

# NIETZSCHE'S EARLY CONCEPT OF CULTURE

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**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to analyze and elucidate Nietzsche's early definition of culture in *Untimely Meditations*. In Nietzsche's early work the concept of culture refers to a shared world, and his idea of culture is concerned with the question of how the shared world is formed. I argue that in his early ideas in relation to this question, Nietzsche believes language and art are significant as the basis for a shared world, and this is reflected in his definition of culture as 'unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people'. It is my argument that language is the common basis for a shared world of a people, and art is what shapes the shared world, giving it form or style, and making it richer.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche. Culture. Unity. Style. Art.

## INTRODUCTION: THE TENSION IN NIETZSCHE'S UNDERSTANDING OF CULTURE

Undoubtedly culture is one of Nietzsche's main concerns. In an early note, he says "My task: *to comprehend the inner coherence and the necessity of every true culture.*" (KSA 7: 19[33]).<sup>2</sup> This concern for culture is not confined to the early period. In the so-called positivist middle period, he calls for "[...] a knowledge of the conditions of culture exceeding all previous degrees of

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<sup>2</sup> I cite Nietzsche's works using and often revising the existing translations according to Nietzsche's German text. Other translations of Nietzsche's notes are my own. For quotations from Nietzsche, the following abbreviations are used. "BGE" for *Beyond Good and Evil*, "BT" for *The Birth of Tragedy*, "D" for *Daybreak*, "EH" for *Ecce Homo*, "HH" for *Human, All Too Human*, "KSA" for *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, "TL" for "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense", "UM" for *Untimely Meditations*, and "Z" for *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. References to Nietzsche's writings are to section and aphorism numbers. When KSA is cited, references provide the volume number followed by the fragment number (e.g. KSA 7: 8[9] refers to volume 7, fragment 8[9]).

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such knowledge” as “[...] the enormous task for the great spirits of the next century.” (HH I 25). Nietzsche never abandoned this question of culture: in a note in 1887, he simply writes “[...] the *culture-complex* as *my* foremost interest.” (KSA 12: 10[28]).

However, there is disagreement as to what Nietzsche’s specific focus is concerning the broader topic of culture. Although most will agree that his interest in culture is that of a diagnostician, some argue that his main concern is not culture in itself but great individuals who can create cultural work, hence, as Leiter (2002, p. 290) remarks, “[...] what matters are *great* human beings.” In this understanding, most people have nothing to do with culture and the vast majority are to sacrifice themselves for a few individuals (DETWILER, 1990, ch. 5).<sup>3</sup> In brief, many understand that “Nietzsche was an elitist, and throughout his work culture is regarded as the domain of the few.” (JURIST, 2000, p. 52).

There is a grain of truth in this kind of understanding. In a sense Nietzsche takes an elitist stance as he presents the proposition: “Humanity should work ceaselessly toward producing great individuals.” (UM III: 6). However, when we look into the text, we can see Nietzsche’s emphasis on unity regarding culture, which is at odds with such an individualist and elitist reading in that this unity does not simply mean individual works of art.

This emphasis on unity is found throughout Nietzsche’s work, but most prominently in relation to culture in his early period. Nietzsche gives his famous definition of culture in *Untimely Meditations*: “Culture is, above all, unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people.” (UM I: 1; II: 4).<sup>4</sup> In this definition, culture is not understood simply as “the domain of the few”; it is not made up of pieces of art produced by an exceptional few. It is unity of style, established and manifested throughout the life of a people as a whole. This aspect seems to be at odds with the other, which creates a tension between Nietzsche’s emphasis on great individuals and his apparent understanding of culture as unity.

In relation to this tension evident in Nietzsche’s early period, Church contrasts the two concepts of culture that he claims Nietzsche adheres to. One is “national culture”, in which “the few and the many collaborate and compete

<sup>3</sup> Apel (1999) shares a similar view. In the similar vein, Hurka (2007) reads Nietzsche as a perfectionist from a perspective of a maximax principle that requires people to devote their energy to a select few to produce the greatest perfection.

