Chapter 6

Aesthetic Refinements

I tell you: One must still have chaos in one to give birth to a dancing star![1]

Nietzsche's restless use of different musical forms sheds light on an important facet of his musical development. His philosophical genius led to a constant refinement of his aesthetic theories; theories which then took form through his musical compositions. The variety of formal systems he uses point to an underlying form-content problem Nietzsche wrestled with throughout his life. In editing *Der musikalische Nachlass*, Janz also found such a trend, and compiled many of his findings in an article directly addressing the issue.[2] Although this article concentrates less specifically Nietzsche's music then might be expected from the editor of his musical works, it provides an excellent overview of Nietzsche's evaluations of others' music and contrasts his early criteria with those used in his later judgments. The center of the issue revolves around the proper relation of form to content and vice versa, an issue that has been debated by music critics, composers and performers from the Baroque era to the present day. Put simply, is music's form an organizing container into which content is poured, or is the form, in itself, the content of music? Georg Simmel puts this question another way when he asks, "whether the presentation of this *content* or the *presentation* of the content determines the sense and the worth of the work of art."[3]

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[1] TSZ, 17: I, Zarathustra's Prologue, 5.

[2] Curt Paul Janz, "The Form-Content Problem in Nietzsche's Conception of Music," *Nietzsche's New Seas*, trans. Thomas Heilke (Chicago: UCP, 1988), 97-116.

[3] Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche - Ein Vortragszyklus* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1907), 121; cited in Janz 1988, 98.

Through much of Nietzsche's life he favored music's content over its form, an ideology in keeping with his cognitive theory of music. This preference is especially evident in his early years and is therefore—due to the early date of most his musical compositions—most applicable to his music. The evolution of his aesthetic views in such later works as *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and *Nietzsche contra Wagner* is a point of considerable debate amongst Nietzsche scholars, and Janz's view that the mature Nietzsche was "absolutely oppose[d]"[4] to a content-centered aesthetic is overly simplistic and will be discussed in later chapters. It is safe to say that Nietzsche began his aesthetic theorizing from the position of romanticism, and from that point his views evolved as his thinking became more refined. His early rhapsodic writings exalting music's transformative powers are unspecific, often contradictory, and betray the youth and inexperience of their author. To repeat a quote from the introduction, "Music unites all attributes in itself; it can uplift, it can flirt, it can encourage, with its gentle, appealing tones it can break down the roughest disposition. But its main purpose comes when it directs our thoughts and goals toward higher things, when it lifts us up and causes us to question."[5] Certain aspects of this praise for music ring throughout Nietzsche's works, including its transformative effect on the listener, and its use in leading individuals to something higher. The differences between early Nietzschean thought and his later thought concern *how* music must be applied, and towards *which* "higher things" it should lead us.

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[4] Janz 1988, 98.
[5] HKB I, 136.

His early music reflects a belief that the transcendental nature of music allowed for fuller and deeper self-expression than could mere words, and that it helped the individual process and absorb his experiences more richly. In his crusade to do so, he adopted forms familiar to him, including the oratorios of Handel and Mendelssohn, and the songs of Schubert and Schumann. As was discussed in Chapter Two, he credited these composers with producing the highest accomplishments of music, and reinforced his praise by positing the music of Liszt and Wagner (with whose music he had little familiarity at the time) as diametrically opposed to that of their forbears; a designation that included an opposite qualitative as well as stylistic value. It was not surprising, therefore, that Nietzsche's first compositions utilized the forms associated with oratorios and lieder. This decision was based on familiarity rather than any judgment of formal merit—an evaluation supported by the complete lack of formal discussion in the writings from this period. Young Nietzsche, surely cognizant of the partisan musical atmosphere of his day and feeling a close kinship with the classical idioms heard in his childhood, most likely felt obligated to defend "his" music against the diatribes of the proponents of the "Zukunftmusik."[6]

After countless discussions with Krug and Pinder over the merits of Wagner, Nietzsche gradually opened his mind to the music of his day. His letters between 1861 and 1864 display a gradual acceptance of Wagner's music until he eventually became an enthusiastic Wagnerian himself. His adaptation of freer forms can surely be attributed to his increasing exposure to Wagner and the other proponents of the New German School, but Nietzsche never saw formal characteristics as predominantly indicative of an

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[6] "How good bad music and bad reasons sound when we march against an enemy," D, 224: V, 557.

aesthetic theory. For him, music always *did* something, and form was important primarily in its use as a medium for music's content. Rather than creating an epiphany whereby Nietzsche abandoned classicism and embraced the New German School, Nietzsche's gradual exposure to Wagnerian ideas provided increasing validation for more elastic forms. The more music Nietzsche came into contact with, the more freedom he felt he had in which to express him musically. The underlying purpose of music had always been content based, but he now realized he had more room to express this content. The writings and compositions discussed up to this point provide plenteous examples to substantiate the content-dominated aesthetic of his youth. It is, however, important for a thorough understanding of Nietzsche's *later* works—both philosophical and musical—to realize that Nietzsche's fundamental views toward music remained the same as he grew older. Therefore, throughout the discussion of Nietzsche's aesthetic refinements, his views toward the form/content problem will be closely examined.

