

Reflections on the Dionysian Spirit of Music in Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*

Dustin Garlitz

April 2006 / *Revised* April 2022

I: Introduction

This philosophical inquiry into the early Friedrich Nietzsche's thought rests primarily on the ancient Greek legacy of music in the opening sections of *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*. I have done historical work on the lineage of the Dionysian and Apollonian drives and am specifically interested in commenting how Nietzsche's philosophy observes their dynamic interplay in mediated art forms. I would like to examine the metaphysical implications of these life drives, or, in other words, how the Dionysian and Apollonian manifest themselves in earthly and worldly pursuits, and then how those pursuits shape our personal identity and subjectivity. In terms of artistic endeavors, I am interested in inquiring into how Friedrich Nietzsche's life drives shape the identity of the artist, the art community, and the actual piece of art itself. My method of philosophical attack is through three loosely structured and interconnected sections of progression, with a fourth auxiliary section that can hopefully provide some sort of concluding hindsight.

II: Approaching the Original Nature of the Dionysian

W.K.C. Guthrie, in *The Greeks and Their Gods*, has written that the Dionysian spirit has historically left commentators puzzled. Furthermore, any type of resulting ecstasies from worshiping Dionysus has been unexplainable by the conventional accounts at the disposal of the commentators observing such a dynamic and intoxicating process. In other words, the spectators of the Dionysian worshiping, and some may argue, the Dionysian followers themselves, are constantly 'left in the dark' (in my words), not epistemically knowing the source and nature of the strange intoxicating spirit of Dionysus. Indeed, Guthrie writes that, "The worship of Dionysus is something which can

never be wholly explained.” (1968, p. 145) This ancient Greek scholar of the first-rank is attempting to explain that we cannot draw contemporary philosophical ‘analogies’ or metaphors towards Dionysus or other gods exuding ‘irrational exuberance’¹ to help us understand the myths of antiquity better, because these myths are in fact puzzling from their core.

Guthrie further attempts to explain the extremely strong hold (spellboundness, in my words) that Dionysus would have over his followers. The worshipers would lose rationality, and with the loss of rationality came the loss of inhibitions. I would like to take this opportunity to point out two different ‘poles’ or ‘scapes’² that classicists like Guthrie and philologists such as Friedrich Nietzsche would have found to be an interesting distinction, and maybe later in their analyses even would have inquired into: rationality involves intellectual capacities while inhibitions imply spiritual and/or moral properties. To allow the Dionysian spirit to free one from all rationality³, to lose one self (and any type of reflexivity) in a moment of ecstasy, is to allow for a type of ‘deintellectualization’⁴ of the self, a readministering of personhood. On the other hand, the loss of inhibitions on behalf of Dionysian wine may be impartial consent for the reshaping of mores and customs.

The point that Guthrie attempts to make about the original nature of the Dionysian spirit involves the scenario where a worshiper (a common mortal) is brought about by

¹ Economist Robert J. Schiller, *Irrational Exuberance* (2000): Princeton University Press, NJ.

² A term used by Arjun Appadurai in “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, *Theory, Culture, Society* 7 (1990).

³ A type of Weberian rationality, as formulated by classical social theorist Max Weber’s thought, not rational choice/game theory rationality, as propounded by mathematician John Nash.

⁴ A play on the contemporary continental philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari concept of “deterritorialization”, as expounded in their two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1968, 1980). The twentieth century French post-structuralism and postmodernism of Deleuze and Guattari was quite inspired by the nineteenth century continental philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

intoxicating methods to heightened inner awareness. Such climatic inner awareness, though, is totally lost once the resulting emotional unification with the ecstatic archetype of Dionysus is met. This idea draws on the ‘spiritual distinction’ I have made, or shall we say ‘the metaphysical distinction’ for philosophically accurate and complementary purposes with the moral distinction made on the same two-faced ‘pole’... while the other ‘pole’ can be labeled “epistemological” (in the commentary above). In this situation there is a ‘strange coalescence’ (in my words) or a ‘criss-crossing’⁵ in multiple directions, since the worshiper loses inhibitions (morals) only to have a heightened sense of personal identity and subjectivity (metaphysics).

In other words, the two faces of one philosophical ‘pole’ are interacting with one another with a great amount of frequency. As for the epistemological pole, philosophical skepticism need not be an issue. Guthrie writes of a godspelized, spellbound (in my words) individual, who loses all rational thought through the intoxicating ways of Dionysus. This individual is in a hyperjoyous state of mind and need not doubt the various pieces of wisdom presented to him - past, present, future - and so we can infer there are not skeptical activities commencing while under the spell of the Dionysian spirit. This means Dionysus renders *praxis* skewed toward the two-faced moral/metaphysical pole. This leviathan of a pole completely outweighs the epistemic pole in terms of productivity. The followers of Dionysus have had to historically comprise intellectual growth at the account of emotional ecstasy and ethical registering.⁶

⁵ Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously describes his philosophy as criss crossing in every direction in the Preface to his *Philosophical Investigations* (1949, 1953). I am attempting to draw a parallel here.

