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**CHASING THE VIVID EVENT:
The Ontology and Aesthetics
of Improvised Music**

Has it been noticed that music liberates the spirit? gives wings to
thought? That one becomes more of a philosopher the more one becomes
a musician?

—Friedrich Nietzsche¹

Today! I saw music in the sky
I drove towards it in my car
And I turned left and I turned right
But I could never lose the light
That shines toward tomorrow night

Who can say what it means?
What goes on in between
And what gets in between
It's just something
Between you and me
Between you and me
It's as sweet as can be
Between you and me

—Steve Hogarth²

¹Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* §1.

²Hogarth and Marillion, "Between You and Me."

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Abstract

Philosophy, it is said, begins with wonder; this paper is no exception. In many years of playing and listening to music, I have marvelled at the intensity of experience when one is *involved* with music. These vivid events can take many forms: a musician playing for an appreciative audience; a composer engaged in the thrall of inspired creation; a raver dancing with God for hours on end to the deafening pulse of electronic rhythm in a club; a single listener transported to another realm by the music in the headphones. This paper comes from a desire to understand these experiences. Why do they occur? What causes them? What are their effects upon those who experience them? Are they predictable or repeatable?

To launch my study, I turned to one of the few philosophers enthralled by “the spirit of music”: Friedrich Nietzsche. In particular, his metaphysical dualism—the Apollonian and the Dionysian—was a useful way to understand the power of music. The Dionysian, with its collapse of boundaries of individuation and its basis in ecstatic frenzy and intoxication, can account for the intensity of musical experiences. But as Euripides shows in *The Bacchae*, uncontrolled Dionysian experiences must be delimited or chaos and destruction will result. The Apollonian mode of abstraction, reflection, and analysis balances the Dionysian and accounts for the *craft* inherent in art. But as Nietzsche laments in *The Birth of Tragedy*, if the Apollonian becomes dominant at the expense of the Dionysian, a vital aspect of human existence is lost. But for Nietzsche, when they coexist harmoniously they represent the pinnacle of art: Greek tragedy.

Nietzsche’s dualism, however, is not fully adequate to account for a wider variety of art. The Dionysian and the Apollonian alone do not account for the will of the artist to create or the creative act itself. This drive to create must be a part of a metaphysics for art; therefore, I have added a third drive to Nietzsche’s model named after Hermes. The Hermetic drive accounts for the novelty introduced by the artist. The Hermetic drive parallels Nietzsche’s later formulation of the will to power, conceived as the desire to exert one’s influence over one’s environment.

Taken together, I argue that the Dionysian, the Hermetic, and the Apollonian drives—all of which are necessary but not individually sufficient for art—can give a much fuller account of creativity. As an example of this model at work, musical group improvisation, in which all members of an ensemble spontaneously play without a script or a score, is an existential and creative phenomenon that shows how all three drives interplay and mediate one another. The unity and entrainment of collectively improvising musicians is the Dionysian drive at work; the novelty introduced by the players so that they don’t merely repeat the same phrase over and over is the Hermetic drive at work; finally, the ability of the other musicians to hear these novel musical propositions, to understand them, and to integrate them into the larger structure of the improvisation is the Apollonian drive at work.

Finally, an aesthetic for improvised music can be derived from this metaphysical model: the stronger the presence of each of these drives, the more aesthetically pleasing the improvisation—both in terms of the process of its creation and the musical

product that can be recorded and examined—will be. Furthermore, given Nietzsche's love of music and life, his famous assertion that existence can only be aesthetically justified, and the intersection between life and song in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, I argue that the metaphysical model developed in this paper can also be applied to human existence. Entrainment and unity with the vibrations of one's environment, creative novelty in response to the vicissitudes of life, and self-reflective, considered appreciation and refinement can, when attended and cultivated, allow one to live life like a song.

1

Introduction

You must realize that since my *earliest* youth and up to the present moment I have been living under the craziest illusion: I've taken *so much* joy in my music! . . . It has always been a problem for me to know whence this joy arises. There was something so irrational about it: in this regard I could turn neither left nor right, the joy was always there in front of me.¹

Like Nietzsche, I have countless memories of powerful experiences with music, going back to my early childhood. My grandmother was a pianist; she used to get such joy out of leading sing-a-longs at family gatherings and with friends. One of the most detailed images of my grandmother that I still carry with me is the look of happiness on her face while she played and sang. Hearing the notes, and the amount of music she could make by herself, completely enraptured me. When my fingers grew big enough to actually strike the keys on the keyboard, she began to teach me rudimentary piano techniques and melodies during visits to her house. I remember feeling that the entire range of human emotion was contained within the 88 keys; the strong, deep bass tones of the leftmost keys sounded like the thunderous wrath of God when struck forcefully; the highest keys reminded me of the gentle sound of rainfall. It seemed fantastic to me that, given enough skill on the part of the player, every song ever invented could be played on the piano. Even more incredibly, there were countless songs hidden in the keys that hadn't yet been invented.

I have continued my involvement with music and sound technology to the present day; it is a lifelong love filled with rich, yet mysterious, experiences that have profoundly influenced my life. But it is only recently that my experiences with music have become *philosophically* interesting to me. With music, whether I was playing the guitar, making recordings, or listening to my favorite albums, I was able to connect with . . . something. During these experiences, I felt an unnamed, powerful energy coursing throughout my body. These experiences with music and energy

¹Nietzsche, "1872 Letter to Hans von Bülow," quoted in Krell and Bates, *The Good European*, 85.

certainly had powerful effects on my personality at the time. Music was the first creative outlet that I was actually good at. As the hours locked in my bedroom unfolded into weeks and years of playing the guitar, I gained a confidence that I had never felt before. I began to think of myself as a musician, eventually going to college to study jazz guitar.