Two authors played especially large roles in the development of Nietzsche's thought during his early college years. The first of these was Schopenhauer, with whose thoughts he became familiar after finding his *magnum opus The World as Will and Representation* in his friend's bookshop. In this work, Schopenhauer draws significantly on Kant's concept of transcendental idealism. According to Kant, we can never have direct, objective knowledge of things in themselves or *Ding an sich*. Any knowledge we think we have comes to us through our senses which are acted upon through secondary processes. For example, we "know" a book is red because light reflects off the book and reaches our eyes, providing certain data to our brains. We interpret this as "redness," although any association of our conception of "red" with the book itself is fragile at best.

Too many filters exist between things in themselves and our conceptions of them. According to Kant, the world is a combination of things in themselves and our observation of them. In order to understand the world, we impose certain rules such as space, time, and causal relationships. These rules exist only in our minds and not in our surroundings. Therefore, the world as we know it can only exist when both the things in themselves *and* the subjective observer are both present. Without us, the world still exists, but not in anyway we could ever conceive.

Schopenhauer accepts much of Kant's theory, but adds to it a rejection of individual things in themselves. Whereas Kant discussed the way in which objects came to be, Schopenhauer discussed how we are deceived into believing that objects exist at all. He reasons that the assumption that an individual object possesses "reality" as a fundamental quality is just as questionable as assuming that the object's color or taste comprise its object-ness. Where Kant removes secondary qualities from the things in themselves, Schopenhauer removes individuation. Schopenhauer is left with the relation of the "will"—an analog of Kant's thing-in-itself, albeit without the individual things—and "representation," a term that corresponds to our mode of experience. Representation for Schopenhauer is illusion, and as such, is worthless. Any attachments to aspects of our own representation are hollow and empty. What makes Schopenhauer a nihilist *extraordinaire* is his view of the remaining metaphysical component: the will. His use of the term "will" does not refer to our common usage. The will, for Schopenhauer, is the fundamental seeking, desiring, and yearning. The human experience of willing is but one manifestation of the overall genus of will, and we must be careful not to confuse the goal-oriented nature of our willing with will itself. Because individuation is a human

construction, the world in itself *is* will. It is not *a* will or *the* will, or even will *towards* something; it is a blind, meaningless seeking. As such, there is no value in it either. Faced with such a yawning pit of existential nothingness, the individual can only transcend mere representation, face the will in its meaningless horror, and reject it.

Nietzsche quickly latched on to Schopenhauer's theories and saw in them elements of his own thought. What especially caught his eye was the privileged status Schopenhauer granted to music. Like Nietzsche, Schopenhauer believed that music had the unique ability to pierce the veil of representation and reveal the underlying reality of the world. Although such a glimpse revealed chaos and nothingness, the act itself redeemed man by temporarily removing him from the realm of illusion and error. As soon as he first encountered Schopenhauer, Nietzsche became an enthusiastic supporter and wrote to everyone he knew proclaiming Schopenhauer's genius. Krug also appreciated Schopenhauer, and the two of them often joked about friends they had "converted."[7]

Before moving on, it is important to quickly note Nietzsche's unique (and some may say un-Schopenhauerian) interpretation of Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation* gloomily concludes that we can know nothing for certain, and that our existence has absolutely no meaning or purpose. Nietzsche takes Schopenhauer's principles, makes the same conclusion, yet finds the new situation to be liberating and empowering. Without metaphysical absolutes to restrain human activity, the individual is released from his servitude to an invisible, otherworldly master, and free to create his own world. Whereas Schopenhauer had seen metaphysical truths such as God, things-in-

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[7] HKB II, 45.

themselves, or a Hindu nirvana[8] as comforting and their negation frightening and disconcerting, Nietzsche found their destruction liberating. From his very first encounter with Schopenhauer, Nietzsche's view of nihilism as a life-*affirming* concept sets him apart from other Schopenhauer enthusiasts, and clearly foreshadows his later writings.

There is no documentation as to whether Nietzsche knew of Wagner's own love for Schopenhauer's writings, but it is probable that Nietzsche knew that at least some connection existed. His overnight conversion to Schopenhaurianism, however, implies that Nietzsche previously had no knowledge of Schopenhauer's theories, and therefore his knowledge of Wagner's connection to Schopenhauer could have been only vague at best. In fact, Wagner's appreciation of Schopenhauer was one of the reasons Nietzsche later sought out the composer, and contributed significantly to his enthusiasm towards Wagner, the man. Wagner's devotion to the philosophy of Schopenhauer is not surprising when one considers his own views toward music. His belief in the oracular characteristics of the artist is strengthened immensely by Schopenhauer's philosophical system. Simmel sums up Schopenhauer's aesthetic by explaining "…that the work of art exists for the sake of its content, namely its idea, that everything which one could name as the functional in art, that all interest in this, receives its tenure only from the interest in the idea that constitutes the respective content of the work"[9]

The very next year, Nietzsche encountered Friedrich Albert Lange's *History of Materialism and a Critique of the meaning of Opposition*. Lange also begins from a

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[8] Schopenhauer was deeply influenced by eastern religions and his negation of Kant's individual things-in-themselves is seen by many scholars as a response to the metaphysical one-ness described in Hinduism. See especially Christopher Janaway's *Schopenhauer*.
[9] Simmel, 121.

