FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE'S MUSICAL AESTHETICS: A REASSESSMENT

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It is well known that Friedrich Nietzsche loved to refer to himself as the "last disciple of Dionysus." On the basis of this famous self-characterization, it would seem warranted to describe Nietzsche's ideal as Dionysian—as Tracy Strong, Bruce Detwiler, and Daniel Conway have done. This paper seeks to reassess the extent of Nietzsche's Dionysianism via an examination of what the philosopher had to say about music—in particular, Richard Wagner's music. What the paper argues is that Nietzsche's musical aesthetics is remarkably Apollonian (or classical), and that elements of this aesthetics can be detected in every period of Nietzsche's intellectual life. While some scholars have acknowledged the classicism in Nietzsche's middle-period, I go further and argue that Nietzsche's early works already indicate that the philosopher was not an entirely loyal disciple of Dionysus.

In the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche famously posited an opposition between two artistic impulses found (in varying degrees) in all human beings and civilizations: the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Despite Nietzsche's claim to the contrary, the Dionysian-Apollonian dichotomy had been used for decades in classical scholarship,[1] but Nietzsche's originality was to have transformed this dichotomy into a "philosophical pathos" and to have used it to explain, in the *Birth of Tragedy*, not only how tragedy came about, but also how it came to an end. Specifically, Nietzsche argued that the Dionysian impulse strives, above all, for the removal of all barriers and laws between the self and the world. As such, Nietzsche saw it as an anti-political

[1] Albert Henrichs, "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 88 (1984), 205–40, and Max Baeumer, "Nietzsche and the Tradition of the Dionysian," in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*, (ed.) J. C. O'Flaherty et al. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1976). Compare with Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Nietzsche and the Study of the Ancient World," also in *Studies in Nietzsche and the Classical Tradition*.

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impulse.[2] The individual engaged in a Dionysian moment of collective ecstasy seeks to unite his self with life's underlying unity. In this process of destruction of (man-made) forms and laws, the individual at once gains and affirms a tragic insight: that life is lawless, meaningless, and yet eternal. But Nietzsche insisted that humans cannot endure this Dionysian, orgiastic state in an undiluted form: the Apollonian impulse is necessary to re-establish some of the boundaries and laws destroyed by the Dionysian impulse. Apollo thus re-individuates the world. If the Dionysian revels in sexual frenzy and darkness, the Apollonian delights in calm, order, and light.

Nietzsche loved to characterize himself as "the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysus,"[3] a label that most commentators have taken to be accurate. Among many others, Tracy Strong puts the Dionysian at the forefront of Nietzsche's philosophy, Bruce Detwiler defines the Nietzschean new order as "Dionysian," and Daniel Conway stresses the primacy given to Dionysus over Apollo.[4] There are plenty of good reasons to accept Nietzsche's self-characterization: the philosopher frequently spoke of himself as the disciple of Dionysus, praised the pre-Socratic Greeks for their Dionysianism and rarely mentioned Apollo after 1873. I would like, however, to supplement this interpretation by pointing to the oft-neglected *Apollonian* dimension of Nietzsche's aesthetics.

In order to reassess the extent of Nietzsche's Dionysianism, this paper will look to Nietzsche's reflections on what he took to be the most Dionysian of all creations: music.[5] As we will see, Nietzsche's

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[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 1–4, 21. Hereafter referred to as BT. Unless otherwise indicated, the numbers that follow references to works by Nietzsche refer to aphorisms/sections, rather than to page numbers.

[3] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 295. Hereafter referred to as BGE.

[4] Tracy Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Daniel Conway, "Returning to Nature: Nietzsche's *Götterdämmerung*," in *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader,* (ed.) P. R. Sedgwick (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). One can also think of the works of Thomas Heilke, Michael A. Gillespie and Adrian Del Caro. Amongst the rare exceptions to the predominant "Dionysian reading" are Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), and Mathieu. Kessler, *L'esthétique de Nietzsche* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

[5] In a Schopenhauerian moment, he claims that "only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon." (BT, 24)

musical aesthetics have little to do with the original Dionysus of the *Birth of Tragedy*, and much more to do with Apollo, the deity who commands, who represents a "will to measure, to simplicity, to submission to rule."[6] It is the Apollonian that *transfigures* and that is form-giving; it distinguishes, shapes and *legislates*. It is thus fundamentally political, having found its clearest expression during the Roman Empire. (BT, 21) If there is "politics of transfiguration" in Nietzsche (as Tracy Strong has claimed), one ought not to overlook its *Apollonian* dimension.[7] Despite referring to his ideal as "Dionysian," we will see that what Nietzsche worshipped was not so much the ecstatic mode of the Bacchic god but, above all, the unyielding, calm sobriety and mastery of the Apollonian—the absence of reactivity.[8]

A related argument that I will make concerns the unity of Nietzsche's thought across the different periods of his authorship. Some scholars have acknowledged that there is a clear "classical"/Apollonian character to Nietzsche's middle works[9], but I want to indicate that Nietzsche's aesthetics contained, *from the beginning*, clear elements of a formalist and Apollonian conception of music.[10] While the 1872 *Birth of Tragedy* contains some outright propaganda for Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik*, there are a host of writings from the same period that suggest that Nietzsche's views were already quite at odds with Wagner's.[11] Indeed, many of the accusations levelled

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[6] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), 1051. Hereafter referred to as WP.

[7] Nietzsche repeatedly associates, in his late works, the "Dionysian" with transfiguration. But I will show that the late Dionysus has "stolen" this key function from the Apollo of Nietzsche's early works. And while the *Birth of Tragedy* maintains that music is "un-Apollonian" (p. 2), we will see that Nietzsche, in fact, came to think of music *predominantly* in Apollonian terms.

[8] See, for example, Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, (tr.) Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), 35 (hereafter referred to as EH), and Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 281 (hereafter referred to as GS). On the concepts of "active" and "reactive," see particularly Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 2005).

[9] See, for example, Mathieu Kessler, *L'esthétique de Nietzsche*; and Eric Dufour, "*L'esthétique musicale formaliste de* Humain trop humain," in *Nietzsche-Studien*, Band 28 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

[10] Contra Dufour, who argues that there is "*un gouffre infranchissable*" between the views of the *Birth of Tragedy* and *Human, All Too Human*. See his "*L'esthétique musicale formaliste*," 229.