⁶ Ethical registering is not moral attunement; it is simply testing the waters to see what is wrong and right. One cannot call the early Nietzsche conception of the Dionysian as morally correct or in ethical attunement, because of the orgiastic events it entailed.

Guthrie examines how this emotional ecstasy I describe as ‘overflow’⁷ into a sense of “hysteria” (1968, p. 150), which reflects the intensity of the Dionysian spirit itself. Scholar Walter Otto has a chapter of a book devoted to Dionysus referring to him as “The Mad God”. There are two situations possible: either Dionysus overpowers his worshipers with intoxicating energy or his worshipers haven’t the tolerance for such an intoxicating experience. In one case, the madness flows from Dionysus, in the other case the fault lies on behalf of the worshiper. The two situations are not mutually exclusive. We can imagine a mortal with very little tolerance for the intense, intoxicating trance of Dionysus. Is it the inactivity of our rationality, and the ‘deintellectualization’ of the self, that does result in these cases of hysteria?

At this point we can entertain the concept of some degree of ‘controlled chaos’ at work in the Dionysian realm. That is, the Dionysian ecstasy is infused with some of the social rationality found lacking above. Developing from such a proposal is a philosophy of marginal excess. We can measure each unit of excess and allow for the sufficient Dionysian conditions for acts of ecstasies to take place, but with a narrative-like, self-monitoring rationality we can draw the line and not allow the acts of ecstasies to collude and form irrational hysteria. This is what I mean by ‘controlled chaos,’ and by entertaining this concept I incorporate a certain degree of “activity” and “agency” back into my proverbial epistemic ‘pole’ described above.

To expand upon Walter Otto’s notion of Dionysian madness, and how such a concept relates to the early Nietzschean conception of the Dionysian spirit, we must momentarily flirt with the idea of “death”. When approaching authentic Dionysian

⁷ The Dionysian sense of ‘overflow’ was examined by Friedrich Nietzsche himself, and remains a popular theme in commentators’ literature on Nietzsche.

culture through historical research and study, Walter Otto makes the unique observation that, “The rapture and terror of life are so profound because they are intoxicated with death.” (1986, p. 137) Dionysus grants individuals the momentary ability to transcend corporeal and temporal boundaries. His intoxication allows the mortal to flirt with death. The timed proceedings of one grandiose Dionysian festivity allow each participating soul to entertain its own fleeting destiny. Otto attempts to explain that the stronger one’s libidinal⁸ energies are, or shall we say the greater one’s life drive is, the worse one can fall towards motionless death and decay. He finds that there are signs that such an entropic decline is in the future path of the lively individual. In fact, the mortal under the spell of the Dionysian spirit seeks asylum from this traditional life-death power struggle. The Dionysian, on the other hand, is confronted with life and death drives weaved together dialectically in the form of intoxicating rhythms, chants, and melodies. The resulting syntheses are glorified ecstasies. The mortal may seek refuge from the verisimilitudes of traditional life in the Dionysian spirit, yet one should recognize that the Dionysian can very well be considered a way of life in itself.

This broaches nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s influence on twentieth century continental aesthetics, and an inquiry into the true nature of the Dionysian spirit may lead to an argument that includes one deeming an artist lives an all encompassing lifestyle (i.e., a way of life) more than a fragmented career with a completely separate personal life on the side. The artist scarifies the personal component of his or her life only to shine and soak in the excess radiance of the Dionysian spirit. Indeed, the archetypal artist in this case wants ecstasies repeatedly. However, there are flaws in such a theory. Such a sacrifice on the artist’s behalf is unjustified. We will see

⁸ Not the sexual use of the word, but the traditional “life” drive meaning.

that the Apollonian life drive manifests itself through sculpture and therefore there are other paths for artists to embark on than that of simply the intoxicating Dionysian spirit. If one correlates art with pleasure, he or she would have to stress the importance of Dionysus as patriarch of the artistic community. In all reality, though, Nietzsche stresses the importance of an actual duality of Dionysian and Apollonian drives, the distinction of which I would like to examine next.

