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Aesthetics (C)

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Preface

This honors thesis represents, for me, the culmination of a four-year-long philosophical journey.

I arrived at Washington and Lee four years ago with few predetermined ideas or beliefs, conscientiously striving to be as much of a blank slate as possible. I was open to the idea of traditional religion and entertained it for some time. By the beginning of the winter semester, however, I had decided that this path was not for me, and, propelled in what seemed to be the opposite direction, I settled on science and all it entails. Skeptical of anything I could not see with my own two eyes, I proudly espoused my credentials: a neuroscience major, medical school ambitions, a future as a surgeon and scientist. That phase lasted longer than my religious one, but it, too, eventually ended. By my sophomore year, the laboratory had become a prison for my soul, and I longed for the freedom to pose the questions which are, in that so-called haven for inquiry, prohibited. Predicting that my craving would be satiated if I merged my scientific background with my philosophical leanings and pursued analytic philosophy, I changed my major, scratched through my life plans, and—to the great chagrin of my parents—became a philosopher. But, to my surprise, the analytic side of philosophy did not satisfy me either, and I found myself once more seeking a new path. Courses in String Theory and Philosophy of Mind—taken simultaneously during my junior year—resulted in a near existential breakdown, for my senses appeared suddenly worthless to me and nothing seemed trustworthy anymore; my entire world-view was plagued by doubt.

It was during this time that, while studying abroad, I entered into a relationship with one of Taiwan's most promising young film directors. Also a writer, philosopher,

poet, and painter, she—together with Nietzsche, whom I also began reading during this time—offered me that new path which I so desperately needed. It was the path of the artist. To no avail I had undertaken religion, science, and scientific philosophy in my pursuit of Truth, but I had not given up; and, finally, it seemed, I had found the answer.

As I sat down to formulate my plans for this thesis the summer before my senior year—nearly a year ago, now—Nietzsche's exaltation of art *over* Truth jumped out at me. I had always considered my highest mission to be the pursuit of Truth, and, most recently, I had decided that art might be the proper *path* to Truth; but, here, Nietzsche was saying that art is, in fact, no *means* to Truth, for it is, even to the philosopher, an end in itself! It is "*worth more* than the Truth"! I was perplexed and intrigued.

My hope was that, in the writing of this thesis, I would emerge with both a clearer understanding of Nietzsche's words and a clearer understanding of my proper path as a philosopher, a scholar, and a human being. I recommitted myself to my creative writing in order to have a perspective from which to view the impending battle between art and Truth, I plunged into Nietzsche, and, throwing caution to the wind, I set sail for uncharted waters—anxious to learn where this final and most important year of my journey would take me. The following pages tell my story.

Lexington, VA

April 2008

Introduction

For

Zhen Wei-ting—

Very early in my life I took **My artist, my muse, my Ariadne; and** truth seriously, even now
 I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance. My first book was devoted to it. *The*
Birth of Tragedy believe **Professor Emeritus Harrison Pemberton—** that it is not possible
 to live with truth, that the **My mentor, my guide, my Socrates.** degeneration

—Nietzsche, XIV, 318

¹ As quoted on Heidegger, *The Will to Power* as in 74

Logikē epistēmē, ēthikē epistēmē, and aisthētikē epistēmē—logic, ethics, and aesthetics: These are the three realms in which the philosopher moves. All rooted in and eternally bound to knowledge—*epistēmē*—these three modes of understanding beckon to us like Sirens, each inviting us to make her object of desire, whether the True, the Good, or the Beautiful, our own. Tempted by such offerings, what are we who are called philosophers—who are called not lovers of the True or the Good or the Beautiful but lovers of wisdom—to do? Which are we to pursue? Whom are we to love?

Far too often do philosophers go about their business without asking these questions, as if the nature of their questioning—were above questioning itself. The author of this study believes, however, that moving forward often requires first stepping back, that a prerequisite for asking new questions is asking old ones in new ways, and hence he wishes to reevaluate this most fundamental question concerning the

Introduction

Very early in my life I took the question of the relation of *art* to *truth* seriously: even now I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance. My first book was devoted to it. *The Birth of Tragedy* believes in art on the background of another belief—that it *is not possible to live with truth*, that the “will to truth” is already a symptom of degeneration.

—Nietzsche, XIV, 368¹

expressed in his very first work his conviction that not only for art but for all men art must be considered “the highest task and the proper metaphysical activity of this life” (Friedrich Nietzsche (*The Birth of Tragedy* 14).

“But what of the Good? What of Truth?” one might ask—and reasonably so. Nietzsche certainly ignored neither, nor shall we. From the day he penned that foreword to Richard Wagner exalting art and artist until the day he fell into insanity, Nietzsche was plagued and tormented by a most “raging” of discords existing between art and Truth.

¹ As quoted on Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art* 74

Logikē epistēmē, *ēthikē epistēmē*, and *aisthētikē epistēmē*—logic, ethics, and aesthetics: these are the three realms in which the philosopher moves. All rooted in and eternally bound to knowledge—*epistēmē*—these three modes of understanding beckon to us like Sirens, each inviting us to make her object of desire, whether the True, the Good, or the Beautiful, our own. Tempted by such offerings, what are we who are called philosophers—who are called not lovers of the True or the Good or the Beautiful but lovers of *wisdom*—to do? Which are we to pursue? Whom are we to love?

Far too often do philosophers go about their business without asking these questions, as if the nature of their quest—of their *questioning*—were above questioning itself. The author of this study believes, however, that moving forward often requires first stepping back, that a prerequisite for asking new questions is asking old ones in new ways, and hence he wishes to reevaluate this most fundamental question concerning the nature of the philosopher's quest. In the spirit of this revaluation he proposes to turn to that philosopher who, more than anyone else in the history of philosophy, believed *nothing* was above revaluation and *nothing* was so given as to be unworthy of questioning and who, risking his reputation and his future as a philosopher, boldly expressed in his very first work his conviction that not only for philosophers but indeed for all men *art* must be considered “the highest task and the proper metaphysical activity of this life”: Friedrich Nietzsche (*The Birth of Tragedy* iv).

“But what of the Good? What of Truth?” one might ask—and reasonably so. Nietzsche certainly ignored neither, nor shall we. From the day he penned that foreword to Richard Wagner exalting art and artist until the day he fell into insanity, Nietzsche was plagued and tormented by a most “raging” of discords existing between art and Truth,

and, as he confessed, he stood for a lifetime in “holy dread in the face of this discordance.” Yet he nevertheless held tight to art, writing, not long before his final decline, that most outrageous of lines, which, at present, has become the subject of our thoughts: “Art is *worth more* than the Truth” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 853, 453). “Sacrilage! Blasphemy!” the reader instinctively shouts. And were this statement to have come from anyone but Nietzsche, it would, indeed, seem heretical. But, despite what the critics may have us believe, Nietzsche was no “mere poet.” Certainly, he was a poet, but he was a philosopher, too, a classical philologist who, despite all his qualms, felt a distinct appreciation for Plato and the logic-revering Greeks and who, moreover, underwent what might be called a distinctly positivistic phase during the late 1870s; Nietzsche was, more than anyone else, the “artistic Socrates” whom he declared in *The Birth of Tragedy* to be “in general, a contradiction in terms” (51). Defying all generalities—thus was Nietzsche.

What, then, are we to make of Nietzsche’s exaltation of art? The goal of this study is to examine why Nietzsche might have declared art to be worth more than the Truth and, with sufficient prudence so as not to attempt to define or simplify where definition and simplification are impossible (as is the case with much of his thought), to place Nietzsche’s thoughts on aesthetics among the other elements of his philosophy, including his ethics. We shall begin with a journey back in time to the land of Oedipus and Socrates and, from there, trace the evolution of that genre most palatable to both artists and philosophers—tragedy—so as to arrive at a better understanding of how Nietzsche’s thought about art is fundamentally *emergent from* Platonism. Next, we shall embark on three critiques: first, of logical positivism, by which we shall see how science

and logic *necessarily* give birth to art; second, of Kant's and Schopenhauer's theory of disinterestedness, contra Nietzsche's notion of an "active" aesthetic state characterized by *Rausch* ("rapture"), the Dionysian, and what Stendhal termed "*une promesse de bonheur*"; and, third, of the Aristotelian concept of catharsis, by which we shall consider art's ability not to *purge* us of the horrible truths of existence but to *bring them to light*. This new understanding of catharsis shall, in turn, compel us to consider Nietzsche's seemingly outlandish statement about art as an artistic statement itself and, subsequently, explore whether we might not learn more about ourselves—whether we might not be better poised to reach the truly deep recesses of the soul—through our interactions with fiction than with Truth; and, then, lastly, in the final chapter, we shall return to that most "raging" of discordances and, having by this time explored it from several perspectives, attempt to lay down as precisely as possible the reasoning behind Nietzsche's shocking verdict in the case of *Art v. Truth* and, with this in mind, point out to the philosopher immobile before his three Sirens his proper path and kindly see him on his way.

With reference to these last weighty questions we must now explain how the influence of Socrates (extending to the present moment, indeed, to all eternity) has spread over posterity like an ever-increasing shadow in the evening sun, and how this influence again and again involves a regeneration of art—yes, of art already in the most metaphysical, broadest and profoundest sense—and how its own eternity is also a warrant for the eternity of art.

—Nietzsche: *The Birth of Tragedy* 51

Asking unanswerable questions, seeking unknowable knowledge, searching for the light-switch to flip ourselves from darkness—this is the struggle which defines the human condition, and, though over the course of history it has taken various forms, its fundamental nature has never changed. It is a drama, a drama best depicted by art, for “art is the collective dream of a period, a dream in which, if we have eyes to see, we can trace the physiognomy of the time most clearly . . . [and not through] bare and empty abstractions, but (as) a living human drama in which we have all been deeply involved, but which the artist has the clearest eyes to see” (Barrett 36). Thus, before we can

Chapter One:

consider man’s ceaseless struggle for truth, we must consider that struggle’s origin; before we can consider Truth, we must consider art. And before we can consider art as a whole, we must consider the **The Scream of Oedipus, The Smile of Socrates:** *The Birth of Tragedy and the Rebirth of Art*

Razing back in time along the ever-twisting path of tragedy, we arrive at last at its origin—an impenetrable cloak of darkness covering all the land, known simply as *Mourning-Fate*. Ironically, though, our journey must take us back further still, to the pre-origins of

With reference to these last weighty questions we must now explain how the influence of Socrates (extending to the present moment, indeed, to all futurity) has spread over posterity like an ever-increasing shadow in the evening sun, and how this influence again and again involves a regeneration of *art*—yea, of art already in the most metaphysical, broadest and profoundest sense—and how its own eternity is also a warrant for the eternity of art.

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Asking unanswerable questions, seeking unknowable knowledge, searching for the light-switch to free ourselves from darkness—this is the struggle which defines the human condition, and, though over the course of history it has taken various forms, its fundamental nature has never changed. It is a drama, a drama best depicted by art, for “art is the collective dream of a period, a dream in which, if we have eyes to see, we can trace the physiognomy of the time most clearly . . . [and not through] bare and empty abstractions, but [as] a living human drama in which we have all been deeply involved, but which the artist has the clearest eyes to see” (Barrett 36). Thus, before we can consider man’s ceaseless struggle for Truth, we must consider that struggle’s origins; before we can consider Truth, we must consider art. And before we can consider art as a whole, we must consider art in its most primordial and elemental form—that genre esteemed, often inexplicably, one might note, by artists and philosophers alike: tragedy.