After a brief stint as a jazz guitar major, I quit school and joined a rock band, getting my first taste of the power of this mysterious musical energy flow experienced with other people in the context of a live performance. I quickly discovered that sharing this energy with bandmates and audience members multiplied the intensity of the experiences exponentially. The energy flowing through a musical performance of practiced, communicative musicians and eager, open-minded audiences is an emotionally powerful, almost indescribable event for everyone *involved* with the music. This energy, which can be experienced both in solitude and with others, by musicians and non-musicians alike, is entralling; it tends to draw the listener (or performer) in with an uncanny magnetism.

This energy flow in the entralling musical experience is the catalyst of my investigation. How does such a hidden, fleeting phenomenon, occurring concurrently with music, induce such profound feelings of joy, elation, even ecstasy in the participants? What is the nature of this energy flow? What are the preconditions for it? Are there different types of this energy flow? If so, how are they different from one another? Can this energy flow be experienced in non-musical settings? Is there a way to accurately predict the occurrence or the intensity of it? Are these vivid musical experiences beneficial to the individual? Can the flow of energy be studied from a psychological perspective? Is the group psychology of the band and/or the audience relevant to this energy flow? Is the presence (or lack) of this energy flow what distinguishes a good performance from a bad one? Is there a relationship between the technical skill of the performer(s) and the presence of this energy flow? Do different genres of music tend to suppress or bring forth this energy flow? Can this energy flow be captured in a recording (audio or video) of the event? Finally, as a musician, perhaps the most important question for me is this: can a musician, consciously and overtly aware of the existence of this energy, develop techniques to encourage its flow in a musical performance?

My first task was to delimit and ground my study within the Western philosophical tradition. Unfortunately, few philosophers have been attentive to music and the feelings associated with it. Certainly, there have been few if any complete studies on the subject. Many Western philosophers, however, dating back to ancient Greece, have written a few detached observations on this phenomenon; it's as if music is interesting enough to be noticed, but nothing more. One philosopher stood out as an exception: as evidenced by the letter at the head of this chapter, Friedrich Nietzsche has "taken *so much* joy" in music, and "it has always been a problem... to know whence this joy arises." Indeed, Nietzsche's first book was entitled *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Nietzsche's work, in many ways, serves as a

point of departure for my study. At the beginning of this book, Nietzsche calls for a new aesthetic:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality—just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations. The terms Dionysian and Apollinian we borrow from the Greeks, who disclose to the discerning mind the profound mysteries of their view of art, not, to be sure, in concepts, but in the intensely clear figures of their gods. Through Apollo and Dionysus, the two art deities of the Greeks, we come to recognize that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in origin and aims, between the Apollonian art of sculpture, and the nonimagistic, Dionysian art of music. These two different tendencies run parallel to each other, for the most part openly at variance; and they continually incite each other to new and more powerful births, which perpetuate an antagonism, only superficially reconciled by the common term “art”; till eventually, by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic “will,” they appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling ultimately generate an equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art—Attic tragedy.²

This beginning paragraph lays out the main themes of the text. Art is dependent on “the Apollinian and Dionysian duality”; Apollo and Dionysus are “the two art deities of the Greeks”; there is a Heraclitean opposition between “the Apollinian art of sculpture, and the nonimagistic, Dionysian art of music”; Attic tragedy is a synthesis, “an equally Dionysian and Apollinian form of art.” The dualism also reveals that psychological drives, in this case drives toward creation, are “disclosed” by attending the Greek gods.

I believe, however, that Nietzsche misses the mark on two counts. First, no art product or process is exclusively Apollonian or Dionysian; both drives are necessary, but not sufficient, for art. Conversely, any art product or process contains both Apollonian and Dionysian elements. For example, music must by definition have Apollonian elements. Composers have their Dionysian lightning flashes of inspiration, but they also must master the Apollonian craft of composing or songwriting through critique, revision, and development of ideas. The best songs often come from moments of supreme inspiration, but even these moments must be fine-tuned: an added harmony here, a subtle melodic tension there, a shift in arrangement (e.g., moving a melodic counterpoint from the flutes to the violins). Modern recording only exacerbates this tension; recording is a curious art, scientific and Apollonian in nature, yet it exists to capture Dionysian moments in performance. So the distinction is not so cut and dry. The dualism eventually collapses.

²Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, 33.

Second, Nietzsche's dualistic model is not sufficient to account for creativity. Dionysus provides the raw spark, the primal energy flow, the divine inspiration. Apollo provides the calculated judgment, the rational reflection, the constructed value. But neither drive accounts for *creation itself*. Hermes, who like Apollo and Dionysus is an illegitimate son of Zeus, embodies communication, innovation, invention, and creation. It was Hermes who invented Apollo's beloved lyre. To round out Nietzsche's dualistic model, I have added Hermes to my investigation. I will begin with analyses of each of these three phases of the creative process: the Dionysian, the Hermetic, and the Apollonian. All are necessary for creativity, although the creative process can be dominated by one or two of the three. Together, these three drives create a wide, multidimensional spectrum that can account for a very wide variety of differing types of art. The Dionysian drive provides the ecstatic experience, the raw material of creation. It is the lightning flash of inspiration; it is that vivid, fleeting moment where the self collapses and the Muses speak through the artist. It is raw, unformed creative energy. The Hermetic phase of creation involves a harnessing and directing of this raw energy, culminating in an act of creation. The Hermetic drive is the will to create. Finally, the Apollonian phase is the phase of wonder, reflection, analysis, refinement, and precision. The Apollonian drive can appreciate the creation of the Hermetic drive and improve upon it, much as Apollo appreciated Hermes' lyre and perfected its play after Hermes gave it to Apollo.