Kantian background, but reaches far more extreme conclusions. For him, the entire

conception of opposition is a human construction, akin to the categories of space and

time. In other words, just as space and time are taken to lack any objective reality in

Kant's system, opposition also emerges as a mental phenomenon in Lange's system. Of

the many oppositions we routinely create, the one causing the most problems is that of

idealism/materialism. In reality, there are only things (hence "materialism") and we, as

things, interact with them. It is only as a result of our unique mode of experience that we

impose the concept of opposites on the world. Like Kant, Lange believes they are

necessary for us to function, but they lack any external justification. Lange goes on to

describe philosophy as the constant conflict between idealism and materialism. Because

materialism accounts for the world, and idealism accounts for our perception of it, neither

is truly wrong until it is applied in an inappropriate theater. Reasoning from our dualistic

mode of thought to an assertion that some unified "will" underlies the "illusion" of

individuation is one of these inappropriate applications. Lange recognizes

Schopenhauer's "will" as just one in a long chain of metaphysical entities that stands in

opposition to reality as we know it. Instead, metaphysics as a whole is bankrupt, and

previous philosophers had fallen down the "abysses of metaphysics."[10] Nietzsche

himself sums up much of Lange's philosophy in one of his earliest published articles:

> When one speaks of humanity, the idea is fundamental that this is something
> which separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, however, there is
> no such separation: "natural" qualities and those called truly "human" are
> inseparably grown together. Man, in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly
> nature and embodies its uncanny dual character. Those of his abilities which are

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[10] F.A. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (Iserlohn: J. Baedeker, 1866), 252.

terrifying and considered inhuman may even be the fertile soil out of which alone all humanity can grow in impulse, deed, and work.[11]

Nietzsche's absorption of this work was extensive and immediate, and one Nietzsche scholar goes so far as to say he "virtually adopted it as his own."[12] Whereas Nietzsche's appreciation for Schopenhauer is widely known, thanks in part to his frequent writings on the subject,[13] his fondness for Lange's works often goes unrecognized. First encountering Lange's works in 1866—the year after first reading Schopenhauer—the former's influence quickly makes its way into Nietzsche's journals and correspondences. In 1866, Nietzsche notes that our inner and outer sensations are similarly the products of our organization. The next year he writes, "The form is something that exists for us. Once we conceive the form as a cause, we lend to an appearance the value of a thing in itself."[14] It is difficult to understand how Nietzsche could have been so adamant towards both Schopenhauer and Lange when the latter so strikingly contradicted the former. Perhaps he appreciated only components of the two works or saw them both as part of the Langean materialism/idealism conflict.

In any case, it becomes readily apparent that Nietzsche—with Schopenhauer and Lange acting as the catalyst—refined his aesthetic theories and eliminated many inconsistencies, while maintaining certain foundational ideas. First among these is the sense that man is responsible *to* himself and *for* himself. The transcendental entities that haunted mankind for millennia might have comforted early man as he struggled to

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[11] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in *Early Greek Philosophy and other Essays*, transl. Maximilian A. Mügge (New York: Russel and Russel, 1964), 49-62; 51.
[12] James I. Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 5.
[13] These works include *Schopenhauer as Educator*, *Ecce Homo*, and *Twilight of the Idols*.
[14] Porter, 168.

survive in an unfathomable world, but we have grown out of our need for such entities

and now they hold us back. By deflecting our own responsibility, we are weakened and

made unable to achieve mankind's potential. Although the full extent of these theories

would not be laid out until *Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morals,* and

ultimately, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the core of these thoughts is obvious as early as early

1862, when Nietzsche wrote to his Germania cohorts:

> Once we recognize that we are responsible to ourselves alone, that we have only
> ourselves to blame and not any sort of higher powers for our failings in life, then
> we finally will strip the foundational ideas of Christianity of their outer covering
> and get at its core. […] The delusion of a world beyond has cast human spirits and
> minds in a false relation to the earthly world: it was the product of a childhood of
> peoples.[15]

Where does this leave music? Surprisingly, Nietzsche still privileges music with

the ability to convey deep, underlying meaning. What changes from his earliest works, is

the *source* of that meaning. It no longer comes from some meaning-laden substratum

that is mystically hidden from view. Where it *does* come from is a highly complex and

multi-faceted issue in Nietzsche's works. To delve into this issue, one must confront

many of Nietzsche's most controversial and galvanizing ideas, including the infamous

"will to power," and the "Übermensch" or "Superman." To say that meaning for

Nietzsche comes from the artistic creation of an individual with "overflowing power and

abundance"[16] may grossly simplify Nietzsche's thought, but let it here act as a guidepost

to aid in assembling his frequently paradoxical theories as they are presented.