III: The Early Apollonian/Dionysian Distinction by Nietzsche

In the opening section of *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, Friedrich Nietzsche writes about how the arts of Apollo include pursuits such as sculpture, whereas Dionysus has fertilized such endeavors as music. However, it would be wise of one should ask the question of what is the relationship, historically, between Apollo and Dionysus, that makes their duality so memorable culturally and dramatically? Walter Otto cites a vase painting dating from 400 B.C.E. that shows Apollo and Dionysus holding hands in friendship, and such a mutual acknowledgment and respect for one another and their inherent gifts, qualities, and powers, resonates with the early Nietzsche we find in *The Birth of Tragedy* (not to mention the perspectivalism we find throughout all of Nietzsche's nineteenth century literary career). To live a true life of an artist, the artist himself must be able to identify with Nietzsche's Apollonian art of sculpture and his Dionysian art of music. The individual well versed in many different branches of the humanities will experience this dynamic interplay between the Apollonian and Dionysian drives constantly, and will allow them to nurture him or her.

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche writes that the, "joyous necessity of the dream experience has been embodied by the Greeks in their Apollo." (2000, p. 35) Such a

statement by Nietzsche can come across as counterintuitive since in contemporary use we can approach dreams to be irrational and ecstatic (the very proprieties of the Dionysian). However, the distinction between Dionysian and Apollonian in this case lies in the process of intoxication: we do not associate dreaming (in antiquity) with impurity. One may lose grip on reality in the context of the dream (approaching intoxication from a rationality angle), but moral debasement need not be linked with ethereal-like dreaming in archaic and ancient Greek cultures. Hence by showing us how the ancient Greeks once dreamt, Nietzsche has already early on in *The Birth of Tragedy* drawn the line between the Apollonian and Dionysian drives.

In *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy*, philosopher John Sallis explains that the Apollonian drive that possesses Nietzsche's dream inclined sculptor is a drive that existed far before that artist existed. The Apollonian drive may appear to focus energy from an era unknown to us. One may only be able to view its dream-like manifestations as primordial representations and archetypes which carry biological value. However, the dream world exists prior to human activity, and sculpture may be the earthly art of symbolizing such an ethereal world. The sculptor hones his craft in order to map out the dream world.

It appears the Apollonian drive can be as addictive (on the conscious and unconscious level) as the ecstasies of the Dionysian drive, yet if it carries physiological weight, shouldn't it be? Apollonian energy exists before the life-world emergence of *praxis*, yet its dream-like drive is in fact an integral component of selfhood and personal identity in a modern world. Obviously, one can interpret Sallis as writing that Nietzsche believes the Apollonian drive exists only before the artist's work comes to full fruition,

not selfhood in general⁹. In such a case, the individual is endowed with Apollonian creativity at heart, yet has simply not found his creative niche (he dreams like an Apollonian but still has not honed his artistic craft).

Friedrich Nietzsche, when interpreting the Dionysian drive, writes of, “the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man” (2000 p. 36) and goes on to describe an intoxication that brings out a hidden, phenomenal quality in ourselves. This hidden phenomenological property being "unmasked" occurs within us naturally. It is part of our original nature, which is what I believe Nietzsche means when he follows the above excerpt with the words, “indeed of nature” (ibid). Therefore it is possible to trace both the Apollonian and Dionysian drives back to very early stages in the development of the public sphere. The interplay of such drives could account for the cyclical harmony and chaos that have shaped the social world for many generations. Nietzsche, later in his philosophical career, employs themes about the Dionysian drive as forbearer to the war-like spirit of man, yet such a topic is beyond the scope of this aesthetically inclined essay on the early Nietzsche. The artistic world (the pursuits encompassing the modern humanities) could very well be the product of the divergent ends of the Dionysian and Apollonian drives. Cultural critics would most likely remark that the disciplines of the humanities are shaped by Nietzsche’s chaotic interplay between both life drives. Where there is harmony, there is social attunement rather than artistic concurrence.

In *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy*, James Porter asks the question if, “Isn’t the Dionysian precisely the consummate form of escapism and the cleverest seduction to aesthetic illusion, in the guise of the absence of all such

⁹ In the corporate art world of twenty-first century consumer capitalism, the term "artist" can simply designate a career path, whereas the label "selfhood" is something much richer, broader, and metaphysical.

illusion?" (2000, p. 85) Answering such a question a certain way can provide the reasoning for allocating praxis within the realm Apollo and his sculptorial arts. Commentator Porter raises a just concern: Dionysus' ecstasy seekers may simply be running away from their real world problems and commitments, irrationally addicted to his heavenly wine and without a firm grip on reality. The notion of the Apollonian dreamer, as expounded by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, doesn't involve the contemporary lay-man's notion of daydreaming, but actually encompasses a motivating force that in the mind of the mortal provides a call to action, if you will, for the individual to recreate physically a heavenly phenomenon through the art of sculpture. I find it ironic that the oldest relic we have that symbolizes Apollo and Dionysus interacting was painted on a vase. That is, it was painted on something that was actually sculpted, or mediated, through this Apollonian inspired art.