Racing back in time along the ever-twisting path of tragedy, we arrive at last at its origin—an impenetrable cloak of darkness covering all the land, known simply as *Moirai*—Fate. Ironically, though, our journey must take us back further still, to the pre-origins of tragedy and to the origins of *Moirai*, and thus we find ourselves on the move once more. Though the atmosphere remains ominous, the darkness begins to subside, and we can make out a form in the distance: “The sentinel at the frontier is Death. It may be significant that *Moirai* is the counterpart of *Moros*, death; and that the word *Moirai* itself easily passes from its sense of allotted portion to mean *doom*—‘the grievous doom of death’” (Cornford 59). Fate, it seems, has evolved from Death—that Siren from which no man ever escapes, that common thread which, more than anything else, unites us all.

Moirai, too, then, must be common to all men—by its nature a part of the human condition, by its nature destined to become one of the fundamental components of art.

Having glimpsed its origins, we return to the darkness of *Moirai*, and here all is obscure to man. Here men are reduced to shadows, forced to acquiesce to an order without order, an overarching yet unfathomable means of apportionment. They have no knowledge of a course of events except that *to be* is *to owe a death*; a tragic world-view is the only option, and the words of the demi-god Silenus ring in the air: “What is best of all is beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best for you—is quickly to die” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 8). In anguish the doomed Oedipus throws back his head, lifts his blood-stained face toward the heavens, and screams at the gods who have destroyed him—but there is no reply. The will is not free, as choice itself has been reduced to a mere extension of that ever-present darkness; despite Oedipus’s best intentions, *Moirai* has commanded his downfall. Oedipus suffers because of “hereditary guilt—of those ‘taints and troubles which, arising from some ancient wrath, existed in certain families’ and were transmitted with the blood to the ruin of one descendant after another, who in the view of a later individualistic morality, were personally innocent” (Cornford 58). It is from this tragic world-view that art first emerged and because of it that it died.

Stars form in even the darkest corners of space and so too on earth, for in the fifth century B.C. the world is blinded by a light more luminous than any it has ever before beheld. With the coming of Socrates and Plato, a new era is founded; indeed, *philosophy is born*. To these thinkers, life is not a mystery but a *puzzle*, not a sea of darkness but a sea of light merely punctuated by *enclaves* of darkness—something which they might not

understand and may never understand but something which they theoretically *can* understand: "I would contend at all costs both in word and in deed as far as I could that we will be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it" (Plato, *Meno* 886). Socratic philosophy is one of *optimism*—it says, literally, that things *can* be "seen," provided that those wishing to see are rational beings dedicated to inquiry. By striving for Truth—by striving for the Good—these rational beings can unshackle themselves from the subterranean darkness of their caves and emerge to find a beautiful world awash in light: "Beauty . . . is in harmony with the divine. Therefore the goddess who presides at childbirth—she's called Moira . . .—is really Beauty" (Plato, *Symposium* 489). *Moira* has been redefined; Beauty, not Fate, rules the world, and thus the tragic world-view has been overturned.

But it is precisely this view—this intellectualizing of Fate, this monumental shift from the tragic to the philosophic—which marks the end of tragedy as the Greeks knew it—an end, according to Nietzsche, "different from that of her older sister arts: she died by suicide, in consequence of an irreconcilable conflict" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 36). Oedipus' anguished screaming and gouging of his eyes has lost its intensity; the tragic lament has lost its power. Indeed, art itself is on the brink of extinction. To Socrates, art is mere *mimesis*, imitation—nothing more. The ephemeral coherence at the end of the *Symposium*—Socrates flanked by the two luminaries of comedy and tragedy, Aristophanes and Agathon—cannot endure, and philosophy triumphs: "After getting them off to sleep, Socrates got up and left" (Plato, *Symposium* 505).

Concurring with Socrates, Plato sees no value in art and, in fact, in it sees trouble—this is what he *says*, at least. He expels the poets from his ideal city in the *Republic*, for “if you admit the pleasure-giving Muse, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain will be kings in your city instead of law or the thing that everyone has always believed to be best, namely, reason” (Plato, *Republic* 1211). Art, then, and tragedy in particular, is an affront to reason, to the most sacred thing of all. In a divided world of *Ideas* and images, in which we should be striving to apprehend those invisible Forms knowable only by the intellect, the tragedian does not even strive to apprehend the *images* of reality—he stoops lower: “He is by nature third from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators” (Plato, *Republic* 1202). All art, to Plato, is imitation and, worse, it does not even imitate the *images* of reality—it imitates the *appearance* of those images. An imitator has no knowledge of what he imitates and, hence, cannot know whether that thing is good or bad, beautiful or ugly; he is thus a corruptor and a threat to the Republic. Further, he cannot blame his lack of knowledge and, following, his lack of virtue, on the darkness of *Moirai*, for “virtue knows no master; each will possess it to a greater or less degree, depending on whether he values or disdains it. The responsibility lies with the one who makes the choice; the god has none” (Plato, *Republic* 1220). Unlike Oedipus, man is now in control of his destiny; he must *personally* choose to pursue Truth and Good. “Farewell” reads the valediction of the *Republic*: “Live rationally, and you shall *fare well*,” is Plato’s parting wisdom.

But continuing through history down the evolving path of tragedy, we might question whether our earlier conclusion was overdrawn. First, we see that both Socrates and Plato make what appear to be concessions to the tragic poet. Socrates, incarcerated

and facing impending death, considers that perhaps, for all the years he has practiced philosophy, he has been misinterpreting the dream which inspires him—the dream which tells him to “practice and cultivate the arts” (Plato, *Phaedo* 53). Perhaps, he thinks to himself, he really was meant to practice and cultivate the “popular” arts—not the art of philosophy, as he had assumed—and, fearing this may be the case, he spends his last days translating fables into verse. Plato not only writes in the dialectic—a peculiarly artistic way of doing philosophy for someone who disdains art—but also concludes the *Republic* with a *myth*—the Myth of Er—that seems strangely out of place in an otherwise argument- and logic-laden text. Perhaps he, too, is making some last-minute concession to Dionysus, acknowledging a side of man other than the rational. While art and tragedy remain undeniably subjugated, perhaps we were premature in declaring them dead.

This point becomes increasingly clear as we move forward yet another generation on our journey through the history of tragedy and come to Aristotle. Unlike Socrates and Plato, Aristotle sees a purpose for tragedy—a final cause—and thus he integrates it into his nonetheless profoundly philosophic world-view. For Aristotle, all entities or substances can be defined by their four causes: the efficient, the material, the formal, and the final. The final cause, or *telos*, of men is happiness, and thus in them and even in nature we see embodied a constant striving for perfection—a striving for the ideal form—guided by the unmoved mover as exemplar. Between moral and intellectual virtue, we have happiness—activity in accordance with the development of a capacity—and, thus, if tragedy can produce happiness either on the part of the tragedian or the part of the audience, then there must be some virtue in it. Countering Socrates and Plato, Aristotle answers yes, the

Aristotle is attractive. It asks us to make a drastic change in the way we view art and to

telos of tragedy is good, for it produces in men a catharsis of fear and pity, purging from them impediments to happiness.

But having come to this conclusion, he then dissects tragedy in the way he might dissect an insect—splitting, classifying, cataloguing, and quantifying. He uses the form of the treatise, having naturally adapted to it from the dialectic, to explicate the four causes of tragedy, to establish its parts, and to provide rules for its characters, its plot, and its diction. We are tempted to laugh as he summarizes *The Odyssey* in a mere three sentences—commenting afterwards, “This being all that is proper to *The Odyssey*, everything else in it is episode” (Aristotle 648)—but, to him, such analysis is sufficient, for, aside from its ability to produce catharsis, art is not unlike one of his scientific specimens. “Man ventures abroad, man suffers, man returns home and triumphs” does indeed summarize *The Odyssey*, but the reader of the *Poetics* cannot help but question whether this really does justice to one of the greatest epic poems ever written. Likewise, though Aristotle certainly is not wrong in defining tragedy as “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself,” (631), the reader wonders if this kind of language really capture tragedy’s essence. The plot of a tragedy should never be impossible, improbable, incorrect, corrupting, or contradictory (665-666), Aristotle asserts, but what of those experiences and those aspects of the world which exist outside the realm of such rigid logic, the reader responds. Aristotle’s reply, of course, would be that we live in a rational world and thus the realm of logic truly *does* encompass all, but here we again find ourselves at the break between the philosophers and the Fate-bound men of ages past. While the optimism of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle is attractive, it asks us to make a drastic change in the way we view art and to

turn our backs on centuries of experience—experience that would have us wonder whether rational thought really is all we need.

While we might debate whether tragedy is dead or simply crippled under the great Greek thinkers, what happens in the nineteenth century thanks to Nietzsche is clear: tragedy is born anew and in its greatest splendor yet. To Nietzsche the tragic world-view is obviously anachronistic; it negates the will to power and offers men only two options: escape to a dream-world of Apollonian illusions or lose oneself amidst the drunken ecstasy of a Dionysian orgy. At the same time, however, Nietzsche realizes that Platonism, while, as the bedrock of all Western philosophy, including his own, is undeniably deserving of a certain degree of reverence, it also has its limitations, certain “. . . extreme points of the periphery where the [noble and gifted man] stares into the unfathomable . . . [where] to his dismay he here sees how logic coils round itself at these limits and finally bites its own tail” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 55). Socrates—despite all his emphasis on logic and reason and the pursuit of a supreme Good—was missing something.

The tragic world-view had given birth to something unexpected, something Socrates, in all his long years of living, had missed and, only in his dying, finally realized—an element of the aesthetic. There was something powerful—something beautiful—in the way men became caught up in the games of the gods, falling prey to unforeseeable ruses and to unassailable enemies. Destruction seemed to beget creation, for tragedy spawned music and drama, poetry and dance; indeed, tragedy spawned *art*: “Here life and death and the very existence and significance of the external world appear only as manifestations of the inner workings of the soul” (Magee 211). In this tragic art-

form, Nietzsche shows us in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Apollo and Dionysus weave a tapestry of opposing ideals, merging restraint with abandon, control with passion, order with chaos; and it is this “blending and duality . . . [which] remind us—as medicines remind us of deadly poison—of the phenomenon that pain begets joy, that ecstasy may wring sounds of agony from us” (6). We can almost imagine the hint of a smile on Oedipus’ face as he realizes his fate—and a strange mixture of horror and relief, pain and joy, as the doomed king falls. In fact, it is this resolution—this moment of catharsis (not simply in the Aristotelian sense but on the part of Oedipus himself)—which the audience has been waiting for all along. The fusion of the emotional and the rational—the Oedipal and the Socratic—creates something beautiful, if only for a moment; and this is what draws us to tragedy. Like the dissonant and suspended harmonics of a Wagnerian opera, each twist in a tragedy’s plot adds to the tension of anticipating tragic destruction yet not knowing when it will come; when it finally does, the audience catches a glimpse of the sublime, for it is at this moment that Apollo and Dionysus, thrashing and struggling in rapture like Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde, achieve their ephemeral union:

In every chord-shift something is resolved but not everything; each discord is resolved in such a way that another is preserved or a new one created. . . . Only at one point is all discord resolved, and that is on the final chord of the work; and that of course is the end of everything—the characters and our involvement with them, the work and our experience of it, everything. The rest is silence. (Magee 208-209)

Thus, in a *dénouement* not even Tiresias could have predicted, tragedy is born anew. And, in the ultimate of all ironies, Nietzsche’s revolutionary assessment of Attic

tragedy forces us to take one last look at none other than Socrates himself and ask if, perhaps, tragedy and art were never dead at all. As the hemlock crept slowly up his body and toward his heart, Socrates found himself arriving at an almost supernatural *thanatopsis*, a view of death (and consequently of life, too) more lucid than anyone fully living might possess. And his only comment to those around him was that the god of healing was owed a sacrifice: "Make this offering to him and do not forget" (Plato, *Phaedo* 100)—seeming to affirm a philosophy he had spent his entire life refuting—the wisdom of Silenus—and leaving us to ponder the ambiguity of the *pharmakon* he drank. Was it poison or was it medicine? Was he killed or was he cured?