In Nietzsche's first published book, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of

Music*, he establishes a base from which later writings can critique modern culture and

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[15] Cited in Porter, 7.
[16] GS, 347: V, 382.

society. Although published in 1872, it provides an accurate portrayal of his aesthetic

thinking throughout his college years. Most notably and persistently, he attacks our blind

acceptance of the "gift" of ethics and morals from the metaphysical realm. Nietzsche's

agreement with Lange here is evident, but what distinguishes him is the application of

these theories to contemporary cultures. The underlying, historical misunderstanding of

dualism created a chain of societal errors: essences vs. appearances, good vs. evil, moral

vs. immoral. At some point during human development[17] such divisions invaded our

very experience and we lost sight of the inherently *subjective* quality of dualism,

mistaking it for an *objective* truth. Materialism, at its very core, is a monistic concept

that precludes any discussion of metaphysics—such is the objective state of affairs. The

human mind—an element of reality no more privileged or different than any other

element - imposes dualism in order to create a scaffolding on which we can exist and

know. Throughout Nietzsche's works, he returns to the characters of Apollo and

Dionysus to describe this dualism created through the anthropomorphized conception of

existence.[18]

Dionysian art is associated with music and states of wild intoxication, while

Apollonian art is associated with form, symmetry and the plastic arts. The Apollonian

comforts men by idealizing aspects of reality and then reconstituting them as beautiful

works of art. As such, art objectifies existence and comforts the onlooker by separating

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[17] Nietzsche attributes this change to Socrates, see BT, 81-93: 12-14.

[18] Although it may seem paradoxical to establish a Dionysian/Apollinian dialectic to address the errors of dialectics, its appropriateness is established when one considers the dualistic nature of our mode of existence. In Nietzsche's early works (especially the *Birth of Tragedy*) his use of these antipodes is not as clearly metaphorical as in his later works. This should not be confused with a complete change of heart. His Langean denials of metaphysics resound throughout his work, from the mid 1860's to his descent into insanity in 1888. See esp. Porter for this discussion.

the horrors of existence from his own being. In fact, it is the Apollinian characteristics that *guarantee* individual existence by establishing and fortifying the subject/object split that underlies the principle of individuation. Dionysian art, on the other hand, revels in unity of existence. It glances behind itself at the chaos and bare existence that the Apollinian act of individuation caused man to turn its back on. The Dionysian festivals consisted of dramas with choruses, in which the audience participated as an integral part. In the course of the festival, participants lost their sense of self, and identified instead with the primal whole. The tragedy of Dionysus - the great tragic figure of the festivals - became the tragedy of all involved and pain and suffering was appreciated in its full measure. Given the immediacy of the experience, and the complete immersion of the individual into the tragic void, the will is stripped of all outlets. Suffering cannot be averted, no true knowledge can ever be obtained, and all existence is a mere chimera. One encounters the possibility of not willing; one comes face to face with the paradox of being a willing subject with no will. At this point, aesthetic sensibilities allow the participants to go beyond the paradox, and revel in the sublime. As Nietzsche writes,

> …*art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live: these are the sublime as the artistic taming of the horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of the nausea of absurdity.[19]

Therefore, through Dionysian art one truthfully confronts existence in all its absurdity and horror and appreciates aesthetically the sublime nature of such a confrontation.

Throughout Nietzsche's works, the demand for one to be true to oneself reappears incessantly. It is due to this demand that excessively Apollonian artwork is criticized.

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[19] BT, 60: 7.

He who gazes at the beauty and perfection of Apollonian art as a remedy to the suffering of the everyday is lying to himself. He bathes himself in illusion instead of facing the difficult truth. He has realized the inherent chaos of existence, but instead of grasping its aesthetic significance or facing the prospect of a will-less existence, he turns to illusion so as to give outlet to his will. These illusions *become* the culture of societies in decline. When a society's or an individual's spirit is depleted, he lacks the ability or courage to face the horrors of existence truthfully. The elation achieved by one who confronts suffering and appreciates the aesthetic beauty of the eternal flux of life is inaccessible to he who is immersed in suffering everyday and values art insofar as it can temporarily *veil* life's horrors. As an example of this, Nietzsche points to the Greeks' decline and the simultaneous retreat from Dionysian art into Apollonian, personified by Socrates and Euripides.

Euripides sought to establish a proper relation between the public and the artwork.[20] He felt that tragedy had become inaccessible to the public because it dwelled on the super-human and epic tales of the gods instead of the more everyday struggles that the average person faced. He sought to place the spectator on stage; thereby creating an illusion so similar to oneself that one could be pleasantly surprised by one's own eloquence and nobility. This popularization of tragedy represented a decline from the superior sixth century Greek tragedy in two ways. By focusing on the public, Euripides introduced a concept unknown to his dramatic predecessors; one that eliminated the Dionysian unity that had given tragedy its inherent value. While the tragic chorus identified so closely with the tragedy that it became one with all the other participants,

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[20] Ibid., 77: 11.

the new distinction between public and actor emphasized the falseness and illusory nature of tragedy. No longer was the experience of reality's horrors the effect of tragedy, rather the playwright aimed to create a beautiful story one could objectively observe, analyze and poke at. Secondly, Euripides placed an all too real hero in the spotlight. Far from the epic heroes of earlier writers, common people appeared in these tragedies, all for the sake of realism. But this realism did not accurately portray the truth of existence, instead it emphasized the culture's flawed conception of it.