[11] The story of Nietzsche's friendship with Wagner has often been told. For detailed and thoughtful discussions, see, for instance, Georges Liebert, *Nietzsche et la musique* (Paris: PUF, 1995); Curt Paul Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Biographie* (Munich: Carl Hanswer Verlag, 1978); R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche, The Man and*

against "Socratic modernity" in the *Birth of Tragedy* are remarkably similar to the ones Nietzsche directed at Wagner in his *Nachlass* during the same period. As we will see, in the late 19th-century aesthetic battle between the "progressive" camp of Wagner/Liszt and the conservative side of Brahms/Hanslick, Nietzsche sided with the latter—and he did so without contradicting any part of his philosophy.

The best way of exploring Nietzsche's musical aesthetics is to pay attention to his opposition to Wagner. I propose, then, to flesh out Nietzsche's *Apollonian* aesthetics via the fourfold critique he lodged against the "decadent" aesthetics of Richard Wagner. In Nietzsche's view, Wagner's music was guilty of: (1) an excessive faith in *logos*; (2) a reactive formlessness; (3) a democratic pursuit of "gross obviousness" and intelligibility; and (4) a very nihilistic form of deception.[12] We will see that the bulk of Wagner's errors were, according to Nietzsche, the result of either an excessively Socratic or an excessively *Dionysian* attitude. Moreover, Nietzsche thought that the cure for these errors was a turn to order, discipline, and form-giving—Apollonian qualities *par excellence*. The first section of this paper will deal with this anti-Socratism, the second will explore Nietzsche's view of form, and the third will deal with the accusations of "obviousness" and deception.

Theoretical Man vs. Musical Man: The Struggle between *logos* and *mousikē*

The most famous accusation articulated in the *Birth of Tragedy* against Socrates is that he failed to show epistemological modesty and wrongly inverted the proper ranking between art and *Wissenschaft*. An optimistic "theoretical man," Socrates not only claimed that knowledge could help us comprehend the essence of the world, but—an even worse crime in Nietzsche's estimation—that it could allow us to *correct* it. Originator of Modernity, Socrates imbued it with *ressentiment* against this world and wariness toward instinct—denying the "music of life." (GS, 372) More specifically, Nietzsche's

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His Philosophy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); Frederick R. Love, *Young Nietzsche and the Wagnerian Experience* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).

[12] See Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), hereafter referred to as CW; and *Nietzsche contra Wagner: The Brief of a Psychologist*, in *The Works of Nietzsche*, (tr.) T. Common (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1899), hereafter referred to as NCW.

Birth of Tragedy accuses Socrates (and his ally Euripides) of having spoiled the greatest cultural product of the Greeks—tragedy—by driving the spirit of music out of it. The "Socratic Enlightenment," with its emphasis on rationality and intelligibility, chose to elevate the claims of *logos* far above those of *mousikē* and thus killed myth and music. Nietzsche objected to the unwarranted scorn that "theoretical men" such as Socrates and Plato manifested toward poetic/musical ambiguity: "Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalize; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon common." (WP, 810) We ought to note that what Nietzsche condemned was *not* words themselves, but an excessive faith in universal concepts.[13] Nietzsche insisted that, apart from a few brief, healthier moments in history (*e.g.*, Palestrina, Bach, and Mozart), the post-Socratic world had *always* been musically and intellectually decadent. (BT, 15) In his "genealogy" of (musical) decadence, Nietzsche thus objected to two things above all: (1) the privileged ontological status given to rational speech by an overly Socratic civilization, and (2) the tendency of philosophers and composers to regard music as the mere servant of the Word.

What is remarkable is that Nietzsche started voicing his disagreement with all of this "musical optimism" as early as 1872, knowing well at the time that Wagner espoused views contrary to his. While *Birth* seems to suggest that Nietzsche agreed fully with the Wagnerian project of the *Gesammtkunstwerk*, other unpublished writings of the time suggest otherwise. In particular, Nietzsche's short essay "On Music and Words" (1871)[14] already points to the theoretical gulf between the two men. In his *Opera and Drama* (1850), Wagner had famously claimed that the problem with opera is that what should be treated as a *means* (*i.e.*, the music), is in fact treated as an *end* by composers. In Wagner's view, it is the word and the drama that should govern music. Nietzsche thought that Wagner treated music as a "mere means" and sought "rhetoric" as Euripides and the *Camerata* had done earlier. (CW, 8) Openly challenging the views of his beloved master, Nietzsche wrote as early as 1871 (at a time when their friendship was strong) that

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[13] For an illustration, see my discussion of the significance of words in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, below. I argue that Nietzsche does not necessarily object to words in music—but he puts them on the *same level of meaning* as other musical instruments. (*e.g.*, BT, 15)

[14] Nietzsche, "On Music and Words," in Carl Dahlhaus, *Between Romanticism and Modernism: Four Studies in the Music of the Later Nineteenth Century*, (tr.) M. Whittall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). This 13-page text was meant to be part of a book on Greece, which Nietzsche never published.

> music never can become a means, however one may push, thumbscrew, or torture it: as sound, as a drum roll, in its crudest and simplest stages it still overcomes poetry and reduces it to its reflection. Opera as a genre in accordance with this concept is thus less a perversion of music than it is an erroneous representation in aesthetics.[15]

Contra Wagner, the young Nietzsche insisted that, when hearing the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (in which the composer uses Schiller's poem "Ode to Joy"[16]), the audience cannot make out the words—in fact, the listener is *indifferent* to them. When Beethoven used Schiller's poem, he "reached *not for words*," wrote Nietzsche, "but for a 'more agreeable' sound, not for concepts but for the *sound* that was most sincerely joyous." The human voice (*i.e.*, its articulation of words and ideas) does not have *any* special status—it is just another musical instrument. For Nietzsche, it is clear that the listener confronts the sung words of Beethoven's symphony as "absolute music."[17] This early, explicit disagreement with Wagner's reverence for drama anticipates the philosopher's later indictment of "Wagner-the-actor." More important, perhaps, Nietzsche's celebration of wordless music also reveals some of his affinities with the Romantics and their metaphysics of pure or "absolute music." In its simplest sense, "absolute music" refers to instrumental music. But the word "absolute" can also be used in two slightly different ways. With a clear metaphysical subtext, the word "absolute" can refer to music's escape from the world toward something other-worldly and eternal. But the term "absolute" can also refer to music's self-referentiality (a meaning that has strong ties with a formalist conception of art).[18] In the latter usage, all musical significance is said to lie within sound and its architecture. What matters for us here is that throughout his life, Nietzsche constantly wavered between these two meanings of "absolute music"—something that is perhaps indicative of his yearning to bridge being and becoming.

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[15] *Ibid.*, 115–16.

[16] The significance of Beethoven's usage of a poem was a matter of intense debate during Nietzsche's lifetime. In Wagner's view, Beethoven's usage of words in that last movement was an implicit recognition that "absolute music" was coming to an end.