But rather than being an acceptance of life as disease, perhaps this was Socrates' way of coming to terms with tragedy as an art-form and, indeed, art as a whole. His fate was, after all, tragic in the fullest sense of the word—not so different, in fact, from that of Oedipus, the icon he had helped to destroy. Perhaps during his last moments Socrates, like Oedipus—like Camus' Sisyphus, even—can be imagined to have smiled. Imagine an all-too-knowing smile full of cynicism yet full of meaning, too—a smile suggesting that meaning had been found. Perhaps Socrates realized at that moment what Nietzsche would later discover on his own: that "we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as an *esthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified* . . ." (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 17). Rational inquiry is the start and the foundation, but it can extend only so far. At the edges of self-knowledge, at the limits of the *psyche*, there exists only one protection against absurdity: art.

Perhaps Socrates, the great teacher, realized that martyring himself for his ideals was not enough; his death should not grant his students closure but instead move them to

inquire, to doubt, and to act—just as his life had. And, considered from this perspective, there could not have been a more appropriate ending to his life, which was, after all, grounded—like that of the unmoved mover itself—in perplexing, inspiring, and *moving* others to action. Perhaps he began to think of his *existence* as a work of art and decided to make his final words—his final lines—as an actor upon the stage of life—not logical but *aesthetic*. It seems so simple but perhaps *that alone* is the reason for his final words: Socrates was simply making one final, brilliant sweep of the brush across the canvas on which he had painted his life—so tragic, so aesthetic, so quintessentially human.

What is art? This is the fundamental question in the field of aesthetics—so we are told, at least. Is there a single standard or criterion with which to judge an objectively? If not, is all art equally good? Is modern art really art? Can plumbers and workmen call themselves artists; must one have artistic talent—whatever that may be—to call himself an artist? Must art be a source of pleasure and enjoyment, and can we distinguish either by type or by degree among the various pleasures and enjoyments art grants; does watching a *Seinfeld* marathon equate to reading one of Shakespeare's plays? Does watching every episode ever made?

Chapter Two:

Science and Myth, Science and Art:

A Critique of Logical Positivism

The story is told (by Kierkegaard) of the absent-minded man so abstracted from his own life that he hardly knows he exists until, one fine morning, he wakes up to find himself dead.

—William Barrett, *Irrational Man* 1

What is art? This is the fundamental question in the field of aesthetics—so we are told, at least. Is there a single standard or criterion with which to judge art objectively? If not, is all art equally good? Is modern art really art? Can plumbers and workmen call themselves artists; must one have artistic talent—whatever that may be—to call himself an artist? Must art be a source of pleasure and enjoyment, and can we distinguish either by type or by degree among the various pleasures and enjoyments art grants; does watching a *Seinfeld* marathon equate to reading one of Shakespeare's plays? Does watching every episode ever made?

These are the types of questions inevitably raised by asking what art is, and, though they may spark lively cocktail-party debate, they far too often fail to produce answers which are accepted universally or even nearly so. But, as so often is the case, perhaps, in our eagerness and enthusiasm, we have acted too hastily and erred in the framing of the question. Perhaps the barrier we have encountered is not a want for acceptable answers but a want for the right question to unlock them. As aesthetician Gordon Graham notes, "The question 'what is art?' is really the question 'what *counts* as art?' and we want an answer to it in order to know whether or not something should be accorded the *status* of art" (3). To ask what art *is* is to ask what worth art *has*. The reason we balk at allowing a commode to be called a work of art is because we naturally desire to attribute some sense of worth to art. Thus, the fundamental question in aesthetics is not "what is art?" but instead "what is art *worth*?" Admittedly, this reframing of the question does not immediately solve the problem of how art is to be defined, and, as a result, there will still be bickering over Warhol's soup cans, Duchamp's snow shovel, and Cage's four minutes and thirty-three seconds of "silence"; but, by

taking for granted that, proximally and for the most part, we can, in general, agree what is and is not art, this new question allows us to move forward with further inquiry, with the hope that doing so might later shed light on how art can be defined. With this in mind, we shall recommence our investigation of the relationship between art and Truth and Nietzsche's ascription of higher worth to the former, and we shall begin with a close analysis of what precisely constitutes "Truth."

Historically, and most fundamentally, Truth has always been aligned with Reality. To Aristotle, it is, indeed, a *correspondence* or *agreement* between knowledge (i.e., thought) and Reality (i.e., that thought about), and already we see the stage set for Descartes' *cogito* and, subsequently, the divide between thinking and non-thinking entities, between internal and external "worlds." With the arrival of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, this correspondence theory of Truth takes *measurement* to be its new standard, and suddenly Reality is *that which can be measured*. Superstition and myth are toppled, and faith now lies with the senses and the intellect—with man's ability to discern empirically *what is*. All the world is a gathering of *res extensa*, present-at-hand.

Plato—and, later, Kant—of course, knew better, for we are *chained* in this cave we call the world, with a fire at our backs and shadows dancing before our eyes. Our senses deceive us. The earth is round, not flat. It orbits the sun rather than standing still. Atoms can be divided into protons, neutrons, and electrons. Protons and neutrons can be divided into quarks. Quarks are strings. We live in a world of illusions, and we have no assurances that what we *think* we see, hear, smell, taste, or feel—that what we think we *know*—is really that.

But the alternative—to look always to the grand, overarching Truth of the *Ideas*—this is no proper task for the human being empowered by science. Nietzsche himself denounces this mode of pursuing Truth as a nay-saying to life, creativity, and *this* world; a negation of the will to power; and the basis for all nihilism. Those who pursue Truth in this fashion, who worship it like a God, he says, go about like Jonathan Swift's Laputans, wandering their floating island in the heavens with one eye turned skyward and the other turned ever inward—so absorbed in their calculations and derivations that they would be incapable of social interaction were it not for the servant-boys who accompany them everywhere and signal them when to speak and when to listen (Barrett 106). Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine these Laputan Platonists waking up one day, like Kierkegaard's absentminded-man, only to find themselves dead. Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy* that “it is only as an *esthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified* . . .” (17), but these creatures are so far-removed from their existence and the world that they drive their women into the arms of wife-beating drunkards on the mainland below: “In the search for the Dionysian, after all, one cannot always be expected to be bound by good taste,” Barrett explains (109).

Thus, the scientists forget Plato and Kant and, optimistic and supremely confident, for a brief moment convince themselves they have invented knowledge (Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” 79). But, ironically, their success is ultimately their demise. In a chapter entitled “The Encounter with Nothingness,” William Barrett describes the limitations of reason:

The most advanced of Western sciences, physics and mathematics, have in our time become paradoxical: that is, they have arrived at the state where

they breed paradoxes for reason itself. More than a hundred and fifty years ago the philosopher Kant attempted to show that there were ineluctable limits to reason; but the Western mind, positivistic to the core, could be expected to take such a conclusion seriously only when it showed up in the findings of science. Science has in this century, with the discoveries of Heisenberg in physics, and Gödel in mathematics, at last caught up with Kant. (33)

The very tool which was to reveal the world's most fundamental Truth, its ultimate Reality—namely, science—begins unraveling the rational structure it itself had created and begins positing in its place an asymptotic limit—a constitution of infinitely regressing illusions. The scientist's most basic and essential assumptions prove to be just that: assumptions. Dividing entities into solids, liquids, and gases is now worthwhile only for the sake of convenience, the scientist realizes, for the so-called "solid" desk upon which he writes is over 99.99% empty space. The logician's Law of the Excluded Middle (either A or not A) is suddenly in shambles as quantum mechanics reveals electrons hovering in uncertainty—perhaps even in multiple locations at once. Even mathematics, that emissary of Truth nonpareil, seems bound to remain forever unconvincing; how is it, Plato's nagging voice still asks, that the length of the hypotenuse of the right triangle with sides of length one happens to be the square-root of two? How can an irrational number define a finite distance?

Positivistic Man is not merely contemptible in the manner in which he pursues Truth, however, for he, too, Nietzsche says, is a nay-sayer to life and to existence. Though he may be more immersed in "the world" than his skyward-looking Laputan

counterpart, he is no less removed from his own Being-in-it and no less likely to wake up one day, puzzled, to find himself dead. In fact, his own blindness to this scenario perhaps makes him more contemptible than the Platonist, and, thus, Positivistic Man is the *real* antithesis of Nietzsche's Dionysus, the *real* antithesis of the aesthetically concerned individual swept up in his own Being.

But what else is Positivistic Man? What, precisely, is the nature of his relationship to Truth? Francis Bacon, that quintessential "prophet of the new science," answers that "in scientific investigation man must put nature to the rack in order to wring from it an answer to his questions" (Barrett 180). In other words, the so-called "external world," to Positivistic Man, is the tight-lipped guardian of all the secrets of existence, the keeper of that which he desires:

[It] must be perpetually attacked, curbed, and exploited in order to yield to human needs. . . . Scheler calls this mode of thought 'knowledge geared to domination and achievement' and sees in it the specific mode of knowledge which has guided the development of modern civilization. It has shaped the predominant notion not only of the ego, the thinking and acting subject, but also of its objective world—the notion of Being as such. (Marcuse 110-111)

The scientist, of course, embarks on this conquest of nature with his microscopes and sextants, his formulas and charts, but what of that other species of Positivistic Man? What of the philosophic variety?

William Barrett posits that logical positivism was born from "the *guilt* philosophers felt at not being scientists; that is, at not being researchers producing

reliable knowledge in the mode of science. The natural insecurity of philosophers, which in any case lies at the core of their whole uncertain enterprise, was here aggravated beyond measure by the insistence that they transform themselves into scientists" (6). In the last century alone scientists introduced to the world televisions, computers, and cell phones; automobiles, airplanes, and rockets; and cures for diseases which otherwise would have threatened the very survival of the human race; and, as if that were not sufficient, by way of nuclear physics they at long last completed the dream of reason and took control of nature on the most fundamental level. On the other hand, aside from lengthy tomes on Nothing, confirmation that we do indeed exist (most likely, at least), and an impetus to learn German, what have philosophers contributed? Here we see Positivistic Man and Truth, eternally wed like those all-too-perfect, all-too-human couples of the mid-twentieth century—those couples so full of dark secrets and deep delusions—in the late-night cloister of their bedroom, their relationship laid bare and exposed for what it really is: violent, hateful, and duplicitous.