Do these Dionysian "essences" and "fundamental truths" reveal a persisting metaphysical vein in Nietzsche's early years? Nietzsche says himself, in his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," that he "tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas"[21] the new thoughts that begin to appear in this early work. Furthermore, it seems to be from a Schopenhauerian perspective that Nietzsche lashes out at the realism of Euripides. But upon closer inspection, Nietzsche's interest in artistic content returns to the forefront. Accurately portraying the substandard characters who themselves were raised on the deeply flawed perceptions that constitute our society's "reality" serves only to reassert an erroneous world-view. That the heroes thusly represented are full of flaws and imbued with mediocrity may accurately reflect our experiences, but completely lacks the cognitive value Nietzsche feels is so important in art. Although the true magnitude of existence's sublimity can never be fully comprehended, through art we can briefly glimpse its immensity. The Schopenhauerian will is here replaced with the limitless capabilities of man, now unchained from metaphysical restrictions. Epic figures such as Prometheus and Oedipus cast such large

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[21] Ibid., 24: Attempt at a Self-Criticism, 6.

shadows that human capabilities could be proportionally deduced. Under Euripides' pen, however, servants and neighbors entered the theater and any perspective that might embrace the true magnitude and depth of possibility could find no characters capable of climbing such heights. Nietzsche attributes many of Euripides' missteps to a tendency he attacks throughout his works: comparing one's self to others. According to Nietzsche, Euripides' error can be seen both *through* his works and *as the author* of such works. In his plays, the general public is glorified and even the lowliest individual deserves respect merely on account of his humanity. Through the influence of such literature, men's actions are measured in accordance with an antiquated human mean, and aspiring to a different ideal becomes an act of disrespect to the lowly that maintain this standard. In turn, the doting Hellenes wholeheartedly embraced this egalitarian mediocrity while simultaneously giving up "his belief in immortality; not only his belief in an ideal past, but also his belief in an ideal future."[22] Euripides actions as a man also reflect this mediocre-izing of humanity. Nietzsche accuses him of composing his works to please two figures. First, he wrote for himself *qua* thinker. By writing a work to give substance to his literary theories, the artwork loses its Dionysian quality and becomes more propaedeutic than tragic. This quest for literary/theoretical exploration is related to the second figure—Socrates.

Nietzsche's excoriations also reach Socrates, accusing him of bringing about the death of tragedy through his optimism. Both Dionysian art and the art endorsed by Socrates obtain their value cognitively, but their epistemological domains are vastly different. Dionysian art delves into the heart of existence and brings the spirit into a *true*

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[22] Ibid., 78: 11.

relation with life's horrors and absurdities. Socrates, on the other hand, would encourage men to discover all truth through careful inspection of the objective world. Because discovering truth is a fundamental activity of humanity, art is beautiful only insofar as it is intelligible.[23] The irrationality of the cult of Dionysus is therefore shunned, and the beautiful illusions of Apollonian art become Socrates' model for the aesthetic. Nietzsche believed this fundamental shift—brought about by Euripides and Socrates—was symptomatic of the decline of Greek culture. In an era where spirit was poor, the optimism of Socrates and Euripides gave the Greeks a more palatable view of existence. They gave up their position in eternity for an easily graspable present.

Having thus created a dialectic, Nietzsche goes on to collapse it by calling for a union of the two aesthetic models. While the Apollinian mode by itself lacks validity through its failure to address the metaphysical void, Dionysianism alone leads to paralyzing pessimism. It is this paralysis that Nietzsche quickly recognized in Schopenhauer's philosophy. When recuperating from an illness while stationed in Naumburg during his brief service in the Prussian military, he worked out in detail the metaphysical inconsistencies in *The World as Will and Representation*. Confronted with a reality that, if not hostile, is so chaotic as to make any sort of pleasure astronomically unlikely, an individual has no motivation to *do* anything. In fact, Schopenhauer's call for a denial of the will (not one's own will, but the underlying, universal will) seems dangerously close to a call for suicide. The Dionysian festivals, in which Nietzsche placed so much stock, end in orgiastic excesses that, if taken as a societal paradigm, would create a culture doomed to near immediate extinction. "He who fights with

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[23] Ibid., 84: 12.

monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster... when you gaze

long into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you."[24] But it is not for practical reasons

alone that Nietzsche felt he must temper the Dionysian temperment.[25] Although

Nietzsche seemingly addressed this problem from a different angle each time it arose, in

the *Birth of Tragedy* he has, ironically, pseudo-metaphysical reasons. Having

acknowledged the meaningless void, the ancient Greeks *sang*. What was this song and

how could a realization of existence's backdrop of nothingness engender it? Apparently,

the "primal unity" of which Nietzsche spoke created an urge for expression. Positing

music as the best and most accurate expression of the fundamental experience within the

realms of human-necessitated dialectics and representations, he then asked, "As what

does music *appear* in the mirror of images and concepts?"[26] In a surprisingly simplistic

answer that he later refined, music is the representation of the world's essence.[27] In *The*

Gay Science, he explains this concept more clearly. "The total character of the world,

however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of

order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our

aesthetic anthromorphisms."[28] Music, therefore, is the immediate product of that chaos

filtered through our mental structures.

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[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1973); (BGE); 102: IV, 146.

[25] Although much can be attributed to Nietzsche, one thing he was decidedly *not* was pragmatic. In virtually every situation, the most efficient or the easiest alternative is also the *least* Nietzschean.

[26] BT, 55: 6.

[27] Nietzsche uses the term "will" here, but I have used the term "essence" in order to avoid confusion. In *Birth* he goes back and forth between an apparent Schopenhauerian conception of metaphysics and his own anti-metaphysical terminology. In his own critique, he comments on his use of the language of Schopenhauer and Kant for concepts that negate the terminology that describe them.

[28] GS, 168: III, 109.