[17] Nietzsche, "On Music and Words," 113.

[18] See John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), ch. 13.

In quite formalist moments, Nietzsche stated that "music is in absolute sovereignty over image and concept" (BT, 6) and that "dramatic music is an absurdity."[19] This is a complete reversal of Enlightenment lamentations that instrumental music lacks semantic content and is thus ambiguous. Like many of his contemporaries, Nietzsche agreed with this characterization of instrumental music, but looked at it in a manner more consistent with Romanticism. For many Romantics, music did not have to express the mundane things that could be conveyed in ordinary language because it could do a lot *more* than this. For instance, Schlegel believed that instrumental music could "approach the condition of philosophy," and Schopenhauer famously wrote that "we could just as well call the world embodied music."[20] While Nietzsche hesitated to equate music's content directly with the Infinite or Schopenhauer's Will, he agreed that the more music takes its distance from concepts, the more significance it acquires and the greater "truth" it holds. Showing his Romantic colours, Nietzsche noted, "music renders many stimuli...that language cannot represent."[21] What the likes of Plato considered to be instrumental music's liability—the absence of an obvious ethico-political content—Nietzsche considered its best defence against the secularizing scalpel of modern science: "That music may dispense with words and concepts—oh what advantage she derives from that fact, this cunning saint, who leads and *seduces back* to all that was formerly believed." (WP, 840)

While it is common to associate Romanticism with an aesthetics of feelings, we often overlook the fact that it also contained a Pythagorean-inspired metaphysics of instrumental music (according to which absolute music can speak of a supra-sensory realm).[22] While Schopenhauer essentially belongs in this second camp, Wagner has greater kinship with the first, although he desperately tried to make his theory compatible with Schopenhauer's once he realized how

[19] Nietzsche, *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, part 3 of *Human, All Too Human*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 163. *Wanderer* hereafter referred to as WS; *Human* hereafter referred to as HAH.

[20] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, (ed. and tr.) E. F. J. Payne (NewYork: 1969), 263. Schlegel is cited in Enrico Fubini, *The History of Music Aesthetics*, (tr.) M. Hatwell (London: Macmillan, 1990), 266.

[21] Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, (tr.) R. T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 47. Hereafter referred to as UnW.

[22] Fubini, *The History of Music Aesthetics*, 329–37.

much the philosopher worshipped music… and the *musician*![23] Indeed, Wagner conceived music both as a means to *express feelings* (linking it to the voice of the *Volk*) and, at the same time, as a *formal* incarnation of will/truth. Enrico Fubini argues that Nietzsche was one of the first to become aware of this intellectual inconsistency in Wagner, and suggests that this contradiction (which permeates late 19th-century aesthetics as a whole) may be at the heart of the quarrel between the two men.[24] What is more, Nietzsche's own work also seems to mirror this inconsistency. As we will see below, Nietzsche thought that music's formal aspect held much of its meaning, and yet he also wanted to believe that music "speaks of a composer" and that it *expresses* something greater than men—something ineffable, untranslatable. From the reflections of his youth until his mature works, Nietzsche was fascinated by music's ambiguity and its apparent kinship with metaphysics. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, he wrote that "it is hardly possible to think clearly about music" (WS, 167), and he noted in *Daybreak* that music "has in itself no character."[25] And yet, like all art, music's task is to *give* the world a character, a shape. This can be done—and perhaps done best—without words.[26] Nietzsche thus affirmed that truth is best characterized as intuitive and *nonverbal*.

The Socratic, then, is lamentably anti-musical, and the young Nietzsche, despite his Romantic infatuation with Wagnerism, articulated a view that was pregnant with his later attack on the master. But what was music, this "most enigmatic thing under the sun"?[27] Nietzsche's insistence on its "purity" and lack of imagery does have some Dionysian elements, but can we best understand Nietzschean musical aesthetics as dark, frenzied, and formless?

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[23] See, for example, Wagner, "Beethoven," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. V, (tr.) W. A. Ellis (New York: Broude, 1966), 76–77.

[24] Fubini, *The History of Music Aesthetics*, 329–37.

[25] Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 461. Hereafter referred to as D.

[26] In his 1871 "On Music and Words," Nietzsche wrote that Beethoven's late quartets put to shame "all concepts and all reality."

[27] "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth," in UM, 222. See also HAH, 167.

Musical Form and Modernity's Formlessness

> That breach between inner and outer must again vanish.
> – Nietzsche, *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*

Perhaps the most recurring critique levelled by Nietzsche against Wagner is that of "formlessness." Unlike the orderly music of a Mozart, Wagner's endless melody induces in the listener a sensation of swimming and floating. "Ambiguity in rhythm...is and remains a sign of dissolution. The part dominates the whole, phrase dominates melody, the moment dominates time (also the tempo), *pathos* dominates *ethos* (character, style, or whatever you want to call it)."[28] With his frantic desire to "break up all mathematical symmetry of tempo and force," Wagner created an endless melody that is excessively feminine and modern, and, rhythmically speaking, "not Greek enough." As Nietzsche wrote to Carl Fuchs in 1884, moderns—and particularly Germans—were unable to use rhythm properly. While Nietzsche acknowledged the impossibility of perfectly imitating the Greeks, he insisted that one should nevertheless exploit the power of a "purely *time-quantitating* metric" like that of the Greeks. Nietzsche contrasted, in the same letter, a rhythm based on "time" (a mathematical one) with one based on *affect*. While the latter is tied to *pathos* (and is exemplified by German Romantic music), the "Greek/time" metric is connected to *ethos* (and is exemplified by French music).[29] Wagner's melody no longer knew proportions and limits; it was sublime and gigantic, rather than beautiful and precise—and Nietzsche repeatedly indicated his discomfort with the sublime.[30]

Wagner's endless melody was, in fact, not melody at all in Nietzsche's view. It was a flight away from melody, from unity and from the building of a precise architectonic structure. (CW, 6; BGE, 240) It was fundamentally at odds with one of Nietzsche's central aesthetic principles: the musically beautiful (at once also the good and the "true") must be precise. "It builds, organizes, finishes; thus it constitutes the opposite of the polyp in music, the 'infinite 'melody.'" (CW, 1) In Wagner, there was "nothing of gracefulness, no dance, *scarcely any will to logic*...something German in the best and worst senses of

[28] Letter to Carl Fuchs, in *Selected Letters*, (ed.) C. Middleton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 233. See also BGE, 240.
[29] Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims*, part 2 of *Human, All Too Human*, 134. Hereafter referred to as AOM. See *Selected Letters*, 235.
[30] See, for example, AOM, 118, 134.

the word, something manifold, *formless*, and inexhaustible...." (BGE, 240; my italics) Wagner's lack of melody thus mirrored closely Modernity's own melodic deficiencies and disregard for form. In his untimely meditation on history, Nietzsche defined a true culture as an "everyday melody,"[31] one that is built out of "a single temperament and key composed of many originally hostile forces."[32] Moreover, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche mockingly described modern scientific man as a "mobile pot for forms that still has to wait for some content and substance in order to 'shape' itself accordingly—for the most part, a man without substance and content, a 'selfless' man." (BGE, 207) A few years earlier, Nietzsche had also unequivocally praised the Greeks for their *Apollonian* acumen. "Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore *appearance*, to believe in *forms, tones,* words, in the whole Olympus of appearance." (GS, Preface, §4) And finally, in the *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explicitly associated the sun-deity with the realm of words, forms, laws and surface.