Positivistic Man—whether scientist or philosopher—does not love Truth; he loves the *search for Truth*. All his odes to Truth—his theorems and his postulates and his laws—are but sweet-nothings whispered into her ear, for if he could ever truly and fully possess her, he would as soon *perish!* Indeed, when Lessing, "the most honest of theoretical men, boldly said that he cared more for the search after truth than for truth itself . . . he revealed the fundamental secret of science, to the astonishment, and indeed, to the anger of scientists" (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 53). But Positivistic Man refuses to acknowledge this clandestine love affair—perhaps even to himself. He turns his back to the cave's wall and, reaching out to the light filtering in through its entrance, convinces

himself that he will not be content until night has been eternally vanquished, until light has filtered into every secret nook and every unknown cranny—until he has at last seduced, ensnared, and conquered Truth herself. *But what then?* a timid voice inside him inquires. His very essence is *bound* to the pursuit of Truth; what would he do if that pursuit one day ended? Who would he become?

Thus, all individuals concerned with Truth (and this proviso is necessary, for there are certainly those who are *not* concerned with Truth; in fact, they are by far the majority) find themselves faced with a choice—a choice between two masks: one for the purpose of *hiding*, one for the purpose of *seeing*. They can attire themselves for that apotheosis of masquerade balls and wear the Mask of Science, its glitter and tinsel shimmering beneath artificial lights. Through it they see what they *wish* to see. They see the paradox which sustains them, which keeps their kind alive: a logical, sensible, reducible world with—ironically—a fountainhead of secrets that never runs dry. To the masked inquirer this world could reveal one of its secrets everyday, each time filling his heart with delight, yet never fail to have a new one the next time he returns—not for the duration of his life, not for all of time. Thus, the one wearing the Mask of Science is permitted to continue cheating his real love and, moreover, to do so without the slightest notion of guilt, for he has grown so accustomed to his mask that he has altogether forgotten he wears it.

But what of the other mask? That other mask which had lain silently, portentously, *ominously*, beside the festive Mask of Science and which had aroused, a careful observer might have noted, an almost imperceptible shudder in the man who passed it over. This is the Mask of Art. Unadorned and sinister, it is the visage of a satyr, intended for no decent masquerade ball. Unlike that cheerfully-clad, ball-going reveler

who squints amidst blinding lights, the one who wears *this* mask will peer into darkness with his *eyes wide open*; for, unlike Positivistic Man, “who gets his enjoyment and satisfaction out of the cast off veil . . . [and] finds his highest pleasure in the process of a continuously successful unveiling effected through his own unaided efforts,” the artist turns always toward the dark realities of his existence, such that “whenever the truth is unveiled, [he] will always cling with rapt gaze to whatever still remains veiled after the unveiling” (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 52). Unlike that “curious creature who dwells in the tiny island of light composed of what he finds scientifically ‘meaningful,’ while the whole surrounding area in which ordinary men live from day to day and have their dealings with other men is consigned to the outer darkness of the ‘meaningless’” (Barrett 19), the artist embraces Truth so fully that it suddenly ceases to resemble “Truth” as previously understood. The artist understands that he was originally not so different from Positivistic Man (that their paths have a common origin in the love of Truth), that Positivistic Man disdains him not on moral grounds but on metaphysical ones, and that—here, Nietzsche stirs—the Mask of Art, as a wider and more value-free lens on the world and existence than its alternative, *reveals more* than the Truth and is, therefore, perhaps, *worth more*:

The truth the artist reveals eludes the conceptual structure of the philosopher. Hence it is no truth, for the latter, but *untruth*. . . . There is, however, another approach open to the philosopher: In the face of the recalcitrant data set forth by the artist, the thinker may choose to let thought rethink itself, to let it stand in more open and living contact with

what is given—[for] one has to take the experience of the real where one finds it. (Barrett 253-254)

The curiosity of Positivistic man is piqued: “What, precisely, is this ‘experience of the real’ which art begets?” he asks. Therefore, let us “let thought rethink itself.”

In his revolutionary essay “The New Aesthetics,” Oscar Wilde writes that “the basis of life—the energy of life, as Aristotle would call it—is simply the desire for expression, and Art is always presenting various forms through which expression can be attained” (40)—conjuring, it seems, an idea of a relationship not unlike the one which exists between art and the will to power: “Art is the most perspicuous and familiar configuration of the will to power” (Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art* 71). If Being *qua* Being is in fact dependent upon the creative capacities and will to power of sentient beings—if Truth and Reality are equiprimordially derivative to *Dasein*, as Heidegger would say—then where do we find ourselves? Wilde answers: “Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life. . . . Life holds the mirror up to Art. . . . Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life. . . . To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence” (40-41). In essence, he says, art is *more real* than Reality.

Consider a fog or a sunset, Wilde instructs. *What, precisely, are these things?* The scientist, his eyes lighting up with excitement beneath his shining mask, might explain that a fog is a collection of water molecules, comprised of hydrogen and oxygen, in the earth’s atmosphere in a gaseous state and that a sunset is nothing more than low frequency lightwaves from the sun bending around the earth as it turns on its axis. But is

this really true? Can fogs and sunsets really be described so objectively, so dispassionately? Are fogs and sunsets really fogs and sunsets if there is no one to see them, to appreciate them, to be moved by their beauty? Translated into the vernacular: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, does it still make a sound? "To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing." Surely, there have been instances of water vapor accumulating in the atmosphere and lightwaves bending around the earth since the beginning of time, but were there really *fogs* and *sunsets* in the centuries before poets and painters came into existence? Surely prehistoric cavemen *looked at* these things, but did they really *see* them?

In *The Artist's Journey into the Interior*, Erich Heller explains that it was in fact Schopenhauer who first put forward this revaluation of art, this overturning of art as *mimesis*:

[It was a] philosophical consummation of what artists and the lovers of the arts had come to feel with ever-increasing conviction: [that] artistic creation was closer to Reality than was the world as it appeared to the uninitiated human mind. For although Plato was right, so the argument ran, in judging the world of appearance to be the mere copybook of Reality . . . he was blind to the fact that the work of the great and inspired artist, in being the outcome of pure selfless contemplation, bore the authentic imprint of the Ideas—that is, of Truth, of Reality. . . . In other words and in two senses: the less the work of art is like 'real life,' the better is its chance to be like real life. (90-91)

We can think of those caricature artists at the fair whose portraits look nothing at all like us but who always reassure us confidently, (Heller 91) “Why, this looks more like you than you yourself!” We can think of those characters in classic literature who, in our minds, will never die. Like all great products of the imagination, they precede and prefigure life itself; Jane Austen’s Mr. Woodhouse, for instance, reminds us that “our experience is not summarized in [a] character, but illuminated, perhaps awakened by it. It is not so much that Mr. Woodhouse is ‘true to life’ but that life is true to Mr. Woodhouse, and the genius of Jane Austen is that she brings us to see just how true to Mr. Woodhouse life can be” (Graham 70). Objects, too, can take on greater Truth-value in art than in reality—as in Joyce’s *Ulysses*, for example:

Each small object of [the protagonist] Bloom’s day—even the objects in his pocket, like a cake of soap—[are] . . . capable at certain moments of taking on a transcendental importance. . . . Each grain of sand, Joyce seems to be saying . . . reflects the whole universe—and the Irish writer was not in the least a mystic; he simply takes experience as it comes, in the course of the single day he depicts in the novel. (Barrett 52)

Thus, we have it: “an aesthetic gnosis, a secular apocalypse: the world is worthless; art is good. Life is no life; literature is the real thing. Music is Reality, poetry reflects the vision of a creature that has escaped from the cave, standing now in the clear light of the Eternal Forms” (Heller 91).

But how can we be certain that this is not simply the artist’s attempt to justify narcissistic frolicking in a carefree world of infinite subjectivity, not simply a means of escape from the rigors of scientific inquiry and devotion to Truth as traditionally

conceived? The aesthete Gordon Graham advises that “once we have discarded familiar conceptions of truth as correspondence or resemblance, and begun to think instead about viewing the world through art, rather than checking art against the world” (68), this new correlation between art and Truth may begin to seem less distasteful. With this in mind, let us consider Hume, the empiricist *par excellence*, and his thoughts on the matter. In his famous treatise on aesthetics, “Of the Standard of Taste,” Hume notes that “Aristotle, and Plato, and Epicurus, and Descartes, may successively yield to each other: But Terence and Virgil maintain an universal undisputed empire over the minds of men. The abstract philosophy of Cicero has lost its credit; The vehemence of his oratory is still the object of our admiration” (360). Throughout history systems of science and philosophy have progressively given-way and been all-too-eagerly supplanted by new ones: Geocentrism by Heliocentrism, Newtonian mechanics by Einsteinean Relativity, Structuralism by Post-Structuralism. In each case, the newly accepted system seems, without any doubt, to be “Truth.” Yet, in each case, it too is eventually rebutted and relegated without fanfare to the footnotes of history textbooks, admits even this godfather of logical positivism. *But what of art?* What of Homer and Shakespeare, Beethoven and Bach, Michelangelo and Monet? Here we come to our next perspective on the relationship between art and Truth: art is *more enduring* than Truth.

But why is this so? Perhaps it is because art provides the *narrative* which captures the story of our lives. Perhaps it is because art is the one constant in a world of flux, the one means of ensuring at least some degree of eternity when faced with the finitude of our existences. Or perhaps, as Wilde so enjoyably relates, it is because “art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth, . . . [and, in fact,] *lying*, the telling of

beautiful untrue things, is [its] proper aim" (44-45). Scientists are forever faced with and bound by the questions "What happened?" and "Why?" No matter what they encounter, they must attempt to answer these questions. But the artist is free to reflect, to invent, to give, to impose; he is free to ask "What was it like?" He is free to ask "Who am I?"

"Realism in art is an illusion,"² Nietzsche says, and the real artist knows this and celebrates it. He distorts, he misrepresents, he *lies*—intentionally, note, such that his work is, to be sure, more enduring than the Truth. To the aficionado of Japanese art, Wilde says, there is no such thing as the Japanese people. Just as a fog or a sunset in the mind of a Monet enthusiast cannot be reduced to mere vapor or lightwaves, the Japanese people as artistically *created* cannot be reduced to any mere real-world populace; the "actual" Japanese people are simply "people," like all the rest of us—utterly un-Japanese: "In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people" (Wilde 43). Art also tells lies as the liaison between the particular and the universal; the particular bar of soap mentioned in Barrett's analysis of *Ulysses*, for example, tells us nothing whatsoever about the Truth of soap bars universally-conceived. It does not teach us about the chemical composition of soap or how soap reacts with water or whether soap is poisonous to the human body if consumed in large quantities (for, even if by some chance it pretends to, we in the "real world" cannot trust it); but, at the same time, as a symbol, a metaphor, a *mask* through which we can view Bloom's life and, subsequently, our own—it teaches us far more than we could ever hope to learn in the laboratory, playing with sodium hydroxide and lye:

What is in view here is human experience in its widest sense—visual, aural and tactile, as well as practical, emotional and intellectual. . . . Works of

² As quoted on Heller 94.

art are works of imagination, and . . . the imagination of the artist can transform our experience by enabling us to see, hear, touch, feel, and think it more imaginatively, and thus enrich our understanding of it. It is in this sense that art is a source of understanding. Though quite different, art is a form of understanding to "be taken no less seriously than the sciences."
(Graham 69-70)

At last we have come full-circle. We can now identify and understand what Nietzsche says is the greatest myth and "most sublime metaphysical illusion" of science:

[It is the] imperturbable belief that, with the clue of logic, thinking can reach to the nethermost depths of Being, and that thinking can not only perceive Being but even modify it. This . . . illusion is added as an instinct to science and again and again leads the latter to its limits, where it must change into *art*; which is really the end to be attained by this mechanism.
(*The Birth of Tragedy* 53).