The conclusion is striking: aesthetics are inherent structures of *our own mind*. Nietzsche takes this dramatic conclusion one step further when he states that "...for it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*."[29] We are aesthetic creatures who use artistic principles to invest our existence with meaning. Faced with the yawning void, "Art steps in to fill the gap."[30] This revision of metaphysics brings with it a whole slew of antecedents. Dualism, time, space, and the other mental constructs through which we perceive our experience now must be seen as aesthetic principles.[31] Paradoxically, attributing our mental filters to aesthetics creates self-referential problems in its relation to metaphysics itself. Suddenly, metaphysics— now deprived of any fundamental reality and limited to an eternity of purely *subjective* reality—is our artistic creation *par excellence*.

To return to Nietzsche's use of Apollo and Dionysus, they too are reinterpreted in the new aesthetic schema. The gods have no claim to a more authentic existence than anything or anyone else, and upon reflection, they are revealed to be manifestations of our own aesthetic productions. The Apollinian dream-state that creates surface appearances from mental characteristics has, in Apollo and Dionysus, created metaphors for two mental tendencies. Nietzsche hints at this conclusion in the very first section of *Birth* when he writes, "It was in dreams, says Lucretius, that the glorious divine figures first appeared to the souls of men,"[32] and at another point, "…the Greeks, who disclose to

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[29] BT, 52: 5.

[30] Porter, 171.

[31] Consider, for example, the works of renaissance metaphysicians such as Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, who are often credited with having created "beautiful" systems. Observe its resonance with the apparently heterodox appeal to beauty as a validation for certain medieval philosophical systems.

[32] BT, 33: 1.

the discerning mind the profound mysteries of their view of art, not, to be sure, in

concepts, but in the intensely clear figures of their gods."[33]   Therefore it is the interplay

between the Apollinian and the Dionysian that constitutes our reality. The Apollinian

allows us to create surfaces upon which we can secure our mode of existence, while the

Dionysian keeps in mind the illusive and superficial qualities inherent in our constructs.

In fact, with dualistic matrices excluded, the Apollinian and Dionysian themselves

must be viewed as two sides of a unity. Beginning with constructed appearances

necessitated by our mode of existence ("a primordial desire for appearance"),[34] we

occasionally intuit the appearance-ness of our appearances (*der Schein des Scheins* to

which Nietzsche frequently refers) and infer a conflict. It is this perceived conflict that

leads to a positing of an "other:" the metaphysical beyond. James Porter explains the

unity of the Dionysian beyond and the Apollinian surfaces by describing a rippling

surface. Being mere surface, it is inherently Apollinian and thoroughly in-line with

Nietzsche's Langean materialist philosophy. The ripples, however, create an *illusion* of

depth, giving vent to our conflicted relationship with existence.[35] Glimpsing the

possibility that the world is nothing more than our own mentally constructed illusions

triggers a response that can be compared to a survival instinct. *Knowing* that we have

created the world precludes us from existing within it; we cannot simultaneously be

outside the box *and* inside the box. Therefore, we turn to these pleats in the fabric of

appearance to find that third-party authority that returns us to a contented existence upon

the surface. Another analogy can be made by examining the event of realizing *der Schein*

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[33] Ibid.
[34] BT, 41-44: 3.
[35] Porter, 47-57.

des Scheins (the appearance of appearance). The discovery of one appearance leads us to that which *projects* the appearance, albeit with a more critical eye than we had used originally. The "projector" is then seen in its true light as yet another appearance and we look to *its* "projector." After each disillusionment[36] we move "down" and our critical eye gains momentum in each deconstruction, like a chain of dominoes gaining force and speed as more and more are toppled. Unlike dominoes, however, there is no end, because there is only illusion and appearance. The Dionysian *is* the vertiginous collapse of appearances, not a brief glimpse of the ground through the clouds of appearance. We continue to topple appearances until we feel the vertigo strongly enough that we can posit *it* as an appearance; one strong enough to pull us out of the downward spiral of cognizance. We call that appearance the Dionysian, and momentarily regain our feet.

If it seems like Nietzsche deconstructs his theories as fast as he constructs them, it is because he does. Nietzsche recognizes that we exist in a paradox, we created that paradox, and we *are* that paradox. It is from this realization that many of Nietzsche's apparent contradictions are born. For example, the passages cited above demonstrate Nietzsche's disagreements with Schopenhauer's system as early as 1866, yet his 1872 *Birth of Tragedy* repeatedly calls into service Schopenhauerian terms and concepts. Realizing that we *need* appearances and the resulting essences they engender to function, he draws on the "will," the "Dionysian unity," and the other metaphysic-laden terms for their rhetorical value. He can, therefore, contrast the Apollinian appearances with the Dionysian essences while maintaining later that both gods are mere appearances. In

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[36] "Disillusionment" is here used more literally than perhaps ever before.

reality (or more accurately, in apparent reality) Nietzsche himself is creating an appearance and as creator, is fundamentally free to create as he pleases.

