

Nietzsche's Musical Affect and the Dancing Satyr

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Art reminds us of states of animal vigor; it is on the one hand an excess and overflow of blooming physicality into the world of images and desires; on the other, an excitation of the animal functions through the images and desires of intensified life; -an enhancement of the feeling of life, a stimulant to it. (WP 802)¹

Nietzsche's fascination with the Dionysian is something which he held for the whole of his academic life. The Dionysian became the image for Nietzsche's quest to dismantle the Platonic Christian world view in favor of a life affirming philosophy. The Dionysian became the embodiment of his life affirming principle and for most of Nietzsche's thinking he would play around with this metaphor, but the core of this image never changed in any radical direction. Instead the Dionysian remained a constant within Nietzsche's thinking and as he matured as a thinker the Dionysian matured along with him.

In Nietzsche's earlier thought there is the split between the two life drives of the will, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, while in Nietzsche's later thought these two principles became merged into just the Dionysian. Although Nietzsche loses this duality the role which the Dionysian plays within Nietzsche's

¹*Will to Power*. Tr. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 1968.

aesthetics stays relatively untouched from Nietzsche's early and later philosophy.

The Dionysian artist is the life affirming artist who creates from the position of a recognition of the nature of becoming at the heart of nature. It is the feeling of life swelling up within the body, an intensified feeling of power and emotions, it is what Nietzsche calls *Rausch*. *Rausch* is translated into English sometimes as intoxication, ecstasy, rapture, or many other words which aim to capture what *Rausch* means. In German it has the meaning of a 'rush' from its roots in the middle German word *ruschen*, it is a rush as in a movement. Nietzsche uses this word in such a way as to mean a rush of emotion, *Rausch* is an embodied state of a feeling of an overfullness of emotion and animal vigor, an intoxication with life.

In Nietzsche's earlier thought it was music which would bring the listener to the place of intoxication, in his later writing, it is affects. It is the ability of the Dionysian's artist to "play with intoxication" (DWW §1 32),² to play within the state of *Rausch*, where the creative potential of the life affirming artist is to be found and for this there needs to be a manner in which the artist can be transported to such a place. Therefore this essay will explore Nietzsche's early conception of music and his later concept of affects and show that both these principles are central to Nietzsche's understanding of the bodily state of *Rausch* and Dionysian artists need to create from a place of intoxication and a fullness of life. Moreover, this paper will show, that Dionysian art is never stable itself, but instead always in a state of becoming. For Dionysian art is the aestheticization of temporal space and an aesthetics which unfolds as it is constantly being created.

Nietzsche's idea of *Rausch* first finds voice in his concept of Dionysian intoxication, as found in *Birth of Tragedy*³ and his essay 'The Dionysian Worldview'. Dionysian intoxication is a "terror" and a "blissful ecstasy that wells

²'The Dionysian Worldview'. Tr. by Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

³*Birth of Tragedy*. Tr. by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 2000

from the innermost depths of man” (BT §1). Nietzsche compares this experience with the Bacchic dance and songs of the Dionysian festival (DWV §2 pg. 43). Within the movement of the dance there is a depersonalizing, a “self-forgetting” and a “collapse of the *principium individuationis*”, where the dancer becomes one with the dance and “expresses himself as a member of a higher community” (BT §1). It is the experience of being lost in the crowd and getting caught up in the collective emotional experience of the group. The force of this group experience sweeps the individual off their feet and their autonomy slips into the steps and rhythms of the collective.

Within the concept of Dionysian intoxication there is an idea of a withdrawal, a movement away from the conceptual and towards the embodied state of nature. This is a movement away from what Nietzsche calls the Apollonian force, the world of “beautiful seeming” (DWV §1 p.30), which provides form and structure to the world of phenomena in order that it can be grasped and understood. For Nietzsche there is no fixed subject or self, no external *logos* or God propping up the world of phenomenal beings. Nietzsche rejects the Christian estimation that in the beginning there was the word, *logos*, and instead embraces the Hellenic primordial chaos as the starting point of creation. The Apollonian drive aims to cover over the phenomenal reality of becoming and impose a stability, a mask, over the chaos. The Dionysian unmasks the Apollonian forms and expose them to the decay of becoming. In this moment the temporary sense of stability and structure which the Apollonian provides dissipates, the Apollonian order withdraws to be replaced by a glimpse of Dionysian chaos.

