetic morality. Instead, a philosophy of ‘self-fashioning’ is favored in the affirmation of the earthly world of appearances. Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics is itself predicated on the harmful dualism between this world and another, which itself produces ascetic morality. This means that Nietzsche’s own positive thinking relies not on a mere reversal of the dualism (i.e. a taste for this world over another), but on its very annihilation. The mask operates as this junction—this *Spielraum*, this pivot—upon which the inside and the outside are demarcated.

Deleuze takes the opposition between health and sickness as a fulcrum for thinking about masks and masking in Nietzsche’s philosophy. He writes that the crux of Nietzsche’s method is the reversal or shift afforded by illness as a means to evaluate health, and health as a means to evaluate illness. Deleuze claims that there is not a reciprocity between the two, and that the very possibility for a change in perspective afforded by the dualism is what ultimately situates health as ultimate victor. This “art of displacement,” as Deleuze calls it, becomes lost when

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Nietzsche “could no longer in his health make of sickness a point of view on health” (59). Later, when Deleuze then says that madness is not Nietzsche’s mask—contra to Nietzsche’s own claim—he means that madness is itself no longer a pivot point, no longer a perspective from which evaluation can occur. I read this not as a rejection of the mask as a functional logic, but as an affirmation. Contrary to the suggestion that Nietzsche’s madness was his “final mask,” i.e., the fateful mask which covered over his genius, Deleuze seems to be suggesting that Nietzsche’s madness is not a “mask” which covers anything at all. At the same time, he tells us that “With Nietzsche, everything is a mask. His health was a first mask for his genius; his suffering, a second mask, both for his genius and for his health. Nietzsche didn’t believe in the unity of a self and didn’t experience it.” (Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 59). Deleuze challenges Nietzsche’s own claim that “madness itself is the mask that hides a knowledge that is fatal and too sure” (quoted in Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, 59), affirming Salomé’s provocative thesis that Nietzsche’s “madness” is not irrespective of his thinking. This challenges Nietzsche’s own deployment of the mask of madness as that which covers truth. Said otherwise, madness is truth. Or, better yet, truth *is* madness: non-rational, non-*a-priori*, among other things. Deleuze suggests instead that madness marks the moment when the masks “merge into a death-like rigidity,” “no longer shifting and communicating” (59). To say that Nietzsche didn’t believe in the unity of a self isn’t to say that he believed in irreconcilable parts, but rather that he worked through the division that would result in a dualism in the first place, ending the function of the mask as that itself which renders legible both exterior and interior, surface and depth.

The mask has a similar function as the *Spielraum* or pivot discussed earlier in reference to Salomé. The mask marks an outside from an inside, but it also marks a secondary outside from a secondary inside, creating a barrier between world and self. Functionally, too, it marks the body-form, the skin, as an inside in relation to which there exists a further inside. This suggests that the outside is already an inside, or that the world of “mere” appearances is itself already the inside—the folded-in-ness—of an outside. This preempts Deleuze’s thinking of the fold [*le pli*], which designates the fold-*ing* of forces that create distinctions between inside and outside. Deleuze’s position here is consistent with his thinking of the fold in other works, and is deeply indebted to Nietzsche.<sup>3</sup> For Deleuze, forces give rise to processes of folding that create an inside-outside, which is an inside composed of its own outside (itself determined by outer forces). Deleuze tells us that the investigation of the external forces with which a human comes into contact is

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<sup>3</sup> I am thinking here of the discussion of the fold especially in *Foucault*.

necessary to determine the form created within a given historical formation. The forces within a human can—depending on the forces with which they interlace—give rise to forms other than what Deleuze calls the Man-form: the historical *formation* marked by forces of finitude.<sup>4</sup> The Man-form has itself been constituted only within the folds of finitude, meaning that it locates (or folds) death within the person. For Deleuze, the defining feature of classical thought is how it thinks the infinite; external forces are what can be raised to infinity (God, for instance). The human being would then be conceived as a mere limitation on infinity. Finitude is then derivative on infinitude: a derivative and not a primary force in itself. On this model, human understanding is merely the limitation placed on infinite understanding. Forces within the human being thus enter into a relation with forces that raise things to infinity, which result in limited, finite forces within the human being. This is why the human being (the Man-Form for Deleuze) is thematized as a fold, and why God, or the God-Form, is thematized as the unfold, understood as the unfolding of every force that can be raised to infinity.

Nietzsche's proclamation that a style should live emphasizes life as that animating force ultimately undergirding his philosophy, especially his thinking of the overcoming of nihilism. The man who proclaims God's death is also our greatest proponent of life. Deleuze says that "there is being only because there is life [...] the Experience of life is thus posited as the most general law of beings [...] but this ontology discloses not so much what gives beings their foundation as what bears them for an instant towards a precarious form" (129). That is, the Experience of life (this ontology) discloses not formal or universal conditions of possibility, but the relation between forces, which produces a certain historical formation (the God-form, Man-form, etc.). Each category reveals a particular relation between forces (129).<sup>5</sup> As Deleuze points out, for Nietzsche, the Man-form is what imprisons life within itself, and the *superman* is what frees it. (Deleuze, *Foucault*, 130). I take this to mean that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* inaugurates the *freeing* of the force of life from those forms which would maintain metaphysical dualisms. As Nietzsche puts it in the *Genealogy*, the ascetic *is* that contradiction of "life *against* life" which would also spring from the "protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life, which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its existence" (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 87). This is the paradox of annihilation, and what both Nietzsche and Deleuze seem to recognize as the "force" of life which is present even in those who would seemingly enact its

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<sup>4</sup> Forces of finitude themselves mean that humanity (?) exists only through the dissemination of the various methods for organizing life (such as the dispersion of languages) (130)

<sup>5</sup> "Of prime necessity is life: a style should live" (129)



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denial. The understanding of life as a force which operates against itself is the *folding* of life which creates the Man-form.

### Conclusion

If clothing is the mask of the body, then what the logic of Nietzsche's mask reveals is that there is nothing underneath. This is not to suggest that there is an empty void or abyss beneath our second skins, but rather that what is found underneath is not itself a truer or more essential version of what might be seen on the outside. If costume does not lack "depth" on the grounds of this Nietzschean critique, then depth cannot be the reason which can continue to mark the philosophical exclusion of dress. As editors Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz say in their introduction to *Fashion Statements: with Nietzsche*, the "time-honored opposition between reality and appearance—a product of a confused fantasy—is readily exposed by fashion" (3).

The pursuit of the origin, as Foucault puts it in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," assumes "the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession" (371). As Foucault puts it, this necessitates the "removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity" (371). But this removal of the mask is contra the project of genealogy. The genealogist finds nothing beyond the mask. The mask is not a mere metaphor here, but a material index of the genealogical method. The death of man, and the coming of the superman or *Übermensch*, relies on the abolishment of the appearance-reality bifurcation, or the inside-outside distinction, as Deleuze's thinking of the fold in part attempts to work through. And this death, as Foucault comforts, is not worth crying over (Deleuze, *Foucault*, 130). In response to Luce Irigaray's question of whether or not there can be a Nietzsche *unmasked*, the answer is, simply, no.

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