One can see here a clear tension between Nietzsche's praise for the Greeks' adoration of *words* and tones, and his contempt for Socratic *logos* and the Wagnerian ranking of word above music. But Nietzsche's denigration of *Socratic logos* was not a denigration of *Apollonian logos*. Socrates' crime was not to have celebrated the Apollonian over the Dionysian, but rather to have taken the purpose of theatre to be dialectical argument. The Socratic is fundamentally inartistic. What is clear is that Nietzsche's condemnation of the "decadent" Wagner was based on the assessment that Wagner wanted to render everything clear for the audience. I will elaborate upon this below.

Contrary to the suggestion of some scholars[33], one need not wait for the writings of the 1880s to witness Nietzsche's so-called "Apollonian turn" or his call for an increase in man's capacity to shape the world. In his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche had already warned his contemporaries against letting an excess of history destroy "life's plastic powers." (UM, 120) According to the young Nietzsche, the

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[31] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 93. Hereafter referred to as UM.

[32] Nietzsche, "Philosophy in Hard Times," in *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870s*, (tr.) D. Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1979), 48.

[33] See, for example, Liebert, *Nietzsche et la musique*. In spite of the considerable agreement between my interpretation and that of Kessler in *L'esthétique de Nietzsche*, I believe that Kessler posits too sharp an Apollonian "turn."

Germans had "no culture": all they had was a feeble, fragmented interior, one too weak to "produce an outward effect and endow itself a form." (UM, 81) What Germans should pursue above all is a concord between their spirit and life, a reconciliation of form with content. (UM, 82)[34] In a more explicitly musical statement, Nietzsche observed in a letter that "all modern music seems to be suffering from an ever increasing atrophy of the sense of melody. Melody, as the last and most sublime art of arts*, is ruled by logical laws* which our anarchists would like to decry as tyranny!"[35] Thus, contra Kessler, it seems that Nietzsche's critique of formlessness and his praise of (French) Apollonian/plastic powers are present throughout his *oeuvre*. (see BGE, 254; WP, 791)

The question is no mere matter of (musical) taste: Nietzsche believed that at the heart of Modernity's ills was its desire to separate reality from appearance, and matter from form. The formalism present within Nietzsche's musical aesthetics is thus part and parcel of his challenge to traditional metaphysics and epistemology. Nietzsche's collapsing of "the true and the apparent worlds" appears to be tied to his belief that form is content. That men separate appearance and essence is not only a decadent, but also a futile, exercise, in his view. Human beings resist what is an inexorable and fundamental unity between life and thought. One must strive, he noted in 1873, for the "abolition of the antithesis of form and content, of inwardness and convention." (UM, 82)

By associating the meaning of man's artworks, above all, with their form, and by rejecting the expressive and mimetic functions of music, Nietzsche articulated an aesthetics that has obvious affinities with formalism.[36] For the formalists, the entirety of music's meaning is located within its immanent content, and has, therefore, nothing to do with the expression or representation of feelings. By focussing on non-referential musical qualities, formalism thus contests the political nature of music. Indeed, if one believes that the meaning of music lies within the tonal and rhythmic *structure*, one greatly "effaces" the socio-political content of the work (after all, words become quite superfluous and do not say anything about a particular culture or

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[34] Janz argues that the central musical preoccupation of Nietzsche is the relationship between form and content. See Curt Paul Janz, "The Form-Content Problem in Friedrich Nietzsche's Conception of Music," in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics, and Politics*, (ed.) M. A. Gillespie and T. B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[35] Letter to R. Krug, February 1882, *Selected Letters*, 144–45; my italics.

[36] For a detailed discussion of Nietzsche's formalism, see Dufour's "*L'esthétique musicale formaliste*," 215–33.

people). And this was precisely one of Nietzsche's intentions. While Nietzsche was fascinated by the "philosophical potential" of music celebrated by antiquity, he objected to the huge socio-political importance given to music by the likes of Plato and Aristotle, and he did so by separating the significance of music's content from a community's experience. As we will now see, Nietzsche's affinities with the "formalism"[37] of Eduard Hanslick are quite significant and are tied to his general suspicions about politics.

"Godfather" of musical formalism and well-known anti-Wagnerian, Eduard Hanslick defined music in his famous treatise, *On the Musically Beautiful* (1854), as "tonally moving *forms*."[38] We know that Nietzsche read and heavily annotated this treatise[39], which soon became the aesthetic manifesto of the anti-Wagnerian camp in its crusade against the "music of the future." Rejecting some of the key principles of the aesthetics of feelings (*i.e.*, music's purpose is to arouse feelings, and feelings are music's content), Hanslick argued that Romantics incorrectly ignored the importance of physiology.[40] Like Nietzsche, Hanslick acknowledged that music can arouse feelings, but insisted that aesthetic authority should be based on the *imagination* (*i.e.*, sensation and intellect) rather than primarily on feeling. Moreover, it is the perception of tonal and rhythmic structures that listeners should find, above all, intellectually rewarding.

What Nietzsche's and Hanslick's conceptions of music also have in common is an implicit denigration of the 18th-century debate over the precedence of melody or harmony. "The mind is a unity," says Hanslick, "and so is the musical creation of an artist. A theme emerges fully armed with its melody and its harmony."[41] Nietzsche also conceived of melody in "harmonic" terms—as a unity already preg-

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[37] I put quotation marks around the word "formalism" to bring the reader's attention to the fact that Hanslick was by no means a "conscious" or strict formalist, and neither was Nietzsche. But this is a (convenient) label often used in music history.

[38] Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, (tr.) G. Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 29; my italics.