It is these two drives, the Apollonian coming into being and the Dionysian passing away of beings, within the “mysterious primordial unity” (BT §1) of the will which is the creative force that allows the will to manifest the world as an aesthetic creation (BT §8). Nature is the aesthetic phenomena rather than humans perceiving the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. It is the overflow from the agonistic relationship between the Apollonian form and Dionysian chaos, the two artistic drives within nature, it is an internal conflict (*agon*) a strife of opposites. Nature becomes the artist of the phenomenal

world “without the mediation of the human artist” (BT §2). There is no actor in creation within this formula. Creation instead is a side effect from the tension within the primordial will, an over-flow from this internal conflict whose creation acts to protect humans from the horrors of existence.

Nietzsche sees this same artistic duality as the potential for human creativity. The Apollonian Nietzsche connects to the plastic arts, paintings, sculptures, and the like, while the Dionysian art form is music. Dionysian music consists of “the jarring force of tone and the absolutely incomparable world of harmony” (DWV §4 pg. 33) and a “musical dissonance” (BT §24). Music contains a strife of opposites, its consonance and dissonance clash, but harmony is created from this agitation and the progressive moment of the tones. Music moreover is incomparable to anything phenomenal for it relates back to the primal unity of the will. This is why for Nietzsche, music is a metaphor of the will for “the will is the subject of music but not its origins” (OMW p.110).⁴ *Music is an aesthetic representation of the Dionysian force of the will within nature.*

Dionysian music has the power to “elevate the naive men of nature to the self-forgetting of intoxication” (DWV §1, p.33) for in “Dionysian artwork-man would express himself not as *individuum*, but as species-man” (DWV §4, p.54). Dionysian music is an experience of the self as the expression of the primordial state of the will and a recognition that the self is also an expression of the reality of becoming. This is why music is an ex-static⁵ experience for it strips away the static form of self-individuation to reveal the dynamism of becoming behind the mask of being.

The static conception of self is the Apollonian illusion. People cling to forms and stability within the world for it grounds them to a sense of identity. People never look past the Apollonian dream images, they are like the sleepers of Heraclitus, living within a world of their own imagination while

⁴“On Music and Word”. As found in *Between Romanticism and Modernism* by Carl Dahlhaus. Tr. by Walter Kaufmann. California: University of California Press, 1989

⁵From the Greek *ex* (ἐξ) meaning out from and *stasis* (στ᾿ ἄσῃς) meaning standing, placing, and still. The meaning then means a movement away from a place of stillness.

never waking to see the world behind the veil. Dionysian intoxication penetrates this illusion and forces the person outside of themselves. When one returns from the experience of Dionysian intoxication they look upon the Apollonian dream images with “horror” (BT §3) for they recognize the reality of becoming at the heart of nature. This horror is captured in the wisdom of Silenus, which states “what is best of all is not to be born, not to be but second, best for you is to die soon” (BT §3 and DWV §2 pg. 37). This is the folk wisdom of the Hellenic people who “knew and felt the terror and horror of existence” (BT §3).

Originally Nietzsche says the Greeks turned away from this reality, towards an “Olympian divine order” and the “Apollonian impulse towards beauty” (BT §3). Apollonian beauty became an affirmation of existence but one which negated reality by creating a mask of beauty and Olympic order. It became a way for the Greeks to endure existence, but at the expense of the denigration of life, and the masking over of the Dionysian.

The triumph of the Hellenic will came when there was a successful merger of Dionysian and the Apollonian creative forces into one art form, tragedy. Through the character of Silenus Nietzsche sees the folk wisdom of the Greeks as celebrating “an often unrecognizable wisdom” (DWV §2 36) of the suffering inherent in existence. Silenus and the satyrs are the expression of “the archetype of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions one who proclaims wisdom from the heart of nature” (BT §8). The satyrs become the recognition of the emotional state within humans and their irrational drives. Rather than turning their backs upon this reality, the Greeks embraced the wisdom of suffering and expressed it in the form of the tragic drama as an affirmation of life and existence.