<sup>4</sup> This view is already implied in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (KSA 1: p. 812).

for their common end” (which Church maintains is freedom or “human self-determination”), and the other is “cosmopolitan culture” in which the few “transcend the many and establish a cosmopolitan community” beyond “social conventions and needs” (CHURCH, 2015, p. 146). Although there is tension between these two understandings of culture, “[...] what unifies them is the notion of merit.” (CHURCH, 2015, p. 8). In this respect, he argues that “[...] the two concepts of culture share a fundamental aim, namely, the establishment of a standard of excellence.” (CHURCH, 2015, p. 169). This culture, in Church’s view, is not about “any particular identity, any arbitrary set of beliefs, practices, or values” but cultural exemplars.<sup>5</sup>

Although we agree that great individuals are important, Church’s claim that the “[...] unity of culture consists in the common memory of a culture’s exemplars” and “[...] a people can have diverse beliefs, practices, and values and still be unified by their best exemplars” (CHURCH, 2015, p. 249) is questionable when considering Nietzsche’s emphasis on myth in bringing unity of culture and giving meaning to life in *Birth of Tragedy* (see GEMES; SYKES, 2015) and his definition of culture in *Untimely Meditations* that draws attention to the shared style of life, or lifestyle, of a people. German people revering Goethe, so to speak, does not make a unity of German culture if their lives are fragmented with different cultural practices.

There has to be a shared basis for a cultural unity, other than reverence for the exemplars. The higher type is significant in forming a shared basis, as the great individual is one who shapes people’s affective interpretation of the world. This shared basis is certainly what gives rise to a cultural unity. We can also find the early development of Nietzsche’s idea of a shared basis for a cultural unity in his early notion of culture. In fact, he develops his idea of culture in a most prominent way in the period of *Untimely Meditations*. In the following sections, I will clarify the early concept of culture, analysing in particular the definition of culture itself, which has often been mentioned in Nietzsche studies but has not been thoroughly analysed.

## 1 EARLY CONCEPT OF CULTURE: LANGUAGE

Let us look again at Nietzsche’s definition of culture. “Culture is, above all, unity of artistic style in all the expressions of the life of a people.” (UM I:

<sup>5</sup> For the egalitarian understanding of the exemplar, see Conant (2001). For the nuanced reading of *Schopenhauer as Educator* in relation to the elitist-egalitarian debate, see Rowthorn (2017).

1; II: 4).<sup>6</sup> In opposition to “true culture” that “[...] presupposes unity of style” (UM I: 2), he considers contemporary German culture a mishmash of styles and disunity between inner and outer. However, he does not fully expound the definition itself, and it does not seem his discussion in *UM* always centres on this definition. I believe we can gain an insight into what he means by this definition when looking into his discussion of culture in the Nachlass from the same period.

What is crucial in the definition of culture is “unity” [*Einheit*]. In early texts Nietzsche praises the Greek culture for its ability to build cultural unity based on myths; he understood that “[...] without myth every culture forfeits its healthy, creative, natural force: only a horizon surrounded with myths completes a whole cultural movement to the unity.” (BT 23). Therefore, unity is at the heart of culture; in a word, “Culture [is] a unity” (KSA 7: 19[221]).

The unity in this definition of culture has two facets. First, where the unity resides is in all the life-expressions of a people. Second, it is not just unity but specifically “artistic unity.” Thus, a culture means that first there is a people established and it manifests a unified style, which is related to an artistic world. To understand this better we should consider Greek culture because what Nietzsche refers to for this idea of culture is, especially in the early period, ancient Greece. Regarding this, he writes in a note: “The solid point around which the Greek people crystallises is its language./The solid point on which its culture crystallises is Homer” (KSA 7: 19[278]).