[39] See Love, *Young Nietzsche and the Wagnerian Experience*, 31–32; Christoph Landerer and Marc-Olivier Schuster, "*Nietzsches Vorstudien zur Gebürt die Tragödie in ihrer Beziehung zur Musikästhetik Eduard Hanslicks*," in *Nietzsche-Studien*, Band 31 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002). In spite of the fact that Nietzsche's comments about Hanslick are not abundant and not always positive, Love, as well as Landerer and Schuster, have all noted the significant influence of Hanslick's treatise on Nietzsche and a certain kinship between them.

[40] "Music creates for the heart, they say; the ear is of no consequence." (Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 30)

[41] *Ibid.*, 34–35.

nant with a vertical architecture (*i.e.*, chords)—and further claimed that melody is ruled by strict *logical* laws and conventions. Similar to his reconciliation of form with content, and poetry with philosophy, Nietzsche eliminated the separation between melody and harmony, as well as that between the *art* and the *science* of music. Also, contra all those who associated melody with the people (*e.g.*, Rousseau[42]), Nietzsche associated melody with a strong aristocracy. As he bluntly observed in *Gay Science,* the modern contempt for melody is "part of democratic bad manners." (GS, 103)

Another ground for kinship between Hanslick and Nietzsche is a shared anti-Romantic conviction that music is amenable to a scientific reading.[43] Conceding that mathematics' explanatory power should not be overrated, they nevertheless insisted that looking for music's essence within the "composer's trembling soul" was pointless. They argued that *both* an empirical focus on acoustics and a mathematical explanation can account for the musical phenomenon. In his *Will to Power*, Nietzsche noted that "all human knowledge is either experience or mathematics" (WP, 530), and he indeed believed that both are necessary to explain music's nature. Finally, Nietzsche and Hanslick shared the belief that what is primary in opera is music (rather than drama), and that instrumental music is the only "true music." (WP, 23, 15) Music needs no extra-musical material to acquire meaning; its beauty is self-contained and independent.

But Nietzsche never went as far as to fully embrace a strict formalism that would fall into "*l'art pour l'art*." Such a radical aestheticism would posit, in his opinion, a false distinction between the artwork and the artist. It would also be yet another version of the Platonic view of "knowledge for the sake of knowledge" (WP, 298) and would thus fail to grasp the *practical* function served by art. Like history and philosophy, music should serve *life* and provide healing. (WP, 853) It is quite revealing that Nietzsche was, throughout his *oeuvre*, willing to concede this "healing" function to music—as he well knew that Apollo is the deity associated with healing and medicine.[44]

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[42] Thomas Robertson spoke for many when he wrote, in his *Inquiry into the Fine Arts* (1784), that "Harmony is the amusement of the learned and of the few; Melody, that Voice which nations hear and obey." Cited in Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music*, 68. This view was also articulated forcefully by Rousseau (see his writings on music in volume 5 of La Pléiade's *Œuvres complètes*).
[43] Hanslick's treatise, in fact, begins by stressing the value of a "scientific method" (*i.e.*, that of the "natural sciences"). See *On the Musically Beautiful*, 41–42.
[44] Specifically, the healing is tied to the "metaphysical" nature (and hence comfort) Nietzsche ascribed to music. See, for example, HAH, 222, and AOM, 177.

Both Hanslick and Nietzsche criticized Wagner for his lack of logic, his pseudo-religious obscurantism, his penchant for "programmatic" music, his endless melody, and, last but not least, his anti-Semitism.[45] In turn, Wagner saw Hanslick's aesthetic theory (and his unsympathetic newspaper musical reviews) as intimately linked to a hostile, conservative and rich Jewry. Although Hanslick was not Jewish, he was personally offended by Wagner's essay *On Judaism in Music*.[46] In this hideous essay, Wagner gave himself the task of explaining why Germans feel "an instinctive repugnance against the Jew's prime essence," hoping that his readers would discover what they "can make head against."[47] Not only did he blame the Jews for being responsible for his financial problems and lack of popularity, he also wanted to demonstrate that the Jews could not produce any music or literature. Specifically targeting Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, Wagner argued that the "vile success" of these Jews was merely the outcome of their wealth and control of the press. More important for our purposes here, Wagner claimed that there were close connections between Hanslick's idea of autonomous music and the conspiracy working against him—a conspiracy designed to undermine his progressive *Gesamtkunstwerk* and to promote, instead, the interests of a Jewish musical culture.

While some of Nietzsche's early letters indicate that he sympathized with some of his master's racist opinions, we also know that Nietzsche soon publicly objected to Wagner's anti-Semitism and his ungrateful, tyrannical behaviour—not only toward Meyerbeer, but more generally toward his patrons and the Jews.[48] Even prior to his break with Wagner, Nietzsche wrote in a notebook: "The tyrant acknowledges no individuality other than his own and that of his confidants. Wagner faces a great danger when he refuses to

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[45] See Eduard Hanslick, *Musical Criticisms 1846–1899*, (tr.) H. Pleasants (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1950), 63–66, 140–45.

[46] But perhaps he was even more angry when Wagner named the conservative character of Beckmesser in his *Meistersinger* after him (calling him in the original libretto "*Veit Hanslich*"), and then identified Germany's entire Jewry with the "nasty" Beckmesser.

[47] Wagner, "On Judaism in Music," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. III, (tr.) W. A. Ellis (New York: Broude Brothers, 1966), 80.

[48] See, for example, Nietzsche, "How I broke away from Wagner," NCW, §1–2. See also Siegfried Mandel, *Nietzsche and the Jews: Exaltation and Denigration* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), and J. Golomb and R. S. Wistrich, eds. *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

acknowledge Brahms, etc. or the Jews."[49] And, almost with a sigh of relief, Nietzsche added that it was "fortunate that Wagner was not born into a higher class...and that he did not become a politician."[50]

If Wagner and Liszt were the main representatives of the "*Zukunftsmusik*," Brahms was the musical hero of the Hanslick /conservative camp. Nietzsche liked to describe his decision to take the side of Brahms (at least for a while[51]) as the "most difficult test of [his] aesthetic conscience."[52] His position in the musical quarrel was also a test of his political conscience, for it required Nietzsche to make an open statement on the so-called Jewish musical "conspiracy" (the idea of which he clearly rejected).