IV: Allocating Musical Ecstasies within the Realm of Dionysus

Friedrich Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy* that, "In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community," and the reader may very well infer that Dionysian ecstasies occur independent of the earthly mediated art of music and its subsequent tone world. It is the song and dance that Nietzsche writes about that can launch Dionysian festivities of ecstasies, yet these artistic practices are simply vehicles of transcendence. Just as Nietzsche clarified that the Apollonian drive manifested in the form of the dream exists before the artist has conceived and realized his sculptorial abilities, the Dionysian spirit that infamously requires intoxication in pursuit of ecstasy is a quality that can be experienced prior to an instrumentalist recognizing musical genius and honing of their craft.

In fact, we should follow ancient Greek scholar Guthrie's lead and not take these explanatory analogies too seriously, since after all, these Dionysian and Apollonian drives are heavenly and ethereal, while music and sculpture, although magnificent pursuits, are indicative of the worldly and earthly activities of the mortals. We cannot deny the latter's transitory, ephemeral, and fleeting nature. It would be very difficult to approach the true nature of the Dionysian and Apollonian in the physical and aural terms and tools at our disposal. The spectators of the Dionysian festivals seems to be entirely 'left in the dark' (in my words), however the active participants may be allowed to get a brief glimpse into this 'true nature' of the Dionysian when reaching states of ecstasies, and so this process of uncovering the Dionysian puts the emphasis back on *praxis*. However, uncovering the Dionysian spirit is not the same thing as arriving at an explanation of the Dionysian drive, and the latter is what Guthrie implies is not possible. To get a better idea of the actual Dionysian character, though, we should indeed take a better look at music meditated art.

Philosopher David Allison writes that the early Friedrich Nietzsche found "it is the subjective states of our experience of music that provokes our ecstatic response." (2000, p. 1969) Allison is describing a 'trigger' theory of musical consumption, where the listener allows the various fragments and components of a composition or improvisation (melody, tempo, key, etc.) to register and interact in certain ways with our entire world of experience and wealth of knowledge. For example, the melody of a composition can serve as a 'mirror' into the unconsciousness of an individual consuming that specific piece of music. The listener sees something hidden of her or himself in the composer's work, and so in this case we can take a Dionysian journey into a land of

ecstasy and learn something that was once veiled about us in the process. This route approaches Nietzsche's philosophy from a therapeutic angle.¹⁰ On a conscious level, if one can create a self narrative, then the Dionysian rich music mediated art can register and align on certain points of interest. There can in fact be an attunement of "psychodramatic"¹¹ energy that results in ecstasy.

The type of registering and movement I am describing involves a certain degree of magnetism. The music listener drawn into a state of ecstasy from a certain melodic interval, for example, is drawn toward those particular sounds with complete and utter resoluteness. The grounding behind this steadfastness is that the individual is identifying his own personal experiences with the music presented to him or her. There may be no greater cause to act firm and enthusiastic than in defending and affirming one's own personal histories and life stories.

However, does Nietzsche write in *The Birth of Tragedy* of the Dionysian art of music being practiced rather than consumed? Philosopher David Allison writes as if there is only the spectator, only the listener of music. On the other hand, from Nietzsche's original account, we may be able to presuppose that the fullest amount of ecstasy is only available to those who actually practice the Dionysian art of music. Apollonian sculpture can only mimic or recreate ethereal dream like states if one is practicing the art, but the Dionysian drive is indeed more complex because there is a massive spectator culture attached to music mediated art. What I in fact find in Sections 2 and 3 of *The Birth of Tragedy* is that Dionysus himself chants intoxicating musical melodies, and all us mortals are entranced by the ecstatic sounds. Therefore, (in terms of

¹⁰ It is no secret that the psychoanalyst Carl Jung conducted public seminars on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, specifically on his masterpiece *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

¹¹ This is philosopher David Allison's term from his Nietzsche publication in 2000.

Nietzsche's stance), in the Dionysian realm we are all spectators. The Dionysian drive involves and implies some passivity (a letting go of one's grip) whereas the Apollonian force in the world promotes action and creativity. However, composers who attempt to recreate Dionysus' intoxicating hymn, are in fact acting on creative impulses as well. Therefore, I doubt Ancient Greek or German scholars (Guthrie as commentator or Nietzsche as philosopher) would make the Dionysian and Apollonian life drives out to be a clear dichotomy.