Regarding the first point, language is essential for a people to be established. A people should not be a mere collection of individuals, but as a matter of course they should form a certain unity. Politics cannot make a genuine unity out of people, but only “[...] a visible mechanical unity” with “[...] government apparatus” and “military pomp” (KSA 7: 7[122]), which have nothing to do with culture. So Nietzsche asks, “Where does the *unity* of a *people* rest?” He answers “[...] inwardly, language and customs.” (KSA 7: 19[308]). But above all, language is core. As to the origin and function of language, Nietzsche understands it developed for communication [*Mittheilung*]. Through language each person comes to share and take part in “the common” with others. He later also understands that “consciousness,” whose development goes hand in hand with “the development of language” as “signs of communication,” “[...] actually belongs not to the individual

<sup>6</sup> In this definition we may find some influence Nietzsche might receive from Burckhardt who uses “unity of style” as an evaluative principle regarding culture (SIGURDSON, 2004, p. 114).

existence of man but rather to the community-nature and herd-nature in him.” (GS 354). Humans cannot just share their inner individual experience in itself without any medium through which to share it. Language is the base for shared experience because it translates individual experience in a common horizon.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, “[a]s a sharing, language works to make people have ‘equal’ experiences (wants and feelings), to bring them into a ‘common’ stance or view.” (RICHARDSON, 2015, p. 217).

Although Nietzsche has a mixed view on “the common” (RICHARDSON, 2015), the important aspect is that language allows the common basis on which humans can communicate with and understand each other, accordingly to form a people. In this vein, “[...] to understand one another [...] we must also use the same words for the same species of inner experiences, we must ultimately have our experience *in common*.” With this shared basis, “[...] when human beings have lived for a long time under similar conditions [...], then something *emerges* that ‘understands itself,’ a people.” (BGE 268). This shared experience is the foundation of the unity of a people.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, language as “metaphor” (TL, KSA 1: p. 879) is not designed to reveal things in themselves: it only shows the way in which we see and understand the world. In this respect, to share language means to share the way to see things; to construct a world in which we take part together even though this may be an illusion. From this comes the basis of unity: “The significance of language for the development of culture lies in the fact that in language human beings set up a world of their own beside the other one.” (HH I 11). Nietzsche also writes, “[the] first stage of culture: the belief in language, as continuous metaphorical designation.” (KSA 7: 19[329]).

<sup>7</sup> In a sense, similar to Wittgenstein’s view, “[...] it makes no sense to refer to ‘the world of experience’ as other to the ‘world of language’.” (RAYMAN, 2008, p. 164).

<sup>8</sup> It may be said that the use of Nietzsche’s middle and late period works, such as *HH* and *BGE*, as in this paragraph, can be problematic because this article is about his *early* concept of culture. However, his idea of language is not completely different and inconsistent for each period in every aspect. While Nietzsche is critical of conceptual language in the early period, he basically understands that language developed for the need of communication and understanding (UM IV: 5), which is his consistent view also in later periods. In this regard, language is concerned with commonness. Nietzsche deems language at the time as operating only by convention, which results in the failure of being the real medium of communication. Thus he presents music and art as “another kind of language” (UM IV: 5) that has “[...] the ability to communicate to others what one has experienced.” (UM IV: 9). In this respect, I focus on language in terms of the basis or creation of commonness.

In brief, to be a people as “something that understands itself,” a group of people who understand one another, humans have to enter a stage of agreement. What makes them enter this stage is language, which allows the shared experience and the shared world. In this respect, to share language is to share life. As Wittgenstein (2009, p. 94) suggests, “[...] it is in their *language* that human beings agree. This is agreement [Übereinstimmung] not in opinions, but rather in form of life.” However, this is not enough in itself to form culture. To have a culture, a people has to have “artistic unity” in its life as a whole. Regarding this, as mentioned above, Nietzsche sees “Homer” as the “[...] point on which [Greek] culture crystallises” (KSA 7: 19[278]); in other words, the “[s]econd stage of culture: unity and coherence of the world of metaphor, based on Homer.” (KSA 7: 19[329]). In the light of this, we can ask: in what sense was Greek culture born in Homer’s horizon?