At that junction in the road which compels Positivistic Man and the artist to part, where they are given a choice between the Mask of Science and the Mask of Art, we see, first, how art *reveals more* than the Truth. Now wearing that latter mask and engaged with and swept up by our own existence, we find that art is surprisingly *more real* than the Truth. As a result of that real-ness, it seems to us that art is *more enduring* than the Truth, and, then, lastly, we recognize art as a trustworthy source of understanding despite the fact—or, rather, precisely because of the fact—that *it lies*. Thus, revalued and freshly conceived, art is *necessarily* the *telos* of all scientific inquiry; it is the end, the answer, the remedy.

—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 518

Word/ shall hereafter be translated as "figure," as opposed to Kaufmann's "form."

What is art? We begin by asking this question once more, though, this time in a different context. This time we pose it not to the philosopher—who must attack it from all angles, seeking precision and accuracy and the eradication of all exceptions—but to the common man in the street, who responds almost immediately: Art is what one finds in museums. Paintings, statues, figurines. The Mona Lisa. David—pretty things to look at.

Chapter Three:

L'Art pour la Vie:

A Critique of the Theory of Disinterestedness

If there is to be art, if there is to be any aesthetic doing and seeing, one physiological condition is indispensable: [rapture]³. Rapture must first have enhanced the excitability of the whole machine; else there is no art. All kinds of rapture, however diversely conditioned, have the strength to accomplish this: above all, the rapture of sexual excitement, this most ancient and original form of rapture. Also the rapture that follows all great cravings, all strong affects; the rapture of feasts, contests, feats of daring, victory, all extreme movement; the rapture of cruelty; the rapture in destruction; . . . finally, the rapture of will, of an [overfull, teeming] will.

—Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 518

³ *Rausch* shall henceforth be translated as “rapture,” as opposed to Kaufmann’s “frenzy.”

What is art? We begin by asking this question once more, though, this time, in a different context. This time we pose it not to the philosopher—who must attack it from all angles, seeking precision and accuracy and the eradication of all exceptions—but to the common man in the street, who responds almost immediately: Art is what one finds in museums. Paintings, statues, figurines. The *Mona Lisa*, *David*—“pretty things to look at.”

This is the False Aesthetic. Since the time of Kant, Nietzsche says, society has been *plagued* by a misunderstanding of art that glorifies the plastic arts and relegates everything else to the periphery. Art has become synonymous with “works” (as in “works of art,” artwork)—as *objects*—and painting and sculpture have become its paradigms. But what of music? What of dance? These, according to the False Aesthetic, are but derivative art-forms. Music is “painting in sound,” dance is “painting in motion” (Graham 152), and they are consigned to the realm of the concert hall—where the distinction between artwork and audience is clear, where order is preserved, and where, in the absence of canvas and clay, the power of the artist can be curtailed and controlled. The concert hall allows for music to be torn from the air, dashed to the earth, and congealed for the scrupulous ears of “an aesthetically aware audience attending [to it] . . . in the way that paintings are attended to in a gallery . . . [while the] programme notes [comment on] the ‘colours’ of the orchestration or the instruments” (Graham 154). Tragedy in the concert hall needs no Apollo, for it is and always will be the tale of the death of Dionysus.

Beauty attracts, ugliness repels: this seems to be a commonly accepted aesthetic provision. Unlike other descriptive words—like “red” or “cold” or “large,”

for example—"beautiful" always seems to imply that what is described is also liked. To say that a painting is red tells us nothing about whether or not we like that painting, but to say that it is *beautiful* implies there is something in the painting which attracts us. But what precisely is the nature of the relationship between this "beautiful" quality and the entity which possesses it? In "Of the Standard of Taste," Hume, the skeptic, posits what many people still believe today: beauty, as such, is completely subjective; it is to be found only in "the eye of the beholder." But there are several potential problems with this view. The first objection was brought forth by one of Hume's contemporaries, Thomas Reid. Reid asks why, if beauty really is *just* in the eye of the beholder, we express our aesthetic judgment as though that judgment were, in fact, about the entity being evaluated. Why say that the painting itself is beautiful if beauty has nothing at all to do with the painting and only to do with our feelings towards it? Another objection is this: Why, if beauty is only in the eye of the beholder, do we even bother to argue about it? The notion of beauty—or lack thereof—incites more debate and deliberation than almost any other quality which can be attributed to things; does this not seem strange if beauty is, essentially, only in our heads?

With the publication of *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant was able to circumvent this antinomy. In the work he redefines the context in which beauty attracts, ugliness repels, via the notion of disinterestedness: "Taste is the faculty of estimating an object or a mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion, *apart from any interest*. The object of such delight is called *beautiful*" (Kant 50). Thus, we are still attracted to beautiful things, but we are attracted *disinterestedly*.

Heidegger explains that “‘interest’ comes from the Latin *mihi interest*, something is of importance to me. To take an interest in something suggests wanting to have it for oneself as a possession, to have disposition and control over it” (*The Will to Power as Art* 109). What Kant’s theory of disinterestedness says, then—and what Schopenhauer would later affirm, as well—is that to view something beautiful is to be attracted without desiring to take possession of, to misrepresent, or to use that thing as a means to any end. Beauty, then, becomes a transcendental property located *between* the universally necessary and the subjectively personal, *between* the pleasant and the merely practical—capable of invoking the *aesthetic attitude*, a special state of mind characterized by contemplation and distance. And the clearest example of this aesthetic attitude? Undraped statues of women. The transcendental beauty of these statues, Kant says, allows us to view them and be attracted *by* them without being attracted *toward* them—to remain in a state of utter disinterestedness.

Suddenly, a *roar* of protest!—either Nietzsche or Pygmalion; we cannot be sure which. This “aesthetic attitude,” the voice cries, is the False Aesthetic *par excellence*! “Contemplation and distance”: this is precisely what *defines* the False Aesthetic! That I might stand disinterestedly and dispassionately at the feet of the beautiful Galatea—nonsense!—for she draws me towards her with all the urgency and desire of a fiery celestial comet streaking towards the earth!

In the same way that, in the previous chapter, we revalued Truth, we must now revalue *art*, such that, when the proper time arrives, we will find ourselves in a position to juxtapose duly and precisely these two shores between which lies Nietzsche’s raging ocean of discord. Thus, we heed the wisdom of Pygmalion and reconsider the Kantian

aesthetic attitude and the False Aesthetic of the concert hall. And in doing so, we come to realize that art properly conceived, in light of the rest of Nietzsche's philosophy, is not *product* but *activity*—and the aesthetic state necessary to appreciate such art not *passive* but *active*. As Collingwood proclaims in his celebrated work, *The Principles of Art*, “Art is not contemplation, it is action” (332). Beauty does not invite calm, detached contemplation; it invokes a surge of passionate energy, a desire to own, to possess, *to be*. In the Japanese author Enchi Fumiko's strangely surreal yet utterly compelling short story “The Flower-Eating Crone,” an unnamed, illusive old woman spends her days searching for beautiful flowers—and then eating them:

“But,” she continued between mouthfuls, “who says we should only *look* at flowers, and not eat them? It's natural: you see a flower you consider especially lovely, and you want to get as close to it as possible. But after a while, looking is not enough—you want to touch it with your hands, pluck it off, crush it, force it open. Finally, you become so consumed with desire, you want to fuse with it, make it part of you. That's when you end up cramming it into your mouth.” (174)

Yes! screams Pygmalion. *Yes!* cries Nietzsche. *This* is beauty! This is the Dionysian! This is the new paradigm of art!

The False Aesthetic has been overturned; no longer the Apollonian plastic arts but instead music, dance, *drama* now receive our highest exaltation. Art is no longer an *object* but a *performance*, and the divide between artist and audience has vanished; in fact, the audience is no longer even necessary. Consider “the jazz pianist playing at a restaurant, the brass band leading the parade, the organist accompanying the Church choir,

the fiddler entertaining friends at home . . .”, and we find that the audience “no longer seems of any special relevance to understanding music as an art. In short, music is *not* a kind of painting in sound, and it is only if unwarrantedly we give special attention to instances such as the Allegri in the Wigmore Hall that we will be inclined to go on thinking so” (Graham 154-55). With music as the new paradigm of art and jazz the new paradigm of music, we see how the essence of art lies now *in the moment*—subject to improvisation, creative impulse, and the existential fluctuations and chord-shifts of the artist’s very soul. There is no “work of art” to be contemplated by an audience—only the ephemeral echoes and epiphenomenal reflections of the deep inner-workings of creators creating for themselves: floating on a breeze, hanging in the air, *then gone*.

But our revaluation of art is not yet complete. Just as we overturned the False Aesthetic, we must now overturn the Feminine Aesthetic; Nietzsche writes in *The Will to Power* that “our aesthetics hitherto has been a woman’s aesthetics to the extent that only the receivers of art have formulated their experience of ‘what is beautiful?’ In all philosophy hitherto the artist is lacking” (811, 429). Based on this overturning of the Feminine Aesthetic, Heidegger leads us to our next essential perspective on Nietzsche’s conception of art: “*Art must be grasped in terms of the artist*” (*The Will to Power as Art* 71). It is no longer true that beauty exists in the eye of the beholder—in fact, just the contrary: beauty exists in the eye of the *artist*. Like the jazz-playing Pygmalion so enraptured by his creative output, the artist, newly revalued, determines the worth of his *own* work, for *it is precisely his active engagement with and creation of it which is the art*. If there is to be aesthetic judgment on the part of an audience, it is not to be in the form of a “female” receiver, observer, or witness; it is, instead, to be on the part of a

newly conceived third-party artist, unshackled and let loose to wreak pandemonium on the stage of the concert hall. This species of artist is the singer, the dancer, the actor: those media previously absent between composer, choreographer, director—and audience. Or perhaps it is the audience itself: *wearing the Mask of Art*, they lean forward in their seats, hands perspiring, and, in the depths of their minds, let forth the same howling tragic lament as the actor in front of them playing Oedipus Rex. With the help of that beautiful instantiation of the Dionysian spirit called the Greek Chorus, the audience, in essence, *become artists*: “Observation of works is only a derivative form and offshoot of creation. Therefore what was said of creation corresponds precisely, though derivatively, to observation of art. Enjoyment of the work consists in participation in the creative state of the artist” (Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art* 117). And what this, in turn, leads to is a perpetuation of the creative cycle. “A man who feels within himself an excess of such beautifying, concealing and reinterpreting powers will in the end seek to discharge this excess in works of art as well,” Nietzsche writes in *Human, All too Human* (II 174, 255), and now we have yet another perspective on art: *art is discharge*. The audience-become-artists leave the performance so over-full of the Dionysian, so over-flowing with the creative impulse, that they return home and begin creating art *themselves*—and *here*, we have perhaps stolen a premature glimpse at our final showdown between art and Truth: art is a means to itself, a self-sufficient affirmation of the will to power and the will to create, the third and final metamorphosis on the path to *der Übermensch*; it is “innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred ‘Yes’” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 27).