It follows that art in general, and music more specifically, is based in action and creativity. They are *the* means for authentic existence.[37] Therefore creation is one of the fundamental characteristics of humanity and it is even *through* creation that we affirm our identity. Experimentation necessarily plays a large role in an act of creation that lies within the confines of a metaphysical void. If there are no Platonic forms, no angelic models, no transcendent criteria of any kind, then any creator must be ever vigilant of blind acceptance of models or tradition. One must experiment in order to ensure the authenticity of a creation. Artists who blindly follow in tradition call down upon themselves several existential problems. First of all, it attributes a fundamental validity to Apollinian surfaces without the consideration of the Dionysian void over which they are assembled. Secondly, such an activity cannot rightfully be called "creation" in the absence of the necessary encounter with the metaphysical reality. Finally, a copier of other artistic creators fails, in the strictest sense, to "Exist." To use a distinction hinted at by Nietzsche and fully developed by later thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, an individual can "exist" or "Exist." The former is a passive state in which one might say, "I exist." The latter is an active state best summed up by the statement, "I *am existing*."[38]

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[37] Qualifying existence with terms like "authentic" recurs throughout Nietzsche's writings and is one of his most dynamic concepts. Having established his metaphysical (or anti-metaphysical as the case may be) foundation by the mid 1860's, the rest of his life he spent establishing how to live in such a world. This will be discussed at more length in subsequent chapters.

[38] See especially Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus' *The Stranger* for literary applications of this distinction. Heidegger, in his book *Being and Time* deals with the same problem more abstractly. I prefer the literary

Always the first to attack hypocrisy, Nietzsche took these conclusions to heart and unceasingly created and experimented. Perhaps it was due to his lack of musical training, in contrast to his extensive literary background, that his experimentation is most evident in his musical works. His use of different forms has been well documented and it seems that through this period of intellectual development he uncovered a philosophical justification for his preexistent propensities. That his tendency to experiment predates his aesthetic justification of the process is readily evident. His youthful attempts to emulate Handelian music, his experimentation with Albrechtsbergian fugues several years later, and his attempt to involve the Tristan chord into his oratorio all attest to experimentation. The same musical tendency has been commented upon by Frederick Love, Tali Makell, Curt Paul Janz and even Walter Kaufmann. Keeping this in mind, perhaps a different approach should be made to Nietzsche's music. Assuming that many of Nietzsche's unique ideas and perspectives were formed in his youth, it is in his youthful works that we should find evidence of this formation. Since, in Nietzsche's case, a large portion of his youthful output was musical, it makes sense to look to this genre to find the seeds of his later thought. During his youthful experimentation with different ideas and outlooks, the musical works he created can be seen as "prototypes" for his later, more fully articulated philosophies.

At this point it is important to return to Nietzsche's musical body of work, and examine a work that includes characteristics of both his earlier and later musical style: the 1863 melodrama, *Das zerbrochene Ringlein*. Although the melodrama form itself had

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embodiments of existentialism over the strictly philosophical in that the former address existential issues in an inherently existential format – fiction.

been firmly established since the time of Benda and his *Ariadne auf Naxos* a hundred

years earlier, Nietzsche's choice of simple piano accompaniment was unusual. Although

Schubert's *Abschied von der Erde* and Schumann's *Schön Hedwig* were both piano

melodramas, they received little recognition despite having been written by such well-

established composers. Their lack of notoriety makes it unlikely that Nietzsche ever

heard them performed, although he was most likely aware of their existence. A more

likely motivation for Nietzsche's use of the piano melodrama genre arose from hearing

piano reductions of orchestral melodramas. Excerpts from Beethoven's *Fidelio* and

Weber's *Der Freischütz* were frequently reduced for piano to be played in the confines of

living rooms and salons, and the melodrama scenes in these works (act 2, scene 1 in

Fidelio and act 2, scene 2 in *Der Freischütz*) were among the most popular. It is

probable that Nietzsche heard piano melodramas first in this way. The genre contains

several characteristics that would have been especially appealing to Nietzsche's evolving

aesthetic theories, including its lack of established form and the loose relation between

the vocal and instrumental parts. The similarities between the relationship of

spontaneous outcries to choral accompaniment in the Dionysian festival and the elastic

bond between speaker and pianist in the melodrama would have provided Nietzsche an

excellent means by which to escape formal constraints.

Within the elastic form of melodrama, Nietzsche set a text by Joseph von

Eichendorff, "Das zerbrochene Ringlein." The text is as follows:

> Deep in the cool of a valley
> a millwheel turns.
> My sweetheart who lived there
> has vanished.

she promised she'd be true to me
and gave me a ring as she spoke.
She broke her word of honour,
and in two the little ring broke.

I'd like to roam the world
as a minstrel,
singing my songs
and going from house to house.

As a horseman I'd like to fly
into bloody battle
and lie beside silent fires
in open fields on a starless night

When I hear the millwheel turning,
I don't know what I want.
But most of all I wish I were dead,
then all would at once be silent.[39]

Upon first reading, the text implies some sort of strophic form. The first two stanzas

provide the narrative context while the third and fourth stanzas provide examples of the

narrator's reaction to the situation. The final stanza brings back material from the first

and provides a conclusion—albeit a gloomy one—to the short narrative. It is easy to

imagine a musical setting wherein the first two stanzas introduce the musical ideas, the

third and fourth stanzas use the same or similar music for the two strophes, and the last

stanza recalls the musical ideas of the opening. It is striking, therefore, that Nietzsche

emphasizes the elasticity of the melodrama form by de-emphasizing the pre-existing

formal implications of the text itself.