## 2 EARLY CONCEPT OF CULTURE: ARTISTIC STYLE

What is prominent about the Greek culture is that a poet was first called for, prior to a prophet or philosopher. Unlike other places with advanced culture, such as ancient China, India, and Israel, poetry emerged in Greece before philosophical wisdom or religious faith was expressed in language. This is evidence of the aesthetic spirit of the Greek people. In Greece, poetry was not a mere tool for conveying philosophical thought or religious conviction; rather, it was their own way to understand the world and the way to express their life. Of course, Greek art was also related to religion or philosophy, but it never sacrificed its artistic or aesthetic aspects for religious content.<sup>9</sup> Hölderlin had an insight into this when he wrote, “Poetry [...] is the beginning and the end of philosophical knowledge. Like Minerva from the head of Jupiter, philosophy springs from the poetry of an eternal, divine state of being.” (HÖLDERLIN, 1990, p. 66).

With regard to Greek culture and philosophy before Socrates, Nietzsche also appreciates its “aesthetic value,” saying “[...] the inadequately proven philosophy of Heraclitus has far more artistic value than all the propositions of Aristotle.” (KSA 7: 19[76]). Such aesthetic value refers to the expression of philosophy rooted in the Greek artistic ground; “[...] the great ancient philosophers belong to *general Hellenic life*.” (KSA 7: 19[28]). Although

<sup>9</sup> Snell (1953, ch. 2) points out that the essence of Greek religion and Homeric gods is wonder at and admiration for beauty, not fear of the unknown or reverence for morality.

philosophy represents “[...] the *isolated* elements of art,” “[t]he content of art and of ancient philosophy is identical.” (KSA 7: 19[41]). When Hegel (1986, p. 176) said “The stage of Greek consciousness is the stage of beauty,” he saw the Greek as inchoate, but Nietzsche endowed this stage of beauty with much more value since, in this stage, he recognises great culture in the artistic or aesthetic horizon.

The horizon in which the Greek culture developed was Homer. It is not difficult to see Homer's great status in terms of Greek culture. In *Symposium* by the Greek historian Xenophon, Niceratus said that “My father was anxious to see me develop into a good man [...] and as a means to this end he compelled me to memorise all of Homer; and so even now I can repeat the whole *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by heart.” (XENOPHON, 1979, Ch.3, S.5). Homer with *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was the only teacher of Greeks until the sophists appeared in 5 B.C. (MARROU, 1956, ch.1). At the time people became Greek and “good men” by reading Homer. Through Homer, Greece was able to maintain its cultural unity in spite of all its political divisions. Even Plato, who did not always treat Homer favourably, admitted that “[...] he is the poet who educated Greece.” (PLATO, 1997, 606e).

Nietzsche sees that one who educates a people is required, as exemplified in Greece with “[...] the tragic poet as a teacher of a people.” (KSA 7: 9[61]). This requirement is because unity of style in life does not occur suddenly but is gradually formed and built. Style indicates a whole way of life organised and shaped in a certain manner, not simply as an individual but also as a collective entity.<sup>10</sup> However, people as a group living in the same place do not automatically exhibit unity of style, since “unity does not exist in space” (KSA 7: 37[6]). It should be formed, which was what Nietzsche hoped for at the time. Therefore he says, “The German as a characteristically artistic style has yet to be *found*, just as in the Greeks the Greek style was found only late: there was no earlier unity.” (KSA 7: 29[47]).

Then how is unity of style built? Nietzsche's early answer is art. Religion, of course, can function to bind people together, and Nietzsche was well aware of the religious characteristics of Greek myths and tragedy.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> What Nietzsche refers to by “style” ranges from the sphere of one's personal and social life to that of arts (UM I: 1). In this respect, culture as unity of style is about the totality of life.

<sup>11</sup> “The tragedy is a religious act of the whole people, that is, a whole community of citizens” (KSA 7: 25[1]); “[...] the Greeks were religiously tuned when they watched [tragedy]; it was high mass, with the glorification of the god at the end, which they had to wait for.” (KSA 7: 3[1]).

However, he places more emphasis on art, as he believes that “[t]he religious ideas [*Vorstellungen*] [are] the womb of the political ones” but “[t]he religious [ideas] spring from the artistic [ideas].” In this respect, he places “[t]he growth of the artistic ideas as the source of all religious and state changes,” as “my theme” (KSA 7: 9[61]). After all, the artistic is the most foundational. The religious and political operate on the horizon opened and the foundation laid by the artistic. Therefore, he argues “[c]ulture can always only issue from the centralising meaning of an art or a work of art.” (KSA 7: 23[14]).