The implications of this are consequential. Here, we see how Nietzsche's philosophy evolves from that of his predecessor, Schopenhauer, and, indeed, *transcends* it, for Nietzsche's revaluation of art is not merely aesthetic in nature but *metaphysical*. Just as Schopenhauer saw something primordially "real" in music, that potent energy without self or substance existing beneath the illusions of the *principium individuationis*, Nietzsche sees something metaphysically real in art and in artistic creation:

But in any case it seems to me that 'the correct perception'—which would mean 'the adequate expression of an object in the subject'—is a contradictory impossibility. For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation. . . . For it is not true that the essence of things 'appears' in the empirical [i.e. the phenomenal] world. A painter without hands who wished to express in song the picture before his mind would, by means of this substitution of spheres, still reveal more about the essence of things than does the empirical world. (Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" 86-87)

Anticipating Wilde, Nietzsche here elevates the worth of the artistic process and considers it metaphysically. If music is a copy of the will, as Schopenhauer posits, then the creative process—the act of making music—must be the gateway to Truth, and the artist must hold the key! With this in mind, our next question is inevitable: By what means does one enter into this artistic process, by what means does he become the artist on the threshold of Truth?

We return now to the beginning: “If there is to be art, if there is to be any aesthetic doing and observing, one physiological precondition is indispensable: *rapture*” (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 518):

[Rapture is] the feeling of enhancement of force . . . the capacity to extend beyond oneself, as a relation to beings in which beings themselves are experienced as being more fully in being, richer, more perspicuous, more essential . . . an attunement which is so disposed that nothing is foreign to it, nothing too much for it, which is open to everything and ready to tackle anything—the greatest enthusiasm and the supreme risk hard by one another. (Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art* 100)

Rapture illuminates one’s Being so completely, so profoundly, that time dissolves, selves merge, the phenomena of the phenomenal world disperse, and all that remains is music. Rapture is erotic, it is sexual, it is Pygmalion’s love for Galatea: to use Nietzsche’s phrasing, “Making music is another way of making children” (*The Will to Power* 800, 421). But most of all, Nietzsche’s beloved *Rausch* is precisely the outcome predicted by his revalued conception of the beautiful: in Stendhal’s words, “*une promesse de bonheur*” (Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* 73); it is both prerequisite for and consequence of creation, thus further perpetuating its own will to power. *Rausch*, as antidote to *le désintéressement*, as antithesis to the “deniers” and “enemies” of life known simply as the Ascetic Priests (Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* 87), is a promise—perhaps the *only* promise—of happiness.

Here we finally grasp the magnitude of the revaluation. Art, as newly conceived, transcends not only the Apollonian plastic arts but even drama, dance, and music. The

artist's basic instinct is directed not towards art but towards "the [meaning] of art, which is *life*. . . . Art is [in fact] the great stimulus to life" (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 529). No longer is art merely *l'art pour l'art*; suddenly it is *l'art pour la vie*. Artists are not merely artists; they are self-creators. Nietzsche's wisdom is this: "We should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 210), for our greatest work of art—our one and only opportunity to create an aesthetic masterpiece—is no painting or sculpture or song—*it is our life*.

One of the essential perspectives on art at which we arrived in the previous chapter is that of *art as discharge*, and we shall now explore it further. Careful consideration of this topic by the reader will inevitably cause it to be identified with the familiar notion of catharsis, and it is precisely for this reason that careful explanation of the different types of discharge with which we may associate art is necessary. Ultimately, we shall see how discharge, as properly conceived, is an affirmative rather than negative response to existence, even when one is faced with its horrors: how this Affirmative Discharge paves the way for a knowledge of Truth linked not to the external world but to the self, via an aesthetic "inward turn"; how the workings of Truth are revealed not in "realistic" works of art but in those most faithful to our infinite subjectivity of the inner subject, to *Charm* and *Quality*; how Nietzsche's seemingly outlandish statement about *A Critique of Aristotelian Catharsis* that—

Chapter Four:

Art and the *Agon*:

A Critique of Aristotelian Catharsis

According to Aristotle, art—and tragedy, in part—*invokes* in the audience a catharsis of fear and pity, purging from them impediments to happiness and guiding them toward their telos. This type of catharsis we shall call *Negative Discharge*. Since Aristotle's time it has become the predominant interpretation of the psychological workings of tragedy—perhaps even of all art—and understandably so. It does seem to shed light on why "we find . . . [why] . . . and yet with the same force we feel ourselves drawn to it . . . [why] . . .

—Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 822, 435

somebody telling the story of a murder, hungrily devour the most fantastic ghost stories, and the more such tales make our hair stand on end, the better" (Zarathustra 1). Theories of aesthetic hedonism, postulating that art is what causes us to feel pleasure, have never worked because, ironically, we are *drawn to*, not repelled from. Greek tragedies, modern

One of the essential perspectives on art at which we arrived in the previous chapter is that of *art as discharge*, and we shall now explore it further. cursory consideration of this topic by the reader will inevitably cause it to be identified with the familiar notion of catharsis, and it is precisely for this reason that careful explication of the different types of discharge with which we may associate art is necessary. Ultimately, we shall see how discharge, as properly conceived, is an affirmative rather than negative response to existence, even when one is faced with its horrors; how this Affirmative Discharge paves the way for a reevaluation of Truth linked not to the external world but to the self, via an aesthetic “inward turn”; how the workings of Truth are revealed not in “realistic” works of art but in those most faithful to the infinite subjectivity of the inner subject, to *Geist*; and, finally, how Nietzsche’s seemingly outlandish statement about the worth of art may, in fact, be just that—and for good reason.

According to Aristotle, art—and tragedy, in particular—invokes in the audience a catharsis of fear and pity, purging from them impediments to happiness and guiding them toward their *telos*. This type of catharsis we shall call Negative Discharge. Since Aristotle’s time it has become the preeminent interpretation of the psychological workings of tragedy—perhaps even of all art—and understandably so. It does seem to shed light on why “we find the sight of misery and horror repugnant and yet with the same force we feel ourselves drawn to it . . . [why], filled with expectation, [we] crowd around somebody telling the story of a murder, hungrily devour the most fantastic ghost stories, and the more such tales make our hair stand on end, the better” (Schiller 1). Theories of aesthetic hedonism, postulating that art is what causes us to feel pleasure, have never worked because, ironically, we are *drawn to*, not repelled from, Greek tragedies, modern

horror films, and gloomy tales of death, loss, and unrequited love; they do not work because our favorite scene in *Oedipus Rex* is inevitably the one it should never be: the one in which the hero falls. What Aristotle put forward—and Dubos and Schiller later refined—is the idea that this horror attracts us because we are able to experience it without any real negative consequences. Engaged with and swept away by the drama, we can, in our minds, *become* Oedipus Rex and experience all the agony and pain he does—but vicariously:

Thus before our eyes the curiosity of Oedipus or the jealousy of Othello arises and grows and is consummated. . . . In this way alone is it possible to compensate for the great distance between the peace of an innocent soul and the torments of a criminal's conscience, between the proud certainty of someone blessed and his terrifying demise, in short, between the [audience's] calm mood at the beginning and the passionate arousal of [its] feelings at the end. (Schiller 17)

Our fear and pity purged, we outlive Oedipus and, seeing the curtain fall, return to ourselves and our own daily struggles. For a brief moment we were face-to-face with the darkness, face-to-face with the terror of existence, but this particular *agon*—this particular struggle—was but temporary and we just as soon find ourselves free of its symptoms.

But Aristotle's notion of catharsis is not the only type of discharge, and we shall now posit an alternative: what we might call Affirmative Discharge. Despite its positive-sounding connotation, this type of interaction with art, we must realize, is in no way an idyllic one; in fact, it is terrifying in every way that Negative Discharge is not. Affirmative Discharge is possible only for the man wearing the Mask of Art, and, thus, he

must stare, with his eyes wide open, into the great darkness of his own Being. Whereas the audience in the midst of catharsis will soon enough be free of its symptoms—purged of fear and pity—the audience experiencing Affirmative Discharge is *itself* sign and symptom. Rather than evading, eluding, *escaping* the horrible truths of existence, *this* audience marches deeper and deeper into the cavernous bowels of Being, ready and poised to hurl itself into the Abyss.

Heidegger says that Being is, in each and every case, a Being-in-the world and, consequently, is overflowing with *facticity*. We are *thrown* into the nullity of Being-already-in-the world, without rhyme or reason—not because of any choice we ourselves made—and we are confronted by the ever-possible possibility of no more possibilities, of Being-no-longer. It is *this* terrifying truth which caused that almost imperceptible shudder, as we earlier considered the Mask of Art, in the man who passed it over. But the tragic nature of our existence is so often covered over—concealed—and his case was no exception. He, Positivistic Man, chose the Mask of Science and saw what he wished to see. Even had he ventured with this mask to the theatre to watch *Oedipus* or *Othello*—even had he momentarily felt the terror of Being—his discharge would have nevertheless been a negative one, and he would have soon thereafter returned to his masquerade.

But the artist, the man in the audience wearing the Mask of Art (for, as we have seen, there is no longer a distinction between artist and audience), does not experience this catharsis; his discharge is quite different. He, too, sees Oedipus bleed; he, too, hears him wail. And, likewise, he, too, feels the tragic lament rumbling in the nethermost regions of his soul, and he, too, grasps the terror of Being. But, unlike his counterpart, the man in the midst of Affirmative Discharge finds no deliverance in the falling of the

curtain. He does not run *from* the darkness but *towards* it. He is not purged of fear and pity so that he might again frolic in the light of day; he is not freed from the *agon* of his existence. On the contrary, his own fear and pity have just been *illuminated*, and now he *dwells* in the *agon*:

Saying Yes to life even in its strangest and hardest problems, the will to life rejoicing over its own inexhaustibility . . .—*that* is what I called Dionysian, *that* is what I guessed to be the bridge to the psychology of the *tragic* poet. *Not* in order to be liberated from terror and pity, not in order to purge oneself of a dangerous affect by its vehement discharge—Aristotle understood it that way—but in order to be *oneself* the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity. (Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* 562-563)

Nietzsche famously wrote in *The Will to Power* that “we possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*” (822, 435), and here the meaning of that oft-misunderstood statement becomes clear. Art prevents us from perishing not because it *shields* us from (by way of purging *from* us) the horrible truths of existence but precisely because of the fact that it *brings those horrible truths to light* and, subsequently, gives us a way to *cope* with them; and this, of course, is where we see the *affirmative* nature of Affirmative Discharge. The discharge itself is not the purging of fear and pity but of the *impulse* to purge them. Art “tells us the deepest and most horrifying truths about ourselves, but does so in a way that makes the news not merely bearable, but welcome, enlivening, and even intoxicating; so that against the backdrop of a fundamentally pessimistic take on existence (the deepest truths *are* horrifying), tragedy offers us a paradoxical form of redemption” (Ridley 9-10). The aesthetically attuned individual does not go to the theatre to “feel good,” to relax

with friends, to end an enjoyable evening of fine cuisine and carefree socializing; instead he goes to explore his own *inner* drama. Rather than driving us away from our-selves and inviting externalization of our inner turmoil, art leads us deep *within* and forces us to come to terms with both our Being and the possibility of our non-Being. In the words of aesthete Walter Davis, it drives us into the "Crypt" of our souls, where we are compelled to begin the painful yet necessary process he calls "Deracination."