Delving back into the aesthetic dimension, there is a well known Nietzschean dictum that preaches the importance of living life as an artist and the actual work of art itself. The original piece of art has what Frankfurt School cultural critic Walter Benjamin described as "aura"¹². Nineteenth century continental philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche had the foresight to equate and register Dionysian infused states of ecstasies with creativity, which logically progressed into Benjamin's authenticity-rich notion of "aura" in twentieth century critical theory. In terms of accuracy, though, Nietzsche explains in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Apollo was the progenitor of creativity in the arts.

It is in fact a state of intoxication with a constant daze that Dionysus left many of his people feeling. This in turn can inhibit creativity and stall artistic productivity. Nietzsche writes that "we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*, through whose gestures and eyes all the joy and wisdom of "illusion," together with its beauty, speak to us." (2000, p. 36) Friedrich Nietzsche presents a scenario where there is a metaphysical joy that jettisons Dionysian excess and any irrationality that can hinder artistic creativity. Nietzsche the philosopher describes Apollo's endeavors as the 'plastic arts' because they in fact are imagistic, and maybe

¹² "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", (1936) reprinted in *Illuminations*.

because the Apollonian sculptor is constantly barraged with physical symbols, his or her rational and creative drives perform at a more optimal level. The Dionysian musician, who works with sounds that have no tactility, may not have such a firm grip on reality and may perform abnormally on a psychosocial basis.

This once again brings up the question of if the Dionysian follower is endowed with musical ability or if he or she is simply listening to the divine sounds of a musician. I want to ask how such a question relates to (1) the Nietzschean dictum about living life as an artist and an artwork, (2) the concept of creativity generating from the actual artist him or herself in the plastic arts of Apollo, and (3) the idea that a music listener can be a Dionysian yet an actual musician need not be, *vice versa*. First of all, if an actual musician or composer was a Dionysian, constantly seeking states of ecstasies in intoxicating fashion, he or she would not pen many compositions. Composing, as the history of western classical music has taught us, takes an austere work ethic¹³ and although the composer may take momentarily joy in hearing his or her orchestral composition performed, Dionysian intoxication would be a completely inaccurate description for the emotional state of the composer during his countless hours of ascetic labor that resulted in that particular composition. The hierarchical structure of the social landscape need not be an issue either. The actual musicians in the orchestra, who are performing the composer's masterpiece, cannot be mesmerized by intoxicating Dionysian excess since their intellectual duties and responsibilities are being called upon (they are reading extremely detailed music, which does not allow for them to sink into a 'deintellectualization' of the self that I find so common of Dionysian ecstasies).

¹³This is similar to classical social theorist Max Weber's Protestant work ethic that he finds that capitalism has perpetuated itself on in a grand scale.

The Apollonian plastic arts require the artist to live his or her life synonymous to the product being created from the nourishment of Apollo's creative, dream-like energies. The Nietzsche dictum hence challenges the Apollonian driven individual, he or she must make progress: the images constructed by the sculptor are if nothing more than metaphorical sign-posts mapping out, guiding, and directing one how to live the aesthetic life. I could foresee personal struggle and conflict on behalf of the Apollonian artist. Apollo encourages the individual to dream, but in terms of creative progress, some may argue standards in his realm are too high when compared to Dionysian rituals of disillusioned pleasure.

One interesting development in the Dionysian realm of the arts is that we can very well seek pleasure and nourishment from disbelievers themselves. Allow me to explain. At this point in time, we assume that Apollo's followers are all artists. That is, they express their creativity, as philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche writes in the opening sections of *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, in the 'plastic arts' such as sculpting. Well the current runs the other way in the Dionysian realm: we have come to the conclusion that the pleasure-seeking composer would not get any work done and the hedonistic musician would not perform well on stage if he were not thinking with the fullest mental capacity. Therefore, Dionysian musical ecstasies are being felt only by listeners (patrons of the arts).

Dionysus has stripped away any ecstatic delight inherent in living an artistic life, as far as in terms of being a career musician. However, what Nietzsche is describing early in his career as philosopher is a Dionysian spirit that exists in music before a mass society that propagates a commercialized music industry exists. The twentieth century

Frankfurt School scholars of critical theory believed that high-modernity rendered ‘culture’ a new “barbarism”¹⁴. Nietzsche may have paved the way for their socioeconomic and cultural critiques by making sociocultural critiques of his own in nineteenth century continental philosophy.

Nietzsche writes in section 23 of *The Birth of Tragedy* that “without myth every culture loses the healthy natural power of its creativity.” (2000, p. 135) In the case of the Dionysian spirit of music, the musician or composer may not believe in myth, but there are commoners (the music listeners, or as the Frankfurt School critical theorists such as Herbert Marcuse would refer to them, the ‘one-dimensional’¹⁵ consumers of the capitalist marketplace) who do believe the ‘hype’ (in my words), who do empathize with music emotionally, relate narratively, reach ecstatic peaks and flourish from the very product being generated by disbelievers of the myth. Such a case is like a diabetic who works in a candy store, constantly aiding in gratifying others ecstatic desires but never giving into his own. This situation presents a new twist: the musician or composer is not a disbeliever of Nietzsche’s Dionysian myth that he finds so important to modern culture. On the other hand, he or she is an actual martyr, sacrificing his or her chance to seek pleasure only to work ascetically to give excess amount of others the chance to experience the grandeur of Dionysian ecstasies.