This shows how deeply Nietzsche has ingested the aesthetic spirit of the Greek, but this also means that his view of art is not wholly of the modern thought that art is the self-expression of an individual artist. The early Nietzsche considers “the subjective artist only as a bad artist,” and what is demanded “[...] in every kind and height of art” is “[...] first of all the conquest of the subjective, and redemption from the ‘I.’” (BT 5). “The base of modern art is no longer the *people*” (KSA 7: 9[107]), but in Greek art in particular, “[...] tragedy is [...] the act of uniting the whole people.” Thus, “[t]he Greek artist addresses his work not to the individual but to the state; and the education of the state, in turn, was nothing but the education of all to enjoy the work of art. All great creations [...] have their sights on [...] feelings of the people.” (KSA 7: 7[121]).

This feeling – to be more exact, “[...] the unity of feeling of a people [*Einheit der Volksempfindung*]” (UM II: 4) – Nietzsche understands, is what is significant for culture and what can be formed by art. With this “unity of feeling,” the unity of a people truly crystallises and the shared world of it as a collective entity can have a style and become richer. Here, we can find some connection with his later idea of ingrained drives or affects interpreting the world, which can be shaped by social circumstances.<sup>12</sup> The early Nietzsche understands that “[t]he *culture* of a people manifests itself in the *unifying control* of the *drives of this people*.” (KSA 7: 19[41]).

Nietzsche’s emphasis on art is not merely based around acclaim for individual excellence. Even if it is an individual who creates a work of art, “[t]he consequence of every great artistic world is a culture.” (KSA 7: 19[33]). Now that culture is understood to be that which is expressed in the life of a people, great art leads to the expression of a people, which means art should

<sup>12</sup> “*Who interprets?* – our affects.” (KSA 12: 2[190]). Nietzsche thinks “[...] the same drive evolves into the painful feeling [...] or the pleasant feeling” under the different customs and social evaluations attached to it, which he calls the “second nature,” and in this way, drives are “*transformed*”. (D 38).



infuse all aspects of the people's life. In other words, a people as a collective entity is to embody the meaning of the art. In a note, Nietzsche implies that to instil something into us to be acquired [*anerziehen*] is "artistic power" or the "*power of art*" [*Kunstkraft*] (KSA 7: 19[49]). With this power, art can shape a style out of a people. So "[...] if we are ever to attain a culture," this power of art is required "so as to produce a unity." (KSA 7: 19[27]). Because of this, art should not stop at being an isolated expression of an individual artist, but has to be the power that shapes the whole, and the whole way of life of a people.

What then is the art that is the power that gives unity of style permeating every level of community; the art that can construct a culture? It cannot be just any work of art. Early Nietzsche understands that a work of art has a shaping force on life because it originated *from* life or the nature of life. In other words, only the art rooted in the life or nature of a people can exert great influence over its life. A transplanted art, which is not rooted in the people's life, can be mere decoration without any formative power. This is what Nietzsche regarded as the contemporary problem. Although there were many works of art consumed by the public at the time, in his view, nothing was like Homer or Aeschylus who were the expression of the Greek life and also pivotal power shaping its life. In a lecture on Greek tragedy, Nietzsche discusses art that is not artificial but "unconscious," "rooted in the *Hellenic ground*" and "[...] growing out of the life of a people [*Volksleben*]," as opposed to the modern opera that is "[...] without the unconscious force of a natural drive, but formed in accordance with an abstract theory." (KSA 1: p. 515-6). In this way, moderns have no artistic world rooted in their lives.

### 3 MODERN DISUNITY

For Nietzsche, art means also the broader sense of the formation [*Bilden*].<sup>13</sup> Thus he recognises "[...] the artistic forces in our becoming," saying "[...] the *artistic* also *begins* with the *organic*." (KSA 7: 19[50]). With the lack of this formative power in the modern world, Nietzsche found disunity in every aspect of life, leading to "[...] the opposite of culture, barbarism, which is lack of style or a chaotic jumble of all styles." (UM I: 1). As discussed above, language and art are essential for culture. Language is the common basis for a shared world of a people. Art is what shapes the shared world, giving it form

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger also argues that Nietzsche considers art in the broader sense of "*forming* [*Bilden*]" or "*formation* [*Bildung*]" (HEIDEGGER, 2003, p. 55, 57, 279).

or style, and making it richer. So, the lack of culture indicates the decline of language and art. What this means is cracks in the shared world and a chaotic mixture of different styles.