We find ourselves now poised and prepared to enter the truly deep recesses of the soul, the darkest and loneliest corners of the Crypt. Art is our vessel, and Deracination its captain. Stern and exacting—never smiling—this captain barks out orders, commanding us through storm and squall, across violent seas and beneath pitch-black skies. The bowlines have long ago been cast off; dry land is but a distant memory. All protection torn away, we pitch and totter with the wind and waves, risking decapitation by the boom each time we tack across our heading, bearing down on and sailing ever further into the heart of our ownmost and uttermost *tempest of Being*.

Deracination, our captain, is the process of turning inward and facing our most frightening fears, of coming to terms with the darkest, most private, most profound aspects of our subjective experience in the world. It is, "for those who engage their existence existentially, the process of thinking . . . whereby a subject . . . is changed utterly—and in depth; . . . [and] purged, at the deepest register of the psyche, of the protections and guarantees that would resolve [his facticity]" (20). Deracination, as affect of art, tears away ideology, the ego, and the multiplicity of escapist avenues manifested by the artificiality and inauthenticity of this fanatically materialistic and technologically-obsessed world in which we live—leaving us alone with our-selves and

our Being: "Art reveals reality in a way that engages the subject in the *agon* of its existence" (Davis 242). Deracination, as helmsman of the Crypt, makes us the players in the theatres of our own minds. Descending like Orpheus into the depths of Avernus, we are utterly and absolutely involved—*swept away*—for the dramas in which we star are in each and every case *our own*. Deracination is sailor but psychologist, too, and like Freud he abolishes the distance between us and our-selves. Interrogating us to interrogate ourselves, he exposes us to the painful truths of our existence and then *keeps us there*—compelling us to watch Eros and Thanatos wage war on the battlefields of our soul, forcing us to dwell in an extended state of nearly unbearable "wakeful anguish." In contrast to the Aristotelian notion of catharsis, Deracination, as corollary to and product of Affirmative Discharge, is no means of cowardly escape but, on the contrary, its *antithesis*: impetus and inspiration to "go in there" and "work it through"; to explore, to question, and to confront; and, undoubtedly to the great satisfaction of Nietzsche, to "*become who [we] are*" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 270, 152).

Here we arrive at the pivot and turning point of our investigation of discharge, for we are beginning to see the revaluation of Truth predicted earlier. No longer is the highest Truth concerned with knowledge of the "external world," for it is, instead, concerned with the *self*—with knowledge of the self. If we once more overturn the traditional Cartesian notion of Truth as a *correspondence* or *agreement* between thought and that thought about (i.e., "Reality") and instead consider Heidegger's view of Being as being always a Being-in-the world or, analogously, Merleau-Ponty's view of body-subject unity, we realize that rather than being apart and interacting, mind and matter, self and world, are *fused*; and, thus, knowledge of the self *is* a knowledge of "the world," for

the two are one and the same. Here, the full potentiality of Affirmative Discharge and Deracination finally becomes clear: art, as Schiller once stated, is “the means of human self-completion.” The great *telos* of all art is that it reveals to artist and audience the “Existential *I*,” the “Know-Thyself Self.” As we might have expected based on our earlier analysis of the death of Socrates, *art*—to which that great philosopher so unexpectedly dedicated his final days—is the solution and secret to the Socratic Injunction, “Man, know thyself.” Here we see how Hamlet and Horatio, Oedipus and Othello, teach us more about ourselves than the therapist, for, transcending psychology and science, art—though it may lie to us in every other way—is eternally bound to tell us the truth *about ourselves*.

With this in mind, we must now once and for all cease comparing art to the “external world,” whether on the grounds of *mimesis* or anything else, and instead *turn inward*. We will no longer associate “Truth” with what are, in actuality, illusions within what Davis deems “a new allegory of the cave”:

Faced with [the horrors of existence] most people become adept at [*sic*] a single operation—discharge, the turning of image into fact, object, concept. The lesson of experience appears to be this: learn how to discharge horror so that eventually nothing makes a deep impression anymore. . . . [Thus, these people live] in a world without images; or, better, one in which everything contributes to one image in a landscape that is utterly literal because the deadening of affect is the one constant that is realized in every perception. (Davis 211)

Instead, we shall embrace art's potentiality to bestow *self*-understanding—to unconceal truths about *the subject*—through an inward, aesthetic turn which, in deracinating our protections against the absurd, lays bare to us the awe-full truth that “keeping the deepest wounds alive in sufferance is the only way ‘to live deliberately’ . . . which is why when image assaults us, we must gladden in thanksgiving, since its eruption means that one remains alive at the deepest registers of one's being” (Davis 211). No longer will “inwardness . . . become information, in endless blind permutation of itself” (Davis 226), as it will, instead, become the intermediary between mere “impressions” of the sensual world and *Ideas* of the intellectual one; as Collingwood hints at in *The Principles of Art*, inwardness discloses and shall always disclose the artist's greatest gift, which is not *to feel* but *to imagine*, and reveals the ultimate potentiality of all art: that of *imaginative self-discovery* on the part of both artist and audience. Here, we exit the realm of the physical and cross over into the infinite subjectivity of *Geist*—Spirit.

In *The Artist's Journey into the Interior*, Erich Heller writes that “the doctrine that the history of art reflects the changeable relations prevailing between the Spirit, or the Idea, and our sensually perceptible reality, between the principle of meaningful form and the principle of unformed matter—is a truly illuminating one . . . which [justifies art as] one of the noblest disciplines in the education of man” (110). What Heller realizes is that nothing besides art—not science, not history, *not philosophy*—is fully capable of bridging the material and non-material worlds, of disclosing the utter boundlessness of the Spirit within the limitations and confines of the profane and physical. As Heidegger would have it, only poetry is capable of allowing us to speak of Being without becoming locked into speaking of beings, only poetry gives us that *a priori* transcendental reference as we

slog through a physical world of form and matter. "Poetically man dwells" (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* 211) is the artist's eternal mantra, for he and he alone knows that "*Gesang ist Dasein*"—"Song is Existence" (Heller 98)⁴. In the intersection of *Geist* and the stuff of which the world—and we, too—are made, we discover the reality of our inner subject, and, at long last, we witness a meeting of art and Truth:

That mode of thought which perpetually stands outside and looks for the object cannot bring into thought the *subjectivity of the subject*. . . . The subjectivity of the subject is a reality within the world. The world contains stones, plants, animals, planets, stars—and also subjects living out their own subjectivity. (Barrett 257)

When we consider that infamous concluding couplet of "Ode on a Grecian Urn,"

Beauty is truth, and truth beauty—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.⁵

we realize suddenly that all our appeals to Kant and Schiller, Plato and Hegel, were perhaps needless and unwarranted, for it was *Keats—the artist!*—who held the answer to Nietzsche's raging discord all along. That we shall never know who the figures on that urn *were* or what they were like is irrelevant, for what matters is that those figures *are*. "What is said of [Goethe's] Tasso in the drama itself—that he tends to withdraw entirely into his inner self, just as if the whole world were within, and without no world whatever" (Heller 117) is what we must say about the figures on the urn, about ourselves, and about all art. "Realism in art is an illusion," says Nietzsche, for the Truth about art is that there are but multiple truths and our interaction with it "explodes the very

⁴ Though Heller makes use of the expression, "*Gesang ist Dasein*" was actually coined by Rilke in *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Part I.

⁵ Keats 214

subjectivity of the subject” (Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art* 123). The only “true” interpretation of the Grecian urn is the one which *changes our life*—or, at the very least, momentarily illuminates our Being. The history of the Spirit was, to Hegel, the history of the Spirit coming to understand itself as free, and, in the infinite subjectivity in which the artist moves and the infinite subjectivity with which we can—no, *must*—interact with his art, that prophesy is forever fulfilled. We gaze at the urn, we smile, we *are*. *Gesang ist Dasein.*

Thus, in its odyssey of self-discovery, *Geist* has, over time, leapt from one art-form to the next, moving ever closer to sheer, ineffable Being:

And Painting, because the Spirit found ‘stone much too hard’ to suit its increasingly subtle demands, won the day over architecture and sculpture, until an ever more heightened spirituality and abstract complexity reached out for pure sounds to express an ecstatic inwardness “which perhaps aims at nothing less than the dissolution of the whole material world.” (Heller 129)

Those pure sounds of abstractness were, of course, the sounds of Schopenhauer’s exalted music—that most metaphysically “real” of all art-forms—but, even there, the Spirit was not content: “Music is perhaps the last word of art as death is the last word of life. . . . To me it is of great significance that Beethoven became deaf in the end so that even the invisible world of tones ceased to have any resonant reality for him,’ until his last creations were made of mere ‘memories of tones, ghosts of expired sounds,” remarks the German Romantic poet Heinrich Heine (Heller 129). From sculpture to painting, painting to dance, dance to drama, and drama to song *Geist* leapt, and there, in the mind of the world’s greatest composer, deaf to and dis severed from the world, it at last found

its abode, for it could ascend no higher. What is this music which cannot be heard, this art which cannot be known to anyone save its creator, but a supreme manifestation of the Spirit, erupting from the deepest “depths of feeling into which we cannot peer”? (Heller 135) What is it but a celebration of that most real of all realities: of inwardness, subjectivity, and the score to which our life is set? What is it but confirmation that art, as Hegel posited, is, in its highest sense, a total and irreversible “unleashing of the inner subject”? What is this silent hymn, this wordless poem, this invisible painting but a matchless and eternal tribute to, sacrifice for, and affirmation of that Truth to which all other truths give obeisance: *Gesang ist Dasein*—Song is Existence.

And thus we come to the end and face Nietzsche once more. Why *did* he utter those words; why *did* he so outlandishly declare art to be worth more than the Truth? In light of what we have just seen, there is perhaps an answer begging to be put forth which we have not as yet considered. Surely, Nietzsche may very well have been referring to the ways in which art undoubtedly *is* worth more than so many of the illusions masquerading as Truth which we have considered. But perhaps his words also are meaningful on another level. Perhaps, as only Nietzsche can do, he is testing us, tricking us, *lying to us* to reveal an alternative truth in exactly the way he says art does. And, in fact, if we consider his statement about the worth of art to be artistic, rhetorical, fictional *itself*, then we suddenly come to realize that, in responding to it, we are experiencing and *benefiting from* this “art-work” of his—not simply this particular *work* of art but, indeed, the “*work*” which all art accomplishes. Just as art invokes an Affirmative Discharge by which we celebrate the totality of our existence, a difficult yet necessary Deracination within the Crypt of our minds, and an inward aesthetic turn and exaltation of the

subjectivity of the inner subject, so, too, in the course of our experience with it, has Nietzsche's provocative testimony. Like that of Socrates' final, enigmatic days, the "truth" of Nietzsche's words will remain forever concealed from us, forever imprisoned within a Crypt which is not our own and to which we have no access; but, ironically, this concealment of the truth is precisely and simultaneously its *aletheia*—its unconcealedness. Nietzsche's final word seems to be this: philosophy, in its highest form, is *itself* performance and art, and the philosopher who creates it is—and always will be—performer and artist: "The only real world is the world of human inwardness. The concrete form of this reality is the poem in its pure absoluteness: *Gesang ist Dasein*. Song is existence . . . Imagination is reality. We know not 'seems.' The world is dead. The rest is poetry" (Heller 98).