What about the reverse for the Apollonian art of sculpture? Can the spectator of sculpture care less about the Apollonian dream-like creativity that the actual artist of the plastic arts holds with such conviction? In such a situation we have a banality of mass culture (a Frankfurt School-like new barbaric homogeneity), that only views (or shall we

¹⁴ Douglas Kellner (2000): *Great Minds of the Western Intellectual Tradition*.

¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse (1964).

say, consumes) 'auratic' pieces of art. There is not a mutually nourishing process being implemented between artist and viewer in this case. Only the individual creating that auratic work of art is flourishing with Apollonian creativity.

From a less cynical angle, these artists (the Apollonian sculptors) may very well though bring about a Dionysian paradigm shift in the emotion makeup of the consumer. We may be dealing with simulated ecstasies in such a situation. Nietzsche makes quite clear from the opening sections of *The Birth of Tragedy* that Dionysus was the patriarch to music, while it was Apollo who was progenitor of the art sculpture. However, Nietzsche also stressed the importance of observing a duality of the drives where there could be some Dionysian qualities of ecstasies infused in states of Apollonian creativity. The latter particular momentary description of a Dionysian/Apollonian flux-like cyclical duality could match the internal conditions of the simulated ecstasies referred in the sculpture-industry spectator situation.

Nietzsche the philosopher does indeed broach the theory of the Dionysian spirit being simulated in the Apollonian realm. Nietzschean commentator John Sallis writes in *Crossings* that "The artwork would be a mimetic double of the Dionysian. Nietzsche calls it a copy (*Abbid*), a repetition (*Wiederholung*), a recast (*Abguss*)" (2000, p. 72). Late twentieth century/early twenty-first century French critical theorist Jean Baudrillard found the Nietzschean concept of a 'copy' to be significant (hence the historical emergence of the 'simulacrum' outside of antiquity), and what we find in both the nineteenth century continental philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche and the late twentieth/early twenty-first century French critical theory of Jean Baudrillard is that the "copy" is not as superior as the original (or as Frankfurt School cultural critic Walter

Benjamin would describe, it has been stripped of at least some of its ‘aura’ or authenticity. However, the Frankfurt School’s Walter Benjamin and French critical theory’s Jean Baudrillard write of machine-based or technological copying and reproduction. Nietzsche himself tacitly implies a simulating or copying of the soul, an Apollonian infused creative energy that is at work doubling or mimicking the incredible spirit of the Dionysian.

Another Nietzschean inspired theme involves a Dionysian music or musician that copies the Apollonian creative drives of the artist. Therefore we are also presented with a situation where the musician attempts to mimic the superior imagistic qualities and skills of the sculptress. Nietzsche foresees Apollonian music as inferior to the Dionysian type in terms of “tone”, “melody”, “rhythm”, and “harmony” (2000, p. 72, footnote 22).

Nietzsche, for instance, saw flaws with actual uniformity of the melody and quality of tone in Apollonian music. He believed it was not significant enough to bring about emotional ecstasies the way Dionysian music could. The listener of Apollonian music would simply not register, emotionally, with the Apollonian musician’s melodic phrases. This spectator’s personal histories and stories would not align with the peaks and declines that the composer particularly penned to bring his audience to emotional ecstasies. So in such a situation we find fault in the Apollonian musician.

Sallis, anathema to my argument, writes in *Crossings* that it can in fact be the musician who receives pleasure from the Dionysian drive. If such a case is taken to be true, then we cannot blame the Apollonian musician for attempting to simulate emotional ecstasies and ignoring, as Nietzsche writes, the significance of uniformity in melody or

leaving unacknowledged the dulcet capacity tone has on the audience¹⁶. We must find fault in the composition, and therefore the composer, that fails to employ Apollonian creative technique, ploys, and mechanism (musical “vibratos,” “staccatos” and “legatos”) that promote and foster emotionally rich Dionysian registering resulting in ecstasies galore.

In such a situation we have the emergence, or possibly even a reemergence, of a Dionysian/Apollonian continuum or dialectic. The mortal soul needs creative rational mechanisms (tools) to bring him and others to emotional heights. One though, has a moral duty not to abuse heavenly drives such as Apollonian creativity. Apollo’s spirit in the arts can be the holistic means to unjust ends that include the irrational pursuit of pleasure. The Dionysian composer is a product of my proposed continuum or synthesis. He uses his Apollonian creative mechanism only in certain cases to bring his audience to an emotional peak.