This disunity stems from the situation whereby people have lost their natural ground. That is to say, “[...] we moderns have nothing that comes from ourselves.” (UM II: 4). When nothing is our own, our lives become a mixture of things foreign to our nature. This is Nietzsche’s diagnosis of contemporary culture, especially German culture.

The lack of unity is first found in language: a “[...] new characteristic of German language: to accept and imitate everything, [a] European mosaic.” (KSA 7: 26[16]). From within this mosaic, the chaotic aspect of language and accordingly cracks in the basis of the shared world, people cannot truly communicate with each other. As Nietzsche understands, “[a]ll intercourse among human beings is based on the fact that one person can read the soul of another; and the common language is the voiced expression of a common soul. The more intimate and sensitive that intercourse becomes, the richer the language; which either grows – or wastes away – along with that shared soul.” (KSA 7: 37[6]). But now that this intercourse becomes shallow because of the insufficiency of language, the shared world also pales. In this respect, “[...] the impoverishment and fading of language is a symptom of the stunted shared soul in Germany; [...] our greatest and richest minds are no longer able to make themselves comprehensible to their fellow Germans.” (KSA 7: 37[7]). This rupture in communication causes disunity and discontinuity among people, making them shallower, without any unity.

People still use the same language, and therefore it looks like the shared world is still there. However, they cannot truly communicate with one another because they are only tied by customs or convention, a sort of inertial sediment left after the original common experience is drained. As mentioned, unity of feeling is necessary for cultural unity, but the natural ground for this is now missing. Thus, people are “[...] suffering from *convention*, that is, agreement in words and actions without agreement in feelings.” (UM IV: 5). So, any ostensible style they adopt in their lives is superficial and alien to them. In this way, the modern people “[...] fall wretchedly apart into inner and outer, content and form.” (UM II: 4). Due to this discrepancy, they wander without touching what is indigenous to their nature, what is of their own, so they can think only “[...] through mediating abstractions” (BT 23) and “[...] feel in abstractions” (UM II: 4).

Nietzsche believed Wagner had seriously grasped this situation: “Wagner was the first to recognize a state of distress that [...] everywhere *language* is sick, and the oppression of this tremendous sickness weighs on the whole of human development. [...] man can no longer really communicate at all: [...] As soon as men seek to communicate with one another, and to unite for a common work, they are seized by the madness of universal concepts.” (UM IV: 5). Thus Nietzsche once believed that Wagner could heal this crippled modernity by constructing an artistic world based on which a culture would be established. Nietzsche believed that what resounds in “[...] the music of our German masters” is “the *right feeling*”; that is, “[...] the enemy of all convention, all artificial alienation and incomprehensibility between man and man.” This music is not a decoration but an expression truly rooted in life with the artistic power to shape it. In this sense, he says “[...] this music is a return to nature, while being at the same time the purification and transformation of nature.” (UM IV: 5). With this shaping power, art can give unity of style to the life of a people. Nietzsche found this power in Wagner, so he said Wagner “[...] has a sense for *unity in diversity* – that is why I consider him a *bearer of culture*.” (KSA 7: 32[12]).