While it would be tempting to read Nietzsche's praise of Mendelssohn and Brahms merely as polemical gestures against Wagner[53], Nietzsche in fact admired the work of both Brahms and Mendelssohn *prior* to his break with the master.[54] Nietzsche saw in Wagner's anti-Semitism, in his hatred of Brahms and the "formlessness" of his music, a common problem: *ressentiment*. Wagnerian Romanticism went too far in its vengeance against the Enlightenment and neoclassicism. (WP, 849) The composer, alleged Nietzsche, "gets rid of all his weaknesses by imputing them to his age and his adversaries," and as a true modern, he resists most conventions—positing the breaking of laws as a principle. He is a born enemy of "logic and straight lines." (BGE, 256) Wagner failed to appreciate the secrets of the Greeks: "three-quarters of Homer is convention; and the same is true of all Greek artists, who had no reason to fall prey to the modern rage for originality. They lack all fear of convention; it was through this, indeed, that they were united with their public." (WS, 122) While Nietzsche valued subtlety and was indifferent to intelligibility (as we will see below), he nevertheless saw as vengeful the desire to pursue

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[49] Nietzsche, Notebook 32, [32], in UnW.
[50] *Ibid.*, [35].
[51] His strong predilection for Brahms lasted from 1881 until 1884 (Nietzsche started showing interest in Brahms as early as 1874). During a visit to Wagner in August 1874, Nietzsche collided with the composer by bringing along with him a score of Brahms' *Triumphlied* and insisted on playing it for Wagner (despite the great irritation of the latter). This led to a nasty parting of both men. See David S. Thatcher, "Nietzsche and Brahms: A Forgotten Relationship," in *Music and Letters*, vol. 54, no. 3 (July 1973), 261–80; and Roger Hollinrake, "Wagner and Nietzsche: The *Triumphlied* Episode," in *Nietzsche Studien* 2 (1973), 196–201.
[52] Letter to Rohde, June 9, 1874, cited in Thatcher, "Nietzsche and Brahms," 266.
[53] See, for example, BGE, 245, and WS, 157.
[54] See Liebert, *Nietzsche et la musique*, 230–40; and Yirmiyahu Yovel, "Nietzsche contra Wagner on the Jews," in *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?*. See also D. S. Thatcher, "Nietzsche and Brahms."

an incomprehensible art merely for the sake of "genius" or for the sheer pleasure of breaking traditions. For Nietzsche, in fact, there was no good creation without appropriation and a certain deference for customs. "Convention is the condition of great art, not an obstacle."[55] One must, besides, acquire a solid mastery of rules *before* one can meaningfully break them. As Adorno would put it almost a century later in his *Minima Moralia*, "one must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly."[56]

What made the free spirits Chopin and Voltaire worthy of praise was their "Greek" respect for conventions and their "freedom in fetters." (WS, 159; WP, 98–100; HAH, 221) In Nietzsche's view, freedom thrives best under aristocratic regimes. Both Bach's and Handel's works demonstrate that, within the strict bounds of counterpoint, one can move "*very* freely."[57] What moderns need is an aesthetics that "imposes laws upon them" and "give[s] them a conscience"—moderns no longer know "on what basis to found the concepts of "model," "mastery," "perfection." (WP, 838) According to Nietzsche, it is easy and "cheap" to destroy laws or ignore models—it is easy, in other words, to be "Dionysian."[58] On the contrary, it is a sign of strength and nobility to have *mastered* principles and then to create new forms within those bounds. (D, 239; HAH, 221)

Nietzsche's harsh account of Wagner's formlessness was thus accompanied by a boisterous critique of the cult and idea of genius. While this attack reached its climax in his middle period, it was already present in his early writings. He noted, around 1872 (at a time when Wagner was trying to protect the cult of his own genius by destroying evidence of his hard work) that "talent is merely the

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[55] WP, 809, and "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge," in *Philosophy and Truth*, §47.
[56] Cited in Adorno's *Essays on Music*, (ed.) R. Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 81.
[57] Nietzsche, Notebook 34, [92], April–June 1885, in *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, (ed.) R. Bittner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7. There is a certain historical determinism to Nietzsche's conception of music history, which suggests that, after a long, classical period of pleasure in symmetry and order, late Modernity will inevitably turn to a predominantly dissonant breaking-down of the tonal system (see, for example, AOM, 119). While at times Nietzsche observed this tendency matter-of-factly, there is also a nostalgic touch to some of his observations and sometimes an explicit call for a new classicism.
[58] While it is easy to destroy out of *ressentiment*, Nietzsche argued that it is difficult to destroy with gratitude. See WP, 846, 852; GS, 370.

prerequisite for culture, the main thing is disciplined training based on models." (UnW, 91)[59]

Unlike Wagner, Felix Mendelssohn (one of the Jews repeatedly targeted by Wagner's ire) was deemed to possess the great virtue of artists: gratitude—not only toward existence but, more specifically, toward past models. (WS, 157) Nietzsche insisted that talent and beauty are earned over generations, and with a labour and sacrifice that warrants gratefulness.[60] He thus lamented that amongst the consequences of the Wagnerian phenomenon (and the cult of genius surrounding it) was an increasing disregard for "all severe, noble, conscientious training in the service of art; all this is to be replaced by faith in genius or, to speak plainly, by impudent dilettantism." (CW, postscript) Nietzsche believed that what must replace this cult of genius—and what must drive all *politics*—is a "cult of culture." (AOM, 185)

The Vulgarity of Intelligibility and the Problems with Deception

Part of what flows from Nietzsche's aesthetics is a considerable disregard for the audience. That music should be intelligible to all listeners was a Socratic obsession worthy of scorn, in his view. Nietzsche did not try to hide his disrespect and impatience when he wrote, in "On Music and Words": "What? the listener *makes demands*? The words are to be understood?" Nietzsche saw in "aesthetic Socratism" a revolting supreme law: that "to be beautiful everything must be intelligible." (BT, 12) What bothered Nietzsche about such an aesthetic principle is that it fails to see the listener as an *intelligent* being—it yields to the listener's inability to discover artistic meaning in subtlety and makes art mediocre. The beautiful and the good do not have "gross obviousness" as their prerequisite. (GS, 329) The second principle of Nietzsche's aesthetics (a principle violated, once again, by Socrates/Euripides and by Wagner) was that

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[59] Despite Wagner's best effort to cultivate an aura of genius around himself, we know that the composer learned immensely from Beethoven (among others) and borrowed extensively from Liszt. See, for instance, Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner* (New York: Knoff, 1946).