Nietzsche claims that it was originally satyrs which made up the primitive tragic chorus and that within the tragic drama the chorus of satyrs “bears the same relation to the man of culture that Dionysian music bears to civilization” (BT §7). The satyrs are the image of primordial man who live behind “all civilization and remained the same despite the changes of generations and of the history of nations” (BT §7), just as music lives behind the Apollo-

nian dream image as a representation of the primordial will and the force of becoming. For this reason the Greek man of culture felt his own individuation melt away in the face of the satyr chorus. While the Apollonian comes to the surface of the tragic drama in the form of dialogue (BT §9) as an act of symbolism.

Nietzsche claims that this is the high point of Hellenic art for it seamlessly blends these two principles and gives voice to the whole of the human condition. Moreover this union is an affirmation of life and the tragic view of suffering. Tragedy becomes “nature’s healing power against the Dionysian” (KSA 3[32])⁶ and a way to “reconcile man and nature” (DWV §1 p.31) by being able to give meaning to the world of suffering. It is the Apollonian force which “tempered” (DWV §1, p.32) the Dionysian impulse as a way to be able to give form and meaning to the emotional excess of the Dionysian. The Apollonian is able to give form, but rather than turning its back on the Dionysian to create beauty to cover up this reality, it created beauty from the position of being intoxicated by the Dionysian, from the experience of *Rausch*.

What is important in Nietzsche’s understanding here is that the art which is created is a temporal art which is defined by movement. It is the image of the satyr dancing, playing his music, which brings the listener to an emotional bodily state yet it is done so in a manner which is guided by the Apollonian. The Apollonian gives form but not to something static and which has the ability to take upon a semblance of stable form but rather something which is dynamic in that it is a continuous repetition of creating. Music is dynamic in a manner which a painting never has the ability to be. Dionysian creativity in this sense is a dynamic creativity for it is an aestheticization of temporal space.

From his early writings Nietzsche hangs onto his view of aesthetics as a dynamic process. Although Nietzsche’s thought matures from this period Nietzsche’s aesthetic philosophy is indebted to his earlier musings and music

⁶Nietzsche: *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas. Tr. by Ladislaus Lob. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. pg 20

in general. Nietzsche never let go of the idea of an aesthetics which did not hold a temporal quality. The Dionysian artist stood as something uniquely different from the Apollonian artist. The Dionysian artist creates from a position of saying yes to life, from a position of a feeling of fullness from life, *Rausch*, and this results in art that expresses this same dynamism inherent from creation as an unfolding of a process rather than a fixed substance.

Nietzsche in the *Gay Science*,⁷ writes “the world is overfull of beautiful things but nevertheless poor, very poor when it comes to beautiful moments” (GS 339). Beautiful things are the same as the beautiful seeming of the Apollonian plastic arts, they are stationary. A moment is an activity and in this sense it speaks more broadly to the whole of life. The Dionysian festival is one such beautiful moment whereby beauty is found in the activity, the movements and dance of the actors in time with the music and dialogue. Moments are defined temporally, they occur within the space of time and with its movements. A beautiful moment then is beauty unfolding over a space of time, it is Dionysian music as the aestheticization of the temporal space, aesthetics as an activity, as a representation of becoming, rather than aesthetics as static.

This idea gets taken up within the *Gay Science* whereby Nietzsche explores the possibility of creating an authentic expression of the self. The ability to give style to one’s character is a “great and rare art” (GS 290) Nietzsche claims. The creation of the self is the ability to “become the person that you are” (GS 270). Although the question then arises, how do you become the person that you already are? Nietzsche answers is that the self is something which is always in a state of becoming and there is never any point where there is a stable concept of the self as a self-contained being. The self is defined aesthetically in the activity of self-creating; it is a never-ending process, it is the continuous aestheticization of the self through the movement of time, and it is an aesthetic activity the same as music. For Nietzsche the ability to become the person which you are amounts to the ability to be able

⁷*The Gay Science*. Tr. by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1974.

to legislate for yourself and break free of the “customs and opinions” (SE 1)⁸ of the socially created masks and be the creator of yourself (GS 335).