Regarding this view of culture as unity presented in the *Untimely Meditations*, Huddleston (2019, ch. 3) argues that to be a genuine culture “[...] in Nietzsche’s valorised sense,” the culture should manifest “[...] *noble ideals* in its whole form of life” in addition to unity, since even a “[...] pseudo-culture can have this unity”. This could be true, as Nietzsche suggests, “[...] if true culture in any event presupposes unity of style, and even an inferior and degenerate culture cannot be conceived other than as diversity brought together in the harmony of a single style.” (UM I: 2). The problem is that in this reading, the determinative touchstone for a culture is not unity; rather, what distinguishes a genuine culture from its opposite is noble ideals. However, in the same paragraph Nietzsche continues to say that it is a delusion that there is a culture, in a genuine sense, to which the cultivated philistine [*Bildungsphilister*] belongs. The cultivated philistine is deluded because he discovers “everywhere the uniform character of himself” and from this uniformity “[...] infers a stylistic unity [*Stileinheit*] of the German *Bildung*; in short, a culture.” It looks like a unity, owing to the consistent “[...] negation of all the artistically productive forms and demands of a true style,” but it is “[...] not culture, even inferior culture, merely because it has system.” (UM I: 2). In “this pseudo-culture” of the cultivated philistine, “[...] he who exhibits his strength only in warding off a real, artistically vigorous cultural style” finds

and “[...] arrives at a uniformity of expression, which, in turn, almost seems to resemble a unity of style.” (UM I: 11). Therefore, it is not that Nietzsche points out the lack of noble ideals when he argues Germany lacks culture. It is unity of style that Nietzsche regards as the hallmark of culture. As a matter of course, he would espouse a culture based on noble values, and he also implies that culture should be the expression of “the noble core” of the “people’s character” (BT 23). But without unity, any values, even noble values, can be just an isolated exhibition, since unity points to values infusing all aspects of life and becoming the expression of a people as a whole.

As discussed, the absence of culture as a lack of unity indicates the discrepancy between inner and outer, content and form, a situation where people have nothing grown out of themselves, and where an artistic world is not rooted in life but only consumed as a decoration or distraction. In this way, art loses its binding force and people come to believe that culture is merely about a consumable, individual work of art, not related to the life-expression, and that it has nothing to do with their lives. This split should be overcome. Nietzsche once argued that the unity or “[...] oneness [*Einssein*] of people and culture” is “[...] what was for a long time France’s great merit and the cause of its vast superiority.” (BT 23). By overcoming the split, a people can restore its “health” and discover its natural ground, i.e. “[...] its instincts and therewith its honesty” again (UM II: 4).

In the age of decadence, Nietzsche calls for a return to nature and wants to recover the natural ground on which a cultural unity can be established. It is along this train of thought that he refers to the Greeks who once faced the danger of “perishing in a flood of things foreign and past,” in “a chaos of foreign” forms. Despite the alien forces, “Hellenic culture, thanks to that Apollonian oracle, did not become an aggregate. The Greeks gradually learned *to organise the chaos* by reflecting, following the Delphic teaching, on themselves, that is, on their genuine needs, and letting those pseudo-needs die out. Thus, they again took possession of themselves.” From this we learn “[...] the concept of culture as a new and improved *physis*, without inner and outer, without dissimulation and convention; culture as a unanimity of life, thought, appearance and will.” (UM II: 10).

In tracing Nietzsche’s text to explain the meaning of his definition of culture, we started from language and art and ended in nature, since only an artistic world rooted in the nature of a people can bring people together to form a unity of style in its life. Although Nietzsche speaks of the natural

ground, i.e. “[...] what issues unconsciously from the deepest fount of the spirit of a people [*Volksgeist*]” (KSA 7: 29[66]), he does not think a cultural unity would automatically spring from it. A unity has to be formed and shaped. Even “the character of the Greeks” was not just given, but acquired with great efforts (HH II i 219). Therefore, we need “[...] the artistic power to construct a whole.” (UM I: 9). We need an educator like Homer, who guided the Greeks to organising the chaos to be a unity, not a mere aggregate. In this respect, great human beings, who can capture the noble core of nature of a people’s life and shape it into a unity as stylised nature, are really significant. They are creators. “It was creators who created peoples and hung a faith and a love over them: thus they served life.” (Z I: ‘New Idols’). Without them, a culture cannot be established.