Art and Truth

"The Raging Disease"

Nature is complete

suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)

There's no advantage! You must be forgiven,

For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love

First when we see them painted, things we have passed

Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;

And so they are better, painted.

—Robert Browning, *Fra Lippo Lippi* 181

The "Nietzsche" and "Aesthetics" in the subtitle of this study are not and should never be linked by the possessive. Nietzsche never attempted to enlist art as an object in the service of a petulant "philosophy of-," nor did he ever set into writing any particular study of aesthetics. Instead, his philosophical writing was itself a testament to his understanding of aesthetics, and art was, to him, no particular discipline but instead a mode of doing philosophy, a mode of living life; indeed, it was, to him, the highest mode of doing philosophy and the highest mode of living life, for "aha, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed" (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 128).

Chapter Five:

"The wooer of truth?—you!—so they say—"

"Not only a poet!"

So I myself sank once

from my delusion

with the truth

that I am banished

from all truth!

Only a fool! Only a poet!

Art and Truth:

"The Raging Discord"

Nature is complete

Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)

There's no advantage! You must beat her then,

For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love

First when we see them painted, things we have passed

Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;

And so they are better, painted.

—Robert Browning, *Fra Lippo Lippi* 181

¹ From one of Nietzsche's "Dionysus Dithyrambs," entitled "Only a Fool, Only a Poet," as quoted in *Cambridge* 224-224.

The “Nietzsche” and “Aesthetics” in the subtitle of this study are not and should never be linked by the possessive. Nietzsche never attempted to enlist art as an object in the service of a pedantic “philosophy of—”, nor did he ever set into writing any particular study of aesthetics. Instead, his philosophical writing was itself a testament to his understanding of aesthetics, and art was, to him, no particular discipline but instead a *mode* of doing philosophy, a *mode* of living life; indeed, it was, to him, the *highest* mode of doing philosophy and the *highest* mode of living life, for “alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have dreamed” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 128).

“The wooer of truth?—you!” so they jeered—

“No! only a poet!” . . .

So I myself sank once

from my delusion of truth . . .

with one truth . . .

that I am banished

from all truth!

Only a fool! Only a poet!⁶

In contrast to the “real” philosophers all around him, Nietzsche was “only a fool . . . only a poet”—least likely of all to be the “wooer of truth.” And that, of course, is precisely what he desired.

“Only a fool! Only a poet!” he replies at the top of his voice to the mocking crowd, pointing at himself and laughing—laughing with the smugness and strength of one who has waged war on himself and triumphed. “Where does man not stand at the edge of Abysses? Is not seeing always—seeing Abysses?” (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 157), he had

⁶ From one of Nietzsche’s “Dionysus Dithyrambs,” entitled “Only a Fool! Only a Poet!”, as quoted on Crawford 233-234.

asked before hurling himself into his ultimate and ownmost Abyss—that “raging discord” between art and Truth which had seemed bound to plague and torment him forever. From the depths of that Abyss his great works had emerged, and in their evolution we see mirrored his own movements on the battlefields of the Abyss—attacks and retreats, sieges and withdrawals, victories and defeats. *The Birth of Tragedy*, his closest approximation to a scholarly work, comes first, and in it we see his first declaration of allegiance to the battalions of the artist. Like all great warriors, though, his sword belongs to the commander who inspires him, and, in the late 1870s, in the process of writing *Human, All Too Human*, he is tempted once more by the allure of Truth—nearly switching sides. But his loyalty to art endures, and, holding high its new standard, he rides into battle with *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—having at long last turned his philosophy completely and irreversibly *into art*. But his conquest is still unfinished, for that base metal which all great alchemists turn into art still awaits his touch. “Behold the man!” he cries as he writes *Ecce Homo*, literally the *story* of his life, the transformation of his *life* into art, “the self-diagnosis of a desperate physician who, suffering the disease on our behalf, comes to prescribe as a cure that we should form a new idea of health, and live by it” (Heller 175). He is on the threshold of madness now, but he knows he has triumphed, and he begins to climb, slowly and methodically, out of the Abyss—longing only to hear ringing throughout the world that same bold and rapturous victory-cry he had bellowed in the deep. Finally, his Abyss is transformed into a mountain, and, like Zarathustra, he stands atop it empowered and alive. Filled with rapture and over-flowing with life, he arches his back, tilts his head defiantly toward the heavens, spreads his arms like Icarus, breathes in the air and the wind and all the beauty of the world, and sacrifices himself to Dionysus

with a silent scream of passion—an irrepressible moan of climax, an unconscious affirmation of existence, a sacred yes to Being: “Art is *worth more* than the Truth!” Then he leaps into his own madness, ending his life as aesthetically as he had lived it.

“Of all that is written I love only what a man has written with his blood. Write with blood, and you will [find] that blood is spirit,” (40), Nietzsche declares in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and, as proof of his testimony, his works, even today, more than a hundred years off the press, are still stained a fiery, burning red—still dripping with a concoction too passionate to have originated anywhere but the heart. The “death of God,” “*der Übermensch*,” a “revaluation of all values,” “the will to power,” and “Eternal Return”: these are the central tenets of Nietzsche’s philosophy, but they are not its essence, and they do not convey its real meaning or significance. There can be no “abridged Nietzsche,” no “study guide” to learn the essential “facts” about Nietzsche’s thought; we could know everything there is to know about these concepts yet, having never actually read Nietzsche, still be as ignorant of them as when we began our “studying.” To “know” Nietzsche is to have *experienced* him—to have followed his lead and descended into the depths of our own Abysses, to have traced our fingers, letter by letter and line by line, over the dried blood of someone whose work and life were indistinguishable, whose philosophy and art were one and the same.

And in having done so, we realize that the difference between the Nietzsches of the world and the Aristotles, the Shakespeares and the Einsteins, the artists and the scholars, is that one can be paraphrased while the other cannot. While the writing of scholars is by no means a simple or inconsequential affair, it can be summarized, condensed, and recapitulated. On the other hand, the mysteries and hidden truths

belonging to the artist are never revealed except during our firsthand involvement with and unreserved immersion in the original works which contain them. Remove but a single note from one of Mozart's *concertos*, replace but one of Milton's rhymes, and the works are forever changed. Like Nietzsche's life itself, works of art are a celebration of man's potential not for *finding* Truth but for *creating his own* in this inherently Truth-less world. They are a rejection of all transcendental sources of existential justification, an affirmation of *this* world and no other—a song, a dance, a rejoicing in the here and now and a sacred embrace of the “eternal recurrence of the same.” They are an affirmation of the individual human being and his capacity to create.

Tout mon sort n'est qu'obéissance

*A la force de mon amour.*⁷

The artist cannot re-present nature—of this we are sure. No painting, no photograph, will ever imitate the world so well that it ceases to be painting or photograph and at once *becomes* the world. But, as Robert Browning tells us, the artist can, in fact, “beat” nature. By intentionally *distorting* the ordinary, the artist can—and always will—reveal a gateway to the *extra-ordinary*. Liberated from Truth, we see in the artist's work “things we have passed/Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see,” yet in such new and profound ways that we cannot help but pause—and linger. And if we consider Nietzsche's perplexing statement about the worth of art as one of these gateways, we realize suddenly that there is no “answer,” as such, which can be put forward to explain the reasoning behind his “shocking verdict in the case of *Art v. Truth*.” Nietzsche's writing is filled with riddles and aphorisms, metaphors and verse—it is fundamentally aesthetic—precisely

⁷ “All my fate is obedience/To the force of my love.” From Paul Valéry's *Cantate du Narcisse*, Scène II, as quoted on Marcuse 163.

because of the fact that he does not wish to be paraphrased—because he wishes to be *experienced*. Therefore, the closest we can come to an answer to this riddle of his is to say that Nietzsche was making use of the very thing he was simultaneously exalting—namely, art—in compelling us to consider, in a fundamentally new way, something we so often see and take for granted. And, in this case, that thing which we so often see and take for granted—if we might be so bold as to surmise—could be either art itself or, far more profoundly, *ourselves*. Thus, what we conclude, at the end of our journey, about the worth of art is, in fact, far less important than *that we undertook the journey itself*. Leaving behind the familiar and the secure and setting forth into the unknown to see things in new ways: is that not the point of it all? Is that not where wisdom lies—the ability to see things in different ways? Is that not what it means to be a philosopher; is that not what it means to be a lover of wisdom?

And so we return now to our philosopher before his three Sirens, who has been anxiously anticipating our return and our guidance, restlessly waiting for us to see him, as it were, “kindly on his way.” At long last, the moment has arrived. Turning to face him now, what are we to say? What is this man called “philosopher”—who is called not lover of the True or the Good or the Beautiful but lover of *wisdom*—to do? What is his proper path? Which is he to pursue? Whom should he love?

An answer and a Truth our philosopher craves—as, admittedly, do we. But we know better, for we have journeyed far and seen much; we have been to the depths of the Abyss and back. In our wandering we found no Truth but wisdom, and *that*, we determine after some deliberation, is what we shall give him now. *We fill the inkwell with blood, pick up the pen, and begin to write . . .*

"Pausanias on the Night"

"The original poem"

A flaming arrow high above

Across the barren wasteland streaks

Such blinding light, born from Darkness

Chaos incarnate

Conclusions

Terrible O Gods

Burn, burn, great Rome

From the ashes of Nothing

Like a phoenix, be reborn!

Linger this moment, thou art so fair

Passion, inspire, fire burning bright

Linger this moment, thou art so fair

Existence in the guiding star, beacon to the night

The highest philosophy ends in a poetic idea, so do the highest morality and the highest politics. It is the poetic spirit that indicates the ideal to all three, and to approach it is their greatest perfection.

—Schiller, *Essays* xxv

Aias! Like life, so quickly gone

A shooting star—were stardust now

Fading, fading, fading, fading

And dying in the Dark

"Beacon in the Night"

(an original poem)

A flaming arrow high Above

Across the barren Wasteland streaks—

Such blinding light, born from Darkness—

Chaos incarnate.

Tremble O Gods,

Burn, burn, great Rome—

From the ashes of Nothing

Like a phoenix he comes!

Linger this moment, thou art so fair—

Passion, rapture, fire burning bright;

Linger this moment, thou art so fair—

Exalted muse, guiding star, beacon in the Night.

Alas! Like life, so quickly gone,

A shooting star—mere stardust now,

Fading, fading, fading, fading—

And dying in the Dark.

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