This idea is quite similar to Nietzsche’s earlier position discussed above but now it the self, rather than existence, for which meaning needs to be created. This opens up the possibilities on Nietzsche’s earlier position for now there is a plurality of meanings which are possible. Meaning is individualized to a single actor and each actor has the ability to legislate for themselves. The creation of the self is absorbed in the same duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, it is the same creative process for the creation turned towards the self. Then being able to give meaning to one’s own existence is always an ongoing activity, it is a continuous aesthetic temporal unfolding just as the creation of music. For this to be possible though, there must first be a breaking of the chains of social constraint, the breaking down of the Apollonian *principium individuationis*. Just as Dionysian music takes the listener to a place whereby one can unmask the static concepts of the Apollonian the self needs to look behind their own masks which are placed on their identity.

Though, Nietzsche no longer talks in this dualistic language of the will as the Apollonian and the Dionysian. These two principals have been absorbed into the one principle, the Dionysian, and the will is now the will to power. The will to power is the one basic force within the world which acts as a creative desiring that gives form to itself from a position of excess. The Dionysian is “explicable only in terms of an *excess* of force” (TI: ‘What I Owe to the Ancients’ 4)⁹, a feeling of *Rausch*, of power swelling inside the body. While “for there to be art, for there to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological precondition is indispensable: *Rausch*. *Rausch* must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine: else there is no art” (TI: ‘Skirmishes of an Untimely Man’ 8). A strong affective experience is a Dionysian experience for a strong affect excites the will to a feeling of

⁸‘Schopenhauer as Educator’. Tr. by Walter Kaufmann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁹*Twilight of the Idols*. Tr. by Duncan Large. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

great power (WP 135). It is a feeling of the activity of life, the will to power as life, and it is from this feeling of power, *Rausch*, that the will to power can actualize its creative potential.

Nietzsche believes that the feeling of great power is caused by great affect (WP 135). Affect for Nietzsche is something close to emotions, but it becomes more than that, for affects are the feelings and desires that arise from the experience and interaction with the phenomenal world. Affects are the way in which the world is presented to the observer in an emotional and bodily capacity. Nietzsche claims that “will to power is the primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of it” (WP 688). The will to power is a will to desiring, a will to more, to expand and grow, it is the desire to create from yourself and from the life force within yourself. It is the creative outbursts from the excess of the suns gift giving virtue (Z 1 “On The Gift-Giving Virtue”).¹⁰ It is the feeling of excess, the feeling of the fullness of life, the Dionysian or *Rausch*.

Nietzsche critiques of a logocentric epistemology stems from his acceptance of the Dionysian principle of becoming. Epistemic knowledge is “arrived at by selecting one element from the process and eliminating all the rest, an artificial arrangement for the purpose of intelligibility” and Nietzsche says “this simply does not occur” (WP 477). Taking one element out from the process creates an artificial permanence akin to Apollonian illusion thereby negating the activity of the being as a process of becoming. Nietzsche says “between two thoughts all kinds of affects play their game” (WP 477), and it is affect and the activity between the thoughts which are being negated in epistemic thought. Although, further to this quote, Nietzsche says that the affects “motions move to fast, therefore we fail to recognize them” (WP 477). Affects are the movement of life and becoming which lie behind the phenomenal world.