This aspect, the significance of great human beings, is the continuous theme from early to late Nietzsche. This has also been the focus of elitist individualist readings, often without relating it to the other aspect: unity of life of a people. Certainly in his early period, culture is concerned with a human community. As we have seen, the concept of culture refers to a shared world. If culture is not merely about individuals’ personal preference, then the concept of culture is concerned with the question of how the shared world is formed. As I have argued, in his early ideas of culture in relation to this question, Nietzsche believes language and art are significant as the basis for a shared world, and this is reflected in his definition of culture.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, we can see that Nietzsche’s concept of culture is deeply connected with the idea of unity. I have argued that culture in Nietzsche’s thinking is not merely related to a few exceptional individuals or some works of art produced by them, but to a cultural whole.<sup>14</sup> The great individuals are certainly important to the formation of culture, but Nietzsche also develops his idea concerning unity or the shared basis of culture as I analysed his definition of culture.

While this paper focuses on Nietzsche’s early period, his concern with unity continues and is later expressed in his idea of European unity and

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche later remarks that “[n]othing is more harmful to good insight into culture than allowing genius and nothing else to count. That is a subversive way of thinking, in which all working for culture must cease.” (KSA 8: 30[163]).

culture. Regarding the foundation upon which culture should be built, early Nietzsche refers to the unity of a people as the condition of cultural unity. As he later thinks beyond nationality and becomes concerned about European culture, a European unity is required as the basis for European culture. In this respect, he argues that the nationalistic fragmentation of nations is *anti-cultural* (EH ‘Wagner’ 2). Thus, Napoleon’s attempt “to bring Europe into a state-association” should be “the great course of European culture” (KSA 11: 25[115]). While he speaks of *Volk* as the basis for cultural unity in the early period, he later emphasises European political unity as a basis for supporting cultural unity.<sup>15</sup>

In a note in 1887 Nietzsche writes, “[...] the *culture-complex* as my foremost interest”, and he regards this culture-complex as the “[...] whole in relation to its parts.” (KSA 12: 10[28]). Therefore, as in the early idea of it, culture still consists in being the whole and unity. In order for culture to be a whole, it follows logically that it must not be fragmented or fractured. In this regard, Nietzsche saw the nationalist divisions of the time as the major threat to the formation of European culture.<sup>16</sup>

Nietzsche denounces *modern society* as “no ‘society’, no ‘body’.” (KSA 13: 16[53]). In the decadent age of mixture and fragmentation, “every form and way of life” is merely mixed without the focal power to organise the diversity into the whole, and “[...] thanks to that mixture, our instincts now run back everywhere and we ourselves are a kind of chaos.” (BGE 224). When society as a body is well integrated to achieve unity it is healthy as a whole. Such unity is what Nietzsche understands as the basis of a culture, and this cultural unity requires the correct social foundation to support it. As Nietzsche is concerned with European culture, he wants to shape the social foundation to support it, and thus he comes to concern himself deeply with European unity.

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<sup>15</sup> In this regard, Nietzsche refers to “Napoleon” as one who “[...] conceived Europe as a political unity” and “Goethe” as one who “[...] imagined a European culture that comes into the full inheritance of humanity that had been attained.” (KSA 13: 15[68]).

<sup>16</sup> For Nietzsche’s interest in European culture, see Drochon (2016); Elbe (2003); Prange (2013); Shapiro (2016).

JEONG, J. O conceito inicial de Nietzsche sobre cultura . *Transformação*, Marília, v. 44, n. 4, p. 229-244, Out./Dez., 2021.

**Resumo:** O objetivo deste trabalho é analisar e elucidar a definição inicial de Nietzsche sobre cultura, em *Considerações Extemporâneas*. Nos trabalhos iniciais de Nietzsche, o conceito de cultura se refere a um mundo compartilhado e a sua ideia de cultura é relacionada com a questão de como o mundo compartilhado é formado. Argumenta-se que, em suas ideias iniciais em relação a essa questão, Nietzsche acredita que a linguagem e a arte são significativas como a base para um mundo compartilhado, e isso está refletido na sua definição de cultura como unidade de estilo artístico, em todas as expressões da vida de um povo. Este é o argumento expresso no artigo, de que a linguagem é a base comum para um mundo compartilhado de um povo, e a arte é o que molda o mundo compartilhado, dando-lhe forma ou estilo e tornando-o mais rico.

**Palavras-Chave:** Nietzsche. Cultura. Unidade. Estilo. Arte.

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