[60] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *Twilight of the Idols* & *The Anti-Christ*, (tr.) R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 102. Hereafter referred to as TI. Artists ought to thank previous generations—parents, teachers, books—for the wisdom they have acquired. See, for example, AOM, 176.

good music should treat the listener "as an intelligent being, as if himself a musician." (CW, 1)

Thus, while Nietzsche asserted his indifference to the aesthetic "needs" of the average audience-member, he paradoxically also insisted on the value of treating the listener as a *clever* individual. Unlike the "truly classical" artwork of Sophocles, Euripides' tragedies brought the plebeians on stage and introduced an intelligible prologue in order to facilitate the audience's comprehension. Likewise, Nietzsche believed that Wagner's art was plebeian art and belonged only in the theatre, in front of the masses. Not surprisingly, noted Nietzsche, Wagner was the first to write "companion" pieces (theoretical writings) to accompany his music, in order to make sure that all was properly understood...and believed. (CW, 10)

Nietzsche could not have ignored Wagner's long-time conviction that art originated in, and ought to serve, the *Volk*. Neither could he have been blind to the composer's ambition to be understood by "the many"—if not by all of humanity. Wagner's theoretical writings and his public statements were always quite clear. And, in fact, Nietzsche noted in early 1874 that "Wagner's art speaks a theatrical language; it has no place in the chamber, in the *camera*. It employs a populist manner of speaking."[61] Nietzsche could not have stated this in an entirely approving manner. Moreover, he accused Wagner's *Zukunftsmusik* of lacking a "noble tempo" (BGE, 256); it unveiled everything and stimulated the senses without much decency. The truly musical, for the ascetic Nietzsche, should not be perfectly intelligible, but neither should it be a sensuous orgy. The true composer should not indulge in an exaggeration of feelings, but should rather embrace the Apollonian motto of "nothing in excess."[62] The wise artist should make things "*half*-visible" (GS, 83; my italics)—and in that respect, Euripides should have followed the example of Sophocles.

In line with his aristocratic taste, Nietzsche lamented the tendency of modern composers to adjust their art according to the audience's increasingly limited capacities. (HAH, 198) It is undeniable, Nietzsche noted, that modern senses have become blunted. Under the pressure of Socratic rationalism, our ears have grown "more and

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[61] Nietzsche, Notebook 32, [21], in UnW. See also WS, 165. In *BGE*, Nietzsche explicitly writes that Wagner's art is "not noble enough" to merit a place anywhere else but with the plebeians. (BGE, 245)

[62] The motto Nietzsche himself ascribed to Apollo in *The Birth of Tragedy*. See also WS, 136; TI, 102.

more intellectual."[63] Amongst the consequences of this blunting of our senses is at once a growing sense of alienation between music and listeners, and an increasing gulf between two types of listeners. The first type comprises the rare listeners who have "refined demands" for subtlety and who can grasp the "true" meaning of music, which lies within its forms rather than mere emotional symbolism. The second group is made up of "the enormous majority," who can barely comprehend the musical meaning in the "sensually ugly and gigantic."[64] In light of the latter's mediocrity, Wagner adopted the leitmotiv (to ensure comprehension via repetition) and increased music's volume to extreme levels.

Wagner is thus amongst the discoverers of the musical sublime—the art of great effects and "the ugly and gruesome." (BGE, 256) Nietzsche repeatedly insisted that beauty requires mastery of rules and of counterpoint, and that the "art of melody" (*i.e.*, the supreme task of culture) is the most difficult of all. (CW, 6) It may be significant that Nietzsche equated the Dionysian (in *The Birth of Tragedy*) with the "barbaric" and the "titanic," and that he was, for a great part of his intellectual life, quite critical of such excesses. Moreover, and unlike arch Romantics who were infatuated solely with the darkness of Dionysus, Nietzsche offered his loyalty to the sun-deity and kept his distance from the pessimistic cult of the night. "We need the south, sunshine 'at any price,' bright, harmless, innocent Mozartian happiness, and delicacy of tones."[65] Nietzsche's bowels could not handle the dissonance and volume of Wagner's first Bayreuth performance.[66] Indeed, he repeatedly complained that the brutality of the composer's music shamelessly agitated the nerves and organs of

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[63] He added, "the more capable of thought eye and ear become, the closer they approach the point at which they become unsensual: pleasure is transferred to the brain, the sense-organs themselves grow blunt and feeble, the symbolic increasingly replaces the simple being." (HAH, 217) Nietzsche further lamented that, as a result of blunted senses, trite programmatic music becomes increasingly popular.

[64] Nietzsche argued that another deplorable consequence of the Wagnerian phenomenon was the dominant taste of the "art-idiot"—the presumption of the layman who organizes cultish association around the new idol. (CW, postscript) But we need not wait for the post-Wagnerian period to witness Nietzsche's aristocratic scorn for all cultural philistines. In his *Untimely Meditations* (the meditation on David Strauss), Nietzsche had already complained about the musical philistines who grant themselves "the right to reflect, think, write on aesthetics," and the right to "compose poetry and music." (UM, 10–11)

[65] Letter to Erwin Rhode, February 23, 1886, in *Selected Letters*, 251.

[66] "But does not my stomach also protest? My heart? my circulation? do not my bowels fret? Do I not unawares become hoarse thereby?" (NCW, 67)

listeners. And he evocatively characterized his objections to Wagnerian music as "fundamentally physiological." (NCW, 67)

In Nietzsche's view, the modern preference for overly exciting material—the "orgies of feelings"—was symptomatic of the alienation, sickness, and absent-mindedness of the 19th-century worker. He considered rigorous reflection, coldness, simplicity, silence, and *sobriety* of feelings, on the contrary, as signs of health. (HAH, 195) "Erotica or socialistica or pathologica" are all manifestations of the same decadence, in his opinion. (WP, 130) Even prior to his break with Wagner, Nietzsche wondered whether this musical revolution could really lead to "a freer humanity" instead of simply becoming swallowed up "by its own flood of destruction." (UM, 250) He prophetically answered his own question a few years later: "It is full of profound significance that the arrival of Wagner coincides with the arrival of the 'Reich': both events prove the very same thing: obedience and long legs.—Never has obedience been better, never has commanding." (CW, §11)

Objecting to all of these musical excesses, Nietzsche articulated in *The Case of Wagner* another feature of the musically "beautiful" and good: it must be light, subtle, graceful. (CW, 157) Having particularly Mozart in mind, Nietzsche wanted music that was 'bold, subtle, malicious, southerly, superhealthy." (AOM, 3; my italics) In his view, there was too much democratic resentment against subtlety in Wagner. The latter's "gross obviousness" had little in common with the heavenly simplification of a Mozart or a Voltaire. The Wagnerian sensibility (the 19th century) was, in Nietzsche's opinion, the antithesis of the classical sensibility. But, he further noted, "the romantics in Germany do not protest against classicism, but against reason, enlightenment, taste, the eighteenth century." (WP, 849) What Nietzsche's aristocratic neoclassicism called for, then, was the undoing of Rousseau's politicization of the Enlightenment—to cleanse it of its bourgeois and revolutionary spirit. He wanted moderns to renew Voltaire's *classical* project: "hardening, simplification, strengthening, making man more evil: these belong together. Logical-psychological simplification. Contempt for detail, complexity, the uncertain." (*Ibid.*)[67] Classicism, for Nietzsche, therefore entailed a certain contempt for the masses, for the so-called "dignity of man," and particularly for the demands of the bourgeois art consumer.