Such a composer uses my examples of “vibratos” or “staccatos” to create momentary ecstatic tension (what David Allison referred to as his ‘triggering’ device). We cannot think of a conventional composer who uses these musical techniques, which are intending to create a dynamic variance or shuffling throughout an extended composition, in every measure of music in the actual composition. Even if the composer were at fault (creatively), and penned such a composition, we could not find fault in the musicians of the orchestra, in terms of their application of Apollonian creativity, in their performance of such a piece of music. The orchestral musicians were simply reading the “vibratos” and “staccatos” written on the pages of music, which reflected nothing about their actual creative abilities. If we wanted to examine the role of Apollonian

¹⁶ John Sallis cites the actual Nietzschean excerpt as “(III I: 29)”.

“mimesis”¹⁷ on the musician, in terms of creative capacity, we would need to examine improvisational based music, not compositionally-centered music.

Historically, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche has found much value attributed to the fact that the ancient Greeks merged imagistic lyricism with aural tonality. He philosophizes that the lyricism incorporates an Apollonian quality back into Dionysian music and writes about the lyricist that “as Apollonian genius he interprets music through the image of the will, while he himself, completely released from the greed of the will, is the pure, undimmed eye of the sun” (2000, p. 55). Nietzsche writes of the Apollonian creativity which can infuse music with purity, yet excess may very well only have radiance in the tone-based world of sounds, and not in lyrics. For instance, in improvised music such as jazz, the melody of a certain song is simply a launching pad for instrumental soloing on its harmonic progression. Dionysian excess is achieved during the freedom of improvisational expression by the musician.

From Section 6 of *The Birth of Tragedy*, it appears that Nietzsche is in fact very fond and appreciative of the creative possibilities of the Apollonian drive, even though they ran countercurrent to his philosophy of excess and overflow (just in the same way, we can say, that the nineteenth century social philosopher Karl Marx was rather optimistic of the original nature of the capitalist spirit, even though later its outgrowth ran countercurrent to his philosophy of communism and Marxism). Nietzsche, in a way, is explaining that Apollo has granted and endowed us with the angelic abilities to intellectually engage the aesthetic phenomenon of musicality. The Apollonian drive can initially serve as an inchoate guiding light to propel a sense of richness in terms of selfhood and personal identity, yet at the end of our metaphysical journey it is the

¹⁷ Sallis, pg. 72

Dionysian spirit that emerges dominant and re-administers emotional registering to the point of self absconding¹⁸ ecstasies.

There are flashes of brilliance in philosopher David Allison's particular commentary on the Apollonian inspired 'being-creativity' paradox brought about through an artistically concerned reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Allison writes that "to invoke a specific image or role at all, in the ecstasy of transformation, is already to draw upon the further resources of Apollo- even if this does result in the ritual incarnation of Dionysus himself". (2001, p. 51) Allison stresses the Nietzschean wisdom that one must use conventional vocabularies to reach states of intense joy that could only be understood by those very conventional vocabularies as marginalities of thought.

Canonical philosophizing includes a situation where a foreign agent, thought, or stimulus brings about an inner joy that can only be described as habitual¹⁹ or native. Nietzsche, on the other hand, is once again using counterintuitive logic. We can, at this point, move towards a Nietzschean theme of using our capacity to dream to allow the Apollonian drive to inspire us creatively - and this is entirely not a foreign distillation. There is naturalization at work in such a process, and any type of foreignness present would be attached to the strange, unknown, unexplained feelings entirely related with the Dionysian its realm of musical ecstasy.²⁰

V: The Controversially Modern Project of the *The Birth of Tragedy*

¹⁸ There is something dark, hidden and mysterious (think: masks) about the Dionysian spirit, which Guthrie also acknowledges.

¹⁹ I ask my audience if we can question the etymology of contemporary cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu's term "habitus".

²⁰ This type of logic makes me think of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's "the inner and the outer". We have examined how Friedrich Nietzsche influenced the continental philosophical tradition, but with Ludwig Wittgenstein's "the inner and the outer" we can make a claim that Nietzsche also carried influential weight in the Analytic tradition of philosophy, despite the critical reaction of Oxford and Cambridge to his work.