The static existence is the one which negates the affects and the life principle. It is a turning away from life towards the Apollonian and a retreat into

¹⁰*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Tr. by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

the illusions of static existence. The priest fears “sensuality” and considers it “the most serious threat to the order” (WP 139) of his world. Nietzsche says that the priest wants to be the only one with knowledge and that there is only one way to obtain it. This is the lowest order of man who wants “emancipation from the senses” and an “absence of affects” (WP 139). This becomes the “inertia” of the herd virtue where “one would rather obey an existing law than create law oneself” (WP 279). It is the passions and affect that “man must free himself from” (WP 383) for they challenge the order and structure of their static way of life. The result of this thinking is what Nietzsche calls the ‘last man’, “no shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever *feels* different goes voluntarily into a madhouse” (Z: Prologue §5). These positions stem from a lack of affect or a turning away from affect, they are a saying ‘no’ to life, while the common factor is their stasis, their lack of activity. This position is the same position as Nietzsche’s earlier example of a turning away from life and the covering over of the world of becoming with Apollonian beauty. The denial of affects is a denial of the Dionysian reality of emotional existence.

In place of a logocentric epistemology Nietzsche proposes a “perspectival theory of affects” (WP 462). Nietzsche claims that,

There is *only* a perspectival “knowing”; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity,” be. (GM III 12)¹²

Perspectives are a way of seeing the world of phenomena while affects are the way in which the world is revealed to the observer. The world of the phenomena is a series of passing away and coming into being, phenomenal beings are in a constant state of becoming and the knowledge of them

¹¹My emphasis added

¹²*Genealogy of Morals*. Tr. by Maudemarie Clark and Alan Swensen. Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.

is always the knowledge of the dynamic process of their being. Affects are the experience of this dynamic process as it is a way that the body interacts with the world of becoming behind the masks of being. This is why more affects and ways of seeing one thing becomes desired, for it strips away the Apollonian masks of seeming and lays bare the process of becoming. Affects function in the same manner as music in that they reveal the Dionysian reality behind the phenomenal world. The difference here is that Nietzsche is applying the legislative power, as shown above in the discussion about giving meaning to the self in the *Gay Science*, to beings in phenomenal reality. Instead of the self as being a work of art now all of life and phenomenal beings become a work of art, but just as the self, it is a work of art that is subject to becoming and therefore never finished. It is a temporal aesthetics. The more eyes and affects one has on an object penetrate past the masks of beings and towards the reality of becoming to see the object from the vantage point of the moment and its inherent movement.

Perspectives become their own form of art for it is “art that permits us to wear masks” (WP 132), art as the Apollonian beauty which attempts to cover over the reality of becoming. This is what Nietzsche means when he says “to impose upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme will to power” (WP 617), it is being or art, which is the mask which is imposed upon becoming. It is something which covers over the nature of becoming, hides the activity behind beings. In Nietzsche’s early thought it was music and the Dionysian force of intoxication which unmasked the Apollonian form and beauty. In Nietzsche’s later philosophy it is Affects which serve the same purpose. Moreover when life is void of either of these two principles life becomes static. So not only do affect and music penetrate past the Apollonian masks, but they also allow the individual to affirm life and embrace the emotional reality of human existence, and from this embrace life has the power to take over and possess the individual and cast them into the state of *Rausch*, and it from within this space that life affirming Dionysian art is possible.

For Dionysian art is the expression of the life activity and therefore art is always in a state of becoming. The world herself is an aesthetic phenomenon,

the phenomenal world is art as the self is art, and behind art there is always becoming, there is always activity. This is why “the will to overcome an affect is ultimately only the will of another, or several other, affects” (BGE 117). Affective experiences break apart the *principium individuationis* of Apollonian seeming by experiencing behind the mask and towards the activity of becoming. The Dionysian artist is the one who is able to give form to oneself and the world around them because “the Dionysian artist’s creating is play with intoxication” (DWW §1 32), creating comes from a place of *Rausch*. It is music which serves this function in Nietzsche’s earlier thinking while in his later it is affect, but the function which each of these serve is the same. For “one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star” (Z ‘Prologue’ 5). Dionysian creativity is the acceptance of life and the principle of becoming, it is allowing the activity of life to overflow within you and swell up inside of you, *Rausch*, and it is the ability to affirm these passions and sublimate them into a rhythm which controls the musical passions, it is the aestheticization of the temporal space, creativity is the image of the dancing satyr.

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