The melodrama is through-composed without any repetition of musical material

in the different sections. There are moments of tone-painting in which the music reflects

the words spoken by the narrator, but even these are limited and show considerable

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[39] Spencer, 29-30.

constraint on the part of Nietzsche. In the third through fifth measures a falling minor second motive repeats several times while the narrator mentions the millwheel (ex. 26). It might be assumed that Nietzsche would use this as a recurring motive but it does not reappear, despite its recollection in the final stanza (ex. 27). Another motive appears in conjunction with the "rider" stanza. A dotted rhythm in bass octaves begins with the text, "Ich möchte als Reiter fliegen" and continues until the speaker reads, "um stille…" (ex. 28). The "Spielmann" section is unified through the use of a downward series of first inversion chords in sixteenth notes (ex. 29). Although the first inversion chords are alluded to previously in with the ring (ex. 30) they are treated very differently in the Spielmann section.

In fact, the most striking formal aspect of *Ringlein* is Nietzsche's avoidance of the text's formal suggestions. While the text of the third and fourth stanzas each describe a different profession the narrator would like to pursue in order to deal with his grief, Nietzsche resisted the suggestion to compose two similar phrases in which to set the stanzas. The Spielmann episode, for example, contains very densely set text over only a few measures, while the Reiter episode contains extended passages for solo piano interspersed with short fragments of the text. The obvious formal implications of the text's "Millwheel" symmetry are also avoided by introducing a new melodic and rhythmic pattern in the closing stanza.

Despite Nietzsche's resistance to more obvious formal implications, his *Ringlein* retains a rhetorical continuity and a unified perspective. The melancholy nostalgia of the opening stanza is reflected in the falling second "sigh" motive that recurs throughout the first section. In sharp contrast, the conclusion exhibits an optimistic atmosphere, finally

concluding in Ab major after the piece began in Ab minor. The rhetorical significance of this is apparent when one considers the closing text, "But most of all I wish I were dead, then all would at once be silent." By closing the piece in major he seems to be challenging the narrator's own self-pity and creating a new text through his unique setting of Eichendorff's original. The pain of the narrator's betrayal proves to be justified artistically through the act of aesthetic creation. In this light, the melodrama exists simultaneously at several levels; it describes a sequence of events and it charts the transformation of the narrator through the very act of narration. Nietzsche overlooked the more pedantic formal applications obvious in the text, and instead fused form and content, effectively foreshadowing his *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

Another example of Nietzsche's musical prototyping can be seen in his lieder that end in different keys than they begin. That this technique is unprecedented may be debated, but that it ran against the musical sensibilities of his day is without question. The modulation's oddity is only heightened in contrast to the short lengths of the works in question and the traditional methods of tonal reaffirmation employed in the openings.[40] Although each individual may take away different conclusions—therein lies much of the value of such experimentation—many will surely respond with negative evaluations. In such a short span of time, establishing a key and then abandoning it creates frustration and undermines the mood established up to that point. At the same time though, it highlights the subject/object relationship between the listener and the artwork in an enlightening way. Accustomed to submerging oneself into the nostalgic and charming

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[40] See pp. 51-54.

lied from hearing countless Schubert and Schumann lieder, the change of key suddenly

reasserts the objective (dare I say Apollinian) characteristic of the artwork.

Another example can be found in Nietzsche's remolding of the mazurka. This

can be seen as both a personal experiment that calls into question traditional definitions

and a statement to others, urging them to question their inherited values. A mazurka in

duple time begs the question, "What is a mazurka?" Is it the coexistence of several

musical characteristics or is it the spirit of the piece? How many characteristics can be

taken away while maintaining the spirit until entitling it a "mazurka" becomes erroneous?

This unusual piece can be seen as Nietzsche's boldest attack thus far on traditional

structures. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he points out the blind adherence of modern

individuals to values based on long disproved ideas. He asks how a self-proclaimed

atheist can cling so tightly to ethical views based solely on the existence of God. In

reference to the stubborn maintenance of religious ideals, he asks, "…how much the

erection of every ideal on earth has cost? How much reality has had to be misunderstood

and slandered, how many lies have had to be sanctified, how many consciences disturbed,

how much 'God' sacrificed every time?" [41] Written over twenty years after his youthful

"mazurka," the seeds of his later attacks on all of modernity can be seen in his earlier

innocuous attacks on musical nomenclature. If such imposing rhetoric appears to be out

of proportion to his small and relatively unnoticed departures from musical tradition,

Nietzsche's own critics raised the rhetorical standard through comparisons of his music to

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[41] GM, 95: II, 24.

"the rape of Euterpe."[42] Nietzsche would, therefore, not have been out of line to point

them to *The Gay Science*, in which he writes,

> What is new, however, is always evil, being that which wants to conquer and
> overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pieties; and only what is old is
> good. The good men are in all ages those who dig the old thoughts, digging deep
> and getting them to bear fruit - the farmers of the spirit. But eventually all land is
> depleted, and the ploughshare of evil must come again and again.[43]

Besides these interpretations, there are surely countless other associations that can be

made by investigating Nietzsche's experiments. It is in this realm that Nietzsche's

philosophical genius provides validity and worth to the musical works that would have

received deservedly little attention if written by others. By considering his use of musical

prototypes, light can be shed on both his music and his philosophy.

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[42] A quote from Bülow's "critique" of Nietzsche's music, cited in Newman, 324.
[43] GS, 79: I, 4.