[67] There is a certain tension between Nietzsche's hatred of "gross obviousness" and his demand that one should have contempt for the uncertain—*i.e.*, that one should strive for the clearest simplification.

Nietzsche believed that *the musical listener has no rights*. Music is not created or performed for the sake of those who listen. That is not its *raison d'être.* The true artist is indifferent to the needs of his audience. Only decadent composers care about being fully "understood" or, more importantly, being *followed*. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche indeed characterized good music as "innocent" music—one that "thinks only of itself" (D, 255)—and in *Twilight*, he spoke of the grand style as that "which disdains to please." (TI, 11) Finally, in his early "On Music and Words," he noted that

> the artistic human being...has nothing to communicate to the listener. Indeed, in his transport he simply forgets who is standing close to him, listening greedily. And as the lyric poet sings his hymn, the *people sing their folksongs for themselves*, prompted by an inner need, *not caring whether the words are understood by those who do not sing*.[68]

This is, of course, fundamentally at odds with the views of writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who affirm that music's origins lie in the very awareness of another individual, and that music's true function (if not its *only* function) is to communicate a human message and serve as a bond between citizens. That being said, there might be some common ground between Nietzsche and Rousseau in the observation that folksongs are prompted by an "inner need." However, while Nietzsche evocatively defined music as a "bridge between the self and the non-self" (UM, 222), the character of this "non-self" does not seem to have much to do with a human being. In spite of suggestive passages about Dionysian "disindividuation" in the *Birth of Tragedy* (to which some scholars appeal in order to make a case for Nietzsche "the democrat"), the Nietzschean bond does not in fact operate primarily between one individual and another, but rather, and above all, between one person and life itself. Part of what makes Nietzsche particularly hesitant to celebrate music's capacity to create a "bond" between citizens is that he knows perfectly well that music can do just that. Nietzsche opts for emphasizing the meaning of music as contained within its *form* not only because it is consistent with his aesthetics (and his individualist taste), but also because the "message" contained within modern music is most likely to be a false or dangerous one. Why spread it?

As I have highlighted at various points in this paper, Nietzsche often drew parallels between Socratic/Platonic decadence and Wagne-

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[68] Nietzsche, "On Music and Words," 115; my italics.

rian musical decadence—and he also drew one between the latter and Christianity. Indeed, he accused Wagner of having offered, in his late works, excessively Christian answers. "How much prayer, virtue, unction, 'virginity,' redemption" speak through Wagner?" (WP, 840) In Nietzsche's estimate, Wagner surrendered to the temptation of using old Christian tricks to offer cheap promises of redemption to his bourgeois audience. What is at stake here for Nietzsche seems to be that Wagner's answers dangerously cover up the antagonisms of Modernity by refusing to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in the modern soul. The modern soul says "yes" and "no" at once and to everything, and it endlessly oscillates between Christianity and antiquity. Faced with such internal division, the worst thing individuals can do is to pretend such antagonism does not exist.[69] The crimes of Wagner were thus not only that he turned to theatrical rhetoric and that his music was formless, but also that he lied to his audience about the saving powers of a pseudo-Christianity that he opportunistically embraced. As Nietzsche concluded, "Wagner's music is never true." (CW, 8)[70]

Of course, Nietzsche repeatedly claimed that it is in the very nature of *all* art to deceive and to serve as an "error." In fact, the entire history of culture and philosophy can be summarized as a long history of deception. But there is something particularly unhealthy about Socratic and Wagnerian deceptions for Nietzsche: Socratic civilization (and Wagnerian music) do not seek to transfigure the world—they are not *Apollonian enough.* As Nietzsche noted in an early notebook, "There is something in Wagner's art that resembles *flight from this world*; it negates this world, *it does not transfigure it*."[71] Wagner indulged in the destruction of musical conventions and in the pleasures of darkness. He also bowed to the Dionysian temptation of religious ecstasy and sought the drunken "bonding" of bourgeois Germans at Bayreuth. In short, what Wagner (and Modernity) suffer from is an excess of Dionysianism.

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[69] "What alone should be resisted is that falseness, that deceitfulness of instinct which refuses to experience these opposites as opposites." (CW, 190–91) Wagner also "deceives" by using modern tricks to produce a *false intensification*.

[70] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, (tr.) W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1969), III:3. Nietzsche wondered, in his *Genealogy*, whether Wagner could really have meant his Catholic Parsifal *seriously.*

[71] Nietzsche, Notebook 32, [44], in UnW; my italics.

Nietzsche's Neoclassical Tune

We can witness, throughout Nietzsche's work, a condemnation of the fictitious distinctions between form and content, and between outer and inner. Because of the peculiar nature of music—the unusual identity of form and content in it—Nietzsche was particularly fascinated about what it had to say about the world. Nietzsche's conception of music points toward a peculiar mixture of idealism/mathematics and empiricism/physiology. Just as he envisioned his most metaphysical doctrine as a reconciliation of mechanism and Platonism[72], his musical aesthetics also tried to perform a great reconciliation. Nietzsche's conception of music—like his philosophy—challenged the categories of the rational and sensuous by collapsing them.

And the peculiarity of his aesthetics does not end here. We noted that Nietzsche's battle against the Socratic faith in *logos* led him to embrace a certain Romantic irrationalism and an accompanying metaphysics of instrumental music. And at the same time, we have also seen that Nietzsche's hostility to the aesthetics of feelings made him resort to the intellectual resources offered by positivism and the musical formalism of Hanslick. Desperately trying to keep one foot in Romantic irrationalism and another in 19th-century formalism, Nietzsche tried to dance—awkwardly, perhaps—to a neoclassical or Apollonian tune. Nietzsche never abandoned the view that, underlying all of our masks and forms was an abyss, a great void of disindividuation at which one shudders in horror and delight. But as this paper has tried to show, neither did he abandon the desire for mastery, sunshine, hierarchy and good cheer.

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[72] See WP, 1061. "The two most extreme modes of thought—the mechanistic and the Platonic—are reconciled in the eternal recurrence: both as ideals." See also HAH, 251.