To further understand these three drives, we will turn to ancient Greece. Greek philosophy was preoccupied with the importance of music in Greek society, as evidenced in this passage from Plato:

Rhythm and harmonies have the greatest influence on the soul; they penetrate into its inmost regions and there hold fast. If the soul is rightly trained, they bring grace. If not, they bring the contrary.³

And in this passage from Aristotle:

Music has the power to produce a certain quality in the character of our souls. And if it has this power, children should clearly be introduced to music and educated in it. Besides, education in music is appropriate to their youthful nature. . . . Also there seems to be a natural affinity for harmonic modes and rhythms. That is why many of the wise say the soul is a harmony, others that it has a harmony.⁴

Music is, Plato and Aristotle agree, deeply connected to the development of one's soul. Music has several characteristics that influence the growth of the soul: music is penetrating, and will have either a positive or a negative effect upon the soul. The spirit is—or has—a harmony. Study of music, and particularly the energy flow associated with music, can therefore illuminate study of the spirit. The Greek spirit, particularly before Socrates, can be experienced through its gods and myths. According to Joseph Campbell,

³Plato, *The Republic*, 401e.

⁴Aristotle, *Politics*, 1340b11-18.

a god is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe—the powers of your own body and of nature. The myths are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human being, and the same powers that animate our life animate the life of the world.⁵

Put differently, gods are an articulation of one's relationship to the world, and of the fundamental life energies involved in existence. As symbols of these fundamental life energies, each god was assigned particular types, such as love, war, wisdom, hunting, magic, and music. Many Greek immortals were involved with music, among them Athena, Pan, and the Muses. But as stated above, the three gods central to my investigation are Dionysus, Hermes, and Apollo. As a groundwork for further analysis of the three artistic drives, we will turn to the stories in Greek myth and legend. We begin with the story of Dionysus.

Dionysus

Born
Suddenly in labor
pangs brought on by force:
Zeus' thunderbolt took wing,
struck him out of the womb.
His mother lost her life
in the flash of lightning.
—Euripides, *Bacchae*.⁶

Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the frenzy
with which you should be inoculated?
—Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.⁷

As Euripides has shown us above, Dionysus was born of lightning. The jealous Hera “persuaded Zeus to swear that he would grant whatever she might ask of him.” Having secured his oath, she demanded that Zeus destroy Semele, the pregnant mortal woman who was bearing his son Dionysus. After incinerating Semele, Zeus rescued Dionysus “from the ashes of his mother and sewed him up in his own thigh, from which he was born at the proper time.”⁸

Put differently, Dionysus was born of an instantaneous flash of energy. The source of the lightning flash can be traced back to jealousy, one of the strongest and most destructive passions. As the bastard son of Zeus, Dionysus was conceived under a state of immortal lust and adultery, two more very strong passions. In *The Bacchae*, one of Dionysus' central motivations is recognition of his divine lineage and nature. In the Prologue, Dionysus speaks:

⁵Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 28.

⁶Euripides, *Bacchae* (88-93).

⁷Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 126.

⁸Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 204.

I came here—my first Greek city—
only after I had started initiations there
and set the places dancing, so that mortals
would see me clearly as divine.⁹

What does Dionysus mean by “me?” Does he himself want to be recognized as an immortal by the mortals? Or does he refer more broadly to the Dionysian drive, which is a process through which mortals can experience divinity? Either interpretation is compelling, and indeed they go hand in hand. For to recognize Dionysus as a divine being, one must also recognize his bailiwick as divine. To re-cognize something is to remember it or to conceive of it again, both of which must by definition be abstractions. This abstract way of thinking is the realm of the Apollonian. So in the *Bacchae*, Dionysus seeks to restore his own drive by appealing to the mortals’ sense of the Apollonian. Dionysus wants to be considered by the Greeks. He wants to get their *attention*. He wants to *enthrall* the mortals, inducing them to dance and ecstasy. These ways of being are not customary to the “refined” Attic spirit embodied in Pentheus. Rather, Dionysian values are at the same time revolutionary and eerily familiar. This familiarity shows itself through the Dionysian modes of music, frenzy, and intoxication:

His domain
is sacred dances
laughter by flutesong
relaxation of care,
whenever grapes shine
on feasting of gods,
or when, at ivy-wreathed festivals,
sleep steals round men from the wine bowl.¹⁰

This description is of a Bacchic revelry; in such a communal activity, the Maenads were the revelers of Dionysus. In *The Bacchae*, a messenger reports to Pentheus what he saw of a Bacchic revel:

they, at the appointed time,
spun into a Bacchic dance, shaking the thyrsus
and crying, “Iacchus,” to the thunderborn child
of Zeus, all with one mouth, and the entire mountain
danced for Bacchus, wild beasts too, all racing into motion.¹¹

In this revel, we can see evidence of one key element of the Dionysian: the collapse of individuation. The Maenads sang “with one mouth”; the “entire mountain” danced in unison. The Bacchanalia is an extraordinary social phenomenon where people

⁹Euripides, *Bacchae* (20-23).

¹⁰*Ibid.* (378-385).

¹¹*Ibid.*(723-727).

come together and have vivid experiences—often involving music—where their self-awareness and individuation melts away, replaced by a feeling of union and commonality. Such behaviors, along with the more brutal bloodshed that was to follow when this unified community was invaded by an outsider, were repulsive to the Attic consciousness. At the same, they were strangely compelling, in sharp contrast to the Apollonian paradigm that had begun to dominate in Euripides' time.

In addition to providing intoxication and unity among his followers, Dionysus has the property of nourishing them:

One [Maenad] took her thyrsus, struck a rock,
and water leapt out, pure as dew.
Another set her staff in solid ground
and the god sent her a fountain of wine.
If anyone was thirsty for a drink of milk,
she scabbled her sharp fingers in the earth
and it came, spurting white. Sweet streams of honey
too came dripping from the ivy-covered wands.¹²

Dionysus, then, has several properties. He can provide water to quench one's thirst. He can provide the primal nourishment of mother's milk. He can provide wine, a source of intoxication. He can provide the sweetness of honey. Additionally, he provides a seductive abandon, so that his followers can temporarily forget who they are and experience a deep sense of unity with their community, fueled by the power of music.

There is a curious tension here regarding the Dionysian drive, a curiosity picked up by Nietzsche in the 19th century. Dionysus is concerned that mortals have lost touch with him, particularly mortals in the "civilized" world, such as Pentheus' realm. To embrace the Dionysian is horrifying to Pentheus and his "civilized," domesticated ilk. The very notion of the Bacchic revelry was objectionable to them because they believed it to be uncivilized. Indeed, Dionysus' origin is, according to the Greco-centric viewpoint, "uncivilized" territories such as Lydia, Phrygia, Persia, Bactria, Media, and Arabia. Dionysus and his religion are foreign to Pentheus. Dionysus is not predisposed toward Attic ideals of discretion, moderation, and reflection.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche gives a detailed analysis of the contrast between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. For Nietzsche, the Dionysian is represented by intoxication (as opposed to the Apollonian world of dream images), the "collapse of the *principium individuationis*," and a reconciliation of humanity with nature.¹³ The emotion associated with the Dionysian experience is ecstasy; in the original Greek, *ekstasis* is "to stand outside of oneself." In the ecstatic, Dionysian experience, one's self-consciousness evaporates, leaving pure experience and hyper-awareness of that particular moment. Beyond the self/other distinction, boundaries

¹²*Ibid.* (704-711).

¹³Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* §1, 36.

in general also collapse in this moment: “All the caste-like divisions which necessity and arbitrary power have established between men disappear.”¹⁴Nietzsche’s strategy in *The Birth of Tragedy* is to outline these properties of the Dionysian in the context of academic prose. He may or may not have been successful, but immediate reaction to the book was almost universally negative. A century later, however, it has become one of the most-studied texts in philosophy and aesthetics.

By 1886, Nietzsche himself was highly critical of his strategy in writing *The Birth of Tragedy*. This text, which argues that the Western world has lost its grasp of the Dionysian under the crushing weight of the Apollonian—is itself too Apollonian. As Nietzsche puts it:

How I regret now that in those days I still lacked the courage (or modesty?) to permit myself in every way an individual language of my own for such individual views and hazards—and that instead I tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant’s and Schopenhauer’s spirit and taste! . . . I obscured and spoiled Dionysian premonitions with Schopenhauerian formulations.¹⁵

Curiously, the end of the “Attempt at Self-Criticism” that prefaced the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* refers to “that Dionysian monster who bears the name of Zarathustra”¹⁶ before quoting directly from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Presumably, then, *Zarathustra* succeeds where *The Birth of Tragedy* failed—for Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* is a Dionysian text.

In *Zarathustra*, one of the earliest and most persistent images of the Dionysian is *lightning*. As we have seen, Dionysus was born from lightning; clearly Nietzsche has the myth of Dionysus’ birth in mind in *Zarathustra*. The image is first used in “Zarathustra’s Prologue” when Zarathustra is preaching the *Übermensch* to the crowd: “Where is the lightning to lick you with its tongue? Where is the frenzy with which you should be inoculated? Behold, I teach you the *Übermensch*: he is this lightning, he is this frenzy.”¹⁷ From the beginning of the book, *Zarathustra* links Dionysian frenzy with the *Übermensch*. Because the *Übermensch* is what shows itself when man has been overcome, the Dionysian frenzy is an avenue of self-overcoming; conversely, self-overcoming requires the Dionysian.

For Nietzsche, the lightning continues to give birth to Dionysus by awakening the Dionysian within one’s spirit. The lightning is a spark, a catalyst for growth and the quest for one’s wisdom: “For these men of today I do not wish to be *light*, or to be called light. These I wish to blind. Lightning of my wisdom! put out their eyes!”¹⁸ The light in this passage continues the image of Platonic goodness and wisdom that is prominent throughout the text. Like the Madman in *The Gay Science*

¹⁴Nietzsche, “The Dionysiac World View” §1, 120.

¹⁵Nietzsche, “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” 24.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁷Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 126.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

who “lit a lantern in the bright morning hours,”¹⁹ Zarathustra would have each individual provide their own light despite the high levels of ambient light around them; Zarathustra wants to use his lightning to blind each individual to this ambient light, and awaken them to the light and wisdom of the Dionysian.

In any creative endeavor such as music, art, or self-creation, Dionysian energy has a crucial role in the process. The Dionysian experience collapses the boundaries of previous existence and conceptions of existence, providing a fertile ground for novelty and growth. Through the metaphor of intoxication, one is able to experience reality in a way that is different from normal modes of consciousness. One can feel a sense of unity with one’s community. One’s spirit can be nourished by these vivid experiences; when one’s life is rich with them, one is cultivating creativity. These experiences are a spur to action, they inspire. In other words, the Dionysian provides the raw creative energy that can be shaped by Hermes and refined by Apollo.

Hermes

Sing, O Muse, of the son of Zeus and Maia, lord of Mt. Cyllene and Arcadia rich in flocks, the messenger of the gods and bringer of luck, whom Maia of the beautiful hair bore after uniting in love with Zeus. . . . But when the will of Zeus had been accomplished and her tenth month was fixed in the heavens, she brought forth to the light a child, and a remarkable thing was accomplished; for the child whom she bore was devious, winning in his cleverness, a robber, a driver of cattle, a guide of dreams, a spy in the night, a watcher at the door, who soon was about to manifest renowned deeds among the immortal gods.²⁰

In praising the “renowned deeds” of Hermes, the hymn also lays a foundation for an analysis of the Hermetic drive. Indeed, this account of the first day of Hermes’ life shows that Hermes has a deep connection to creativity in general and music in particular. On his first day of life, Hermes invents the lyre from the shell of a tortoise. The object of Hermes’ creation, the lyre, is itself an instrument of creation. Homer describes Hermes’ musical acumen with his newly invented instrument:

When he had finished, he took up the lovely plaything, and tried it by striking successive notes. It resounded in startling fashion under his hand, and the god accompanied his playing with a beautiful song, improvising at random just as young men exchange banter on a festive occasion.²¹

Hermes’ music is improvised, which reinforces the notion that it does not contain any semblance of detailed Apollonian analysis or refinement. He simply plays, sublimating raw Dionysian energy into inventive action: “As swiftly as a thought darts

¹⁹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §125.

²⁰Homer, “Hymn to Hermes (4),” 189-190.

²¹*Ibid.*, 190.

through the mind of a man whose cares come thick and fast or as a twinkle flashes from the eye, thus glorious Hermes devised his plan and carried it out simultaneously.”²² In this description, Hermes is the bridge between plan and action. He is acting as quickly as he thinks, not spending too much time in either the reflective state or in mindless action. His action is thus a necessary mediator between the Dionysian state of pre-reflective action and the Apollonian state of wonder and reflection. Take, for instance, Hermes’ theft of Apollo’s cattle. This deed is a synthesis of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Inspired by his spontaneous invention of the lyre, and by the music he has created with the lyre, Hermes has enough of the Dionysian drive to be moved to act, and by driving the cattle backwards so that it would appear that they were travelling in a different direction, he had enough of the Apollonian drive to be very clever at it. Conversely, he lacks enough Apollonian sense to realize that Apollo is one of the more powerful gods, and angering him may not be the wise thing to do. Additionally, since Hermes was “devising in his heart sheer trickery,”²³ he was planning for a very specific future for himself, and not surrendering to the loss of self entailed in the Dionysian moment.

These pursuits are relevant to the Hermetic drive. Hermes wanted to become known as the trickster god and “the prince of thieves.” To accomplish this end, he goes after some of Apollo’s cattle, stealing them and slaughtering them in sacrifice to the gods (including himself). When he has done this and returns to his mother’s side (he is just a day old at this point), his mother asks him what he has been doing. His reply is ambitious: “I shall go after divine honor just as Apollo has. And if my father [Zeus] does not give it to me, to be sure I shall take my honor myself (and I can do it) which is to be the prince of thieves.”²⁴ Hermes’ honor—his goal—is to be outside of social convention and order. He is unconcerned with social hierarchy and rank—if Zeus doesn’t give him what he wants, he will create it himself. At the same time, Hermes is seeking recognition from both mortal and immortal alike. This somewhat roguish attitude—and the ability to be balanced by the Dionysian and the Apollonian—is just what is necessary for new creation or innovation to take place. The innovative thinker cannot be dominated by current convention; s/he must learn to think outside of the box, out of the dominant paradigm, while at the same time mediating the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

Later in the story, when Apollo and Hermes go before Zeus to settle their disagreement, Zeus refers to Hermes as “a child newly born who has the appearance of a herald.” A herald is a proclaimer of what is to come; the innovative thinker can also be thought of as a herald. Certainly Newton and Galileo, for example, were heralds of modern science, and both developed their insights (at least partially) through action. Galileo made his telescope, and despite the fact that his observations were incompatible with the dominant scientific paradigm of his day, he developed new ideas about the basic structure of the solar system—but not until he saw Jupiter’s moons in motion through the telescope that he made with his own hands. Even when con-

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴Homer, “Hymn to Hermes (4),” 192.

demned by the Inquisition and sentenced to house arrest, his legendary response—which embodies the spirit of the Hermetic drive by trusting his own innovations—was “and yet they move.”

To return to the myth of Hermes, the disagreement between Hermes and Apollo is finally settled when Hermes gives his lyre to Apollo; he gives Apollo the gift of music. To abstract from this myth into a general description of the artistic drives, the Hermetic drive creates with raw Dionysian energy, continually shaping it. The Hermetic drive then gives its creation over to the Apollonian drive to be appreciated, analyzed, refined, and judged.

Apollo

The maidens who serve the far-shooting god, the Deliades, [are] a great and wondrous sight, whose renown will never perish. They sing their hymn to Apollo first of all and then to Leto and Artemis, who delights in her arrows, and they remember the men and women of old and enchant the assembled throng with their songs. They know how to imitate the sounds and sing in the dialects of all human beings. So well does their beautiful song match the speech of each person that one would say he himself were singing.²⁵

Homer’s description of the Deliades shows the difference between them and the Maenads who serve Dionysus. While the Maenads are wild women, the Deliades are quite refined. They are well-educated and knowledgeable of their history: they “remember the men and women of old.” Additionally, they are accomplished linguists, for “they know how to imitate the sounds and sing in the dialects of all human beings.” So the Deliades sing of history and myth, looking backward in reflection, and “enchant the assembled throng.” Their music, however, is much different from that of the Maenads, who

sing praise to Dionysus
over thundering drums
and cry VoHé
to the glory of the god
with shouts and Phrygian war-cries.²⁶

The drums of the Maenads are more primal than the practiced, refined singing of the Deliades, who tell stories in their songs. This difference reflects that of the Apollonian and the Dionysian drive. While the Dionysian is an ecstatic experience that is a catalyst for creativity, the Apollonian is a reflective, highly rational drive that seeks to judge art via aesthetics, possibly in order to improve it. Some art, like sculpture, Nietzsche’s example of Apollonian art, requires precision executed over a period of time to produce a desired result. The sculptor chipping away at the block

²⁵Homer, “Hymn to Delian Apollo,” 166.

²⁶Euripides, *Bacchae* (155-160).

of stone is an example of Apollonian precision. This sustained action over time is governed by a process of rational reflection. The body is guided by the mind; the material world is governed by the abstract world.

In many places in the Homeric texts, Apollo is referred to as the “far-shooting” god. In at least one place, however, this characterization takes on a subtle twist: Apollo is “the lord who shoots from afar.”²⁷ This action from a distance shows that Apollo can still conduct warfare, even when not immediately engaged with an opponent. Apollo remains detached from the situation upon which he exerts his influence. This detachment is mediated through the power and practice of abstraction. Nietzsche refers to this Apollonian abstraction as “the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy,” arguing that such fantasy—or Apollonian rationalism—is necessary:

The higher truth, the perfection of these [Apollonian] states in contrast to the incompletely intelligible everyday world, this deep consciousness of nature, healing and helping in sleep and dreams, is at the same time the symbolical analogue of the . . . arts generally, which make life possible and worth living.²⁸

Like the Dionysian, the Apollonian is necessary but not sufficient in itself for art. Additionally, for Nietzsche, the Apollonian and the Dionysian are interdependent.

The Apollonian, therefore, cannot alone account for creation. For Nietzsche, the Dionysian is also necessary. But I argue that the Hermetic, too, is necessary. To illustrate the differences between the Hermetic drive and the Apollonian drive, we return to Homer’s Hymn to Hermes. After Hermes steals the cattle of Apollo, they have many conversations and interactions in an attempt to reconcile their differences. They go to Zeus, who orders them to search for the “missing” cattle together. While doing so, Hermes picked up his lyre and began to play:

He took up the lyre in his left hand and tried it by striking successive notes. The instrument resounded in startling fashion and Phoebus Apollo laughed with delight as the lovely strains of the heavenly music pierced his being, and sweet yearning took hold of his heart while he listened.²⁹

Apollo is enthralled by Hermes’ music. He is familiar with music, but he has never heard the lyre before. It has captured his attention and triggered his sense of wonder; it is an object of curiosity worthy of analysis:

This newly uttered sound I hear is wonderful, and I tell you that no one, either mortal or god who dwells on Olympus, has ever before known it, except you, you trickster, son of Zeus and Maia. What skill! What Muse’s art! What salve for sorrow and despair! It gives the choice of three blessings all at once: joy and love and sweet sleep. I follow the Olympian

²⁷Homer, “Hymn to Apollo,” 165.

²⁸Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, 35.

²⁹Homer, “Hymn to Hermes,” 197.

Muses who delight in dancing, the swelling beat of music, and the lovely tune of flutes, yet never have I been as thrilled by such clever delights as these at young men's feasts. I marvel, O son of Zeus, at your charming playing.³⁰

After this, Hermes gave the lyre to Apollo, and the two were reconciled. After the reconciliation, Apollo became master of the lyre. Apollo's mastery, therefore, comes on the heels of the inspiration of Dionysus and the action of Hermes. Similarly, the Apollonian drive is reconciled with the Hermetic when it is able to accept and master the gifts of the Hermetic drive. The Apollonian phase of creation is the culmination and refining stage of art—but all three drives are necessary for mastery.

³⁰*Ibid.*

2

The Dionysian Drive

I had a marvelous experience two nights ago. I was invited to a rock concert. (laughter in the audience) I'd never seen one. This was a big hall in Berkeley and the rock group were the Grateful Dead, whose name, by the way, is from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. And these are very sophisticated boys. This was news to me. Rock Music has never seemed that interesting to me. It's very simple and the beat is the same old thing. But when you see a room with 8000 young people for five hours going through it to the beat of these boys... The genius of these musicians—these three guitars and two wild drummers in the back... The central guitar, Bob Weir, just controls this crowd and when you see 8000 kids all going up in the air together... Listen, this is powerful stuff! And what is it? The first thing I thought of was the Dionysian festivals, of course. This energy and these terrific instruments with electric things that zoom in... This is more than music. It turns something on in here (the heart?). And what it turns on is life energy. This is Dionysus talking through these kids. Now I've seen similar manifestations, but nothing as innocent as what I saw with this bunch. This was sheer innocence. And when the great beam of light would go over the crowd you'd see these marvelous young faces in sheer rapture—for five hours! Packed together like sardines! Eight thousand of them! Then there was an opening in the back with a series of panel windows and you look out and there's a whole bunch in another hall, dancing crazy. This is a wonderful fervent loss of self in the larger self of a homogeneous community. This is what it is all about!"¹

This excerpt from a talk by Joseph Campbell illustrates his observance of the Dionysian drive at work in the context of modern music. As Campbell mentions, one of the key elements in the Dionysian experience is “a wonderful fervent loss of self in the larger

¹Joseph Campbell, “Joseph Campbell and the Grateful Dead.”

self of a homogeneous community.” But how can this loss-of-self happen? If the self is lost, then who is having the experience of loss-of-self? Indeed, this tension between the self and its surrender is the central problem of the Dionysian drive.

Self-Consciousness and Self-Overcoming

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi offers one solution to the problem; rather than using the term “loss of self,” he refers to a “loss of self-consciousness.” For Csikszentmihalyi,

Loss of self-consciousness does not involve a loss of self, and certainly not a loss of consciousness, but rather, only a loss of consciousness of the self. What slips below the threshold of awareness is the concept of self, the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are. And being able to forget temporarily who we are seems to be very enjoyable. When not preoccupied with our selves, we actually have a chance to expand the concept of who we are. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward.²

Csikszentmihalyi is not referring to the Dionysian by name; rather, his work is a psychological investigation of the phenomenon he has termed “flow.” But as we shall see, his flow state is very similar to the Dionysian state, expressed in the language of science. For example, in the above passage, Csikszentmihalyi notes that “being able to forget temporarily who we are seems to be very enjoyable.” In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche says almost exactly the same thing: “the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis* [provides] a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysian.”³

But why should the loss of self be pleasurable? Indeed, Nietzsche also refers to the terror of the Dionysian loss of self and to the “intoxication of suffering.”⁴ The tragedy of *The Bacchae* should give us pause: the loss of self is not always pleasurable. Rather, *intensity of experience*, which is often but not always pleasurable, is the mark of the Dionysian loss of self. But what effect do these intense Dionysian experiences of self-forgetfulness have upon the long-term development and health of individuals? To answer this question, we must consider what we mean by “self” vis a vis time and growth. The Dionysian experience of self exists in the present as a threshold between what was—the prior self, or one’s identity—and what may come to be—the future self, or the ideal of self-growth. In order to grow, a self must leave its prior self behind, or no growth is possible. The Dionysian loss-of-self, therefore, is a casting away of the now static identity of the prior self. This growing self, existing in the present, is in the uncharted territory of possibility. It corresponds to Charles Sanders Peirce’s ontological category of Firstness, which “is predominant in

²Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 64.

³Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, 36.

⁴Nietzsche, “On the Dionysiac World View,” 126.

the ideas of freshness, life, freedom.”⁵ In short, the Dionysian loss-of-self is pleasurable at least in part because, when considered in retrospect, it indicates that growth has *happened*. As Csikszentmihalyi noted in the above passage, “When not preoccupied with our selves, we actually have a chance to *expand the concept of who we are*. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to *self-transcendence*, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward” (emphasis added). It is, therefore, the function of the Dionysian drive to push the boundaries of being, making the growth of the organism a possibility. When the boundaries of being have been pushed, it is possible to expand one’s identity by participating in novelty. One becomes what one has not yet been.

Additionally, the Dionysian experience is predominantly a social phenomenon. With the collapse of the *principia individuationis* that had previously identified the individuals participating in the experience, a new entity enters the awareness of the participants: the organic, collective whole. The awareness of each individual shifts from that of self-awareness to the awareness of this larger social entity. This shift in consciousness is what Joseph Campbell observed at the Grateful Dead show. Experientially, it (in Campbell’s words) “turns on . . . life energy.” This shift to awareness of pure being, without being constrained by identities or ideals, allows one to act in a creative way. It is the present threshold between the self-identity of the past and the forward-looking self-ideal of the future. When experienced with a community, the Dionysian drive allows that community to act synchronously. This connection is what allows a flock of birds or a school of fish or a group of F-15 fighter pilots in formation to move as if they were controlled by a single mind. There is nothing to distinguish the movements of each individual. Such group activity illustrates the power of social unity in the Dionysian experience.

Entrainment And Unity

One of the mechanisms of this process of fusing together was a discovery of early modern science:

The Law of Entrainment, which seems to be fundamental to the universe, was first discovered in 1665 by the Dutch scientist Christian Huygens. Huygens noticed that if two clocks were placed next to each other, within a very short time they would lock up and tick in perfect synchrony. *Entrainment*. If two rhythms are nearly the same, and their sources are in close proximity, they will always entrain. Why? The best theory is that nature is efficient and it takes less energy to pulse together than in opposition.⁶

The Law of Entrainment seems to indicate that multiple rhythmic entities synchronizing together is built-in to the fabric of the universe. If this law is true, then it

⁵Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology,” 78.

⁶Hart, *Drumming at the Edge of Magic*, 123.

has profound implications for human experience. As John Dewey noted, “life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance.”⁷ This unison with the march of surrounding things—or entrainment with one’s environment—is essential for survival. When it is lost, one can step off the street corner at the wrong time and, without looking, be hit by a bus. Entrainment is essential for any sort of meaningful communication. If one is out of unison with another while attempting a conversation, each person will appear distracted to the other. On the other hand, when this unison has been nurtured, and two or more people have practice with entrainment, they develop an uncanny “sixth sense” for one another. A wife can finish her husband’s sentences. A quarterback can sense that the receiver will cut a certain way, even though it violates the playbook. An office assistant has already prepared a document before he is asked to do so. When entrained, the experience of the many, to some degree, becomes one. This unity of an organism with its environment is “food” for the growth of that organism. Recovery of unison, Dewey continues,

is never a mere return to a prior state, for it [the organism] is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed... Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.⁸

This cycle of falling out and recovering unison is the rhythm of growth in an organism. It is a constant cycle of tension and release, difficulty and integration, antithesis and synthesis. The organism must continuously adapt to its environment, or it will perish. As Dewey writes,

if life continues and if in continuing it expands, there is an overcoming of factors of opposition and conflict; there is a transformation of them into differentiated aspects of a higher powered and more significant life. The marvel of organic, of vital adaptation through expansion (instead of by contradiction and passive accommodation) actually takes place. Here in germ are balance and harmony attained through rhythm.⁹

Self-growth, if Dewey is correct, is rhythmic. It is also *creative*, in the sense that one must continuously create in order to survive and grow by adapting to one’s environment. Entrainment, as a feeling of unison with one’s environment, is the altar of creativity and growth. It is the rhythm of life.

In a musical context, entrainment is essential. For example, suppose a group of musicians are experimenting with free improvisation. In my own experiences in such a setting, one can easily feel the moment of entrainment, where everyone begins playing synchronously with one another. Free improvisation is a special case

⁷Dewey, “The Live Creature,” 535.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*, 536.

that differs greatly from more traditional modes of improvisation in western music. In the west, American jazz is perhaps the most well-known mode of improvisation. In most jazz music, a musician usually improvises in the context of playing a solo. During the solo, the rhythm section (drums, bass, keyboards, and/or guitar) usually holds down a musical structure that serves as the point of departure for the soloist. The famous 12-bar, I-IV-V blues progression is an enormously popular occurrence of such a structure, as well as being the basis for an enormous number of songs in popular music—jazz, blues, rock, R&B, gospel, country, etc. all feature a version of this progression. It is extremely predictable and, comparatively, very simple. As long as the soloist knows what key the band is in, she can easily improvise riffs and melodies that correspond to this idiom. The melody is improvised, but the harmonic and rhythmic structure are fixed. In free improvisation, however, there is no such predetermined structure. This style of music, known as “jam bands” and pioneered by the Grateful Dead and others, is much more unpredictable. It is common knowledge in the “Deadhead” community that sometimes this (lack of a) formula works wonderfully, and sometimes it fails miserably. The Dead were known just as much for their “off” nights as for their incredible moments on stage. Interestingly, bootleg recordings of these “off” nights are still highly valued by collectors for their historical, if not aesthetic, value.

The difference between a good night and a bad night, one could argue, is entrainment. One can sense when the musicians are entrained, whether one is a participating musician or an attentive audience in the crowd. When the band is entrained, the separate parts of each player—the musical *principia individuationis*—become less distinct. The larger totality of sound coalesces into one organism: the groove. Rhythm is the foundation of the groove; once the rhythm is tight, meaning that the musicians holding the rhythm are entrained, the melodic and the harmonic instruments have a basic structure in place to serve as their point of departure for improvisations. The musicians, because they are striving for entrainment, certainly know when it has arrived. But the audience also knows—indeed, anyone who is listening attentively can feel it. As Mickey Hart, drummer for the Grateful Dead, has observed,

on many occasions performing with the Grateful Dead or Planet Drum, I’ve noticed that the band achieves such a level of synchrony that the audience just has to reinforce the rhythm by clapping in unison. No one starts it, no one directs it. It’s a social response to the power of the groove.¹⁰

The groove, once brought into being by entrained musicians, is *enthraling*. One cannot help but tap a foot, clap their hands, beat a drum, or get up and dance. The groove causes one to *move*; in philosophical jargon, the groove is a *mover* in which members of an audience allow themselves to be moved, casting away societal convention and surrendering to the thrall of the music. This response to the groove seems to be instinctual. I’ve observed many infants, my own daughter included,

¹⁰Hart, *Spirit Into Sound*, 112.

move their tiny bodies and clap with big smiles on their faces in response to music. This response occurs without prompting; indeed, these infants are barely able to hold themselves upright. But they can feel the groove, and it often overwhelms their uncoordinated bodies.

Other musicians have written about this feeling of being enthralled by the groove:

If the rhythm is right, if the translation between inner mood and drum membrane is perfect, then you know it instantly. *Ahhhh*, you say, this goes with my body tempo, this relates to how I feel today, how fast my heart is beating, what my thoughts are, what my hands feel like. When the rhythm is right you feel it with all your senses; it's in your mind, in your body, in both places. The head of the drum vibrates as the stick strikes it. The physical feedback is almost instantaneous, rushing along your arms, filling your ears. A feeling not unlike trust settles over you as you give yourself to the rhythm. You don't fight it, but instead allow yourself to be propelled by this insistent but friendly feeling. All sense of the present moment disappears, the normal categories of time become meaningless. Your mind is turned off, your judgment wholly emotional. Your emotions seem to stream down your arms and legs and out the mouth of the drum; you feel light, gravityless, your arms feel like feathers. You fly like a bird.¹¹

Musical entrainment is, in a strange way, a form of communication in which each musician, trusting the power of the groove, give themselves *to* the rhythm. In doing so, the improvising musicians interact with one another, imposing a homogeneous order upon the chaos of noise. This order emerges in real-time, along with the disparate parts. When entrained, each musician contributes a smaller piece to the larger groove. The groove continuously folds back upon itself and