Friedrich Nietzsche cites the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer in Section 5 of *The Birth of Tragedy* in that ““It is the subject of the will, i.e., his own volition, which fills the consciousness of the singer, often as a released and satisfied desired (joy) but still oftener as an inhibited desire (grief), always as an affect, a passion, a moved state of mind.”” (2000, p. 51) In such a scenario Nietzsche is attempting to draw an inverted equation involving the ancient hedonistic rich myth of “Dionysos”, an “Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life”²¹, with modern Schopenhaurian pessimism. I find such a project to entail controversial notions, since Nietzsche is attempting to point out analogies that span several millennia and label multiple intellectual enlightenments as mere similarities. Was the ancient Greek inquiry into the human condition really equivalent to progress made by modern German scholars after organized religion and ideology had been spread across the entire continental of Europe? How can we account for the variance between multi-generational shifts in social customs and practices of Greek antiquity and Nietzsche’s modern era?²²

We must take remember that Guthrie pointed out that any analogy to Dionysus’ mysterious ways of intoxication would in fact be a ‘weak’ one. Nietzsche is attempting to bridge an ancient culture with a modern one, and doing so requires one to infuse sociological tools in philosophical and philological analyses. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche uses the philosophically ‘hip’ language (at the time) of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer to describe aesthetic practices of the archaic and ancient Greek

²¹ C. Kerényi, Princeton University Press (1972) Bollingen Series LXV.2

²² Twentieth century economist John Maynard Keynes, when once describing British History at Cambridge University, said it is not possible to compare the reign of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria as one would do so in the field of differential calculus. Keynes was remarking on the dynamics of only centuries of change. Nietzsche has undertaking an even bolder project in *The Birth of Tragedy*, one that incorporates millennia of change. We are left to ask: is such a project feasible?

world. Friedrich Nietzsche uses this philosophically fashionable language as a cultural anthropologist employs the tools of ethnographic data. Philosophers Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer's phrasings allow us to inquire into modern values and norms (for instance we can track the progress of the will in the above quote by Schopenhauer, which seems to appear fragmented, and this may mean that Nietzsche is attempting to draw a weak/strong Apollonian/Dionysian parallel in the scenario).

It is nonetheless the case that the ancient Greek world may have had a culture that included myths we cannot articulate in terms of the language and discourse of modernity (Immanuel Kant being the first thinker of a cultural modernity rather than the last thinker of a philosophical one). One has to admire the ambition of nineteenth century continental philosopher Nietzsche, though, for undertaking such a comprehensive and controversial project. Twentieth century philosophers of modernity and postmodernity followed his lead and turned to the culture of the ancient Greek world while infusing their literature with German and French-style continental phrasing and terminology. For instance, we can think of cultural theorist Michel Foucault and his concept of "Care of the Self", or we can go back further and look to phenomenologist Martin Heidegger, who also turned to the ancient Greeks.

VI: Conclusion

Two approaches my essay inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music* did not broach, which philosophical commentators such as David Allison confront, are Freudian psychoanalytic textual treatment and cognitive science research-based analysis. I presented my argument from two alternate angles: antiquated Greek genealogical perspectives and modern applied aesthetic

concerns. The crux of my reading of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* lies in what he writes about music in Sections 5 and 6. My essay, if nothing more, is a reconsideration of the type of philosophizing taking place in those two crucial sections.

My method of philosophical analysis was to track the presence and direction - the effluence - of the Dionysian and Apollonian life drives in Nietzsche's nineteenth century work. In attempting to 'pin down' Friedrich Nietzsche's Dionysian spirit of music, I came to the conclusion that Nietzsche employed methods that went beyond stagnant literary criticism. To do Nietzsche and the Dionysian spirit of music in *The Birth of Tragedy* justice, we may find it necessary to do field work from a 'cultural studies' angle. Is this a reason why we find new Nietzscheans amongst music critics just as commonly as we find them amongst classically-trained literary scholars? A question I find even more puzzling, though, involves determining who the true new Nietzscheans, in terms of intellectual genealogy and scholarly lineage, actually are.

Bibliography:

Allison, David. *Reading the New Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and On the Genealogy of Morals.* Oxford, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001.

Allison, David. "Musical Psychodramatics: Ecstasis in Nietzsche" in *Why Nietzsche Still?* (ed., Alan Schrift). Los Angeles and Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Guthrie, W.K.C. *The Greeks and Their Gods.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968.

Kerenyi, C. *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Liebert, Georges. *Nietzsche and Music.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Mencken, H.L. *The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.* Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1967.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music in The Basic Writings of Nietzsche.* New York, NY: Random House, 2000.

Otto, Walter. F. *Dionysus: Myth and Cult.* Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1965.

Pfeffer, Rose. *Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus.* Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1972.

Porter, James. *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on The Birth of Tragedy.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Sallis, John. *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Solomon, Robert., (ed.). *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Garden City, NY, Anchor Books, 1973.

Solomon, Robert and Kathleen Higgins. *What Nietzsche Really Said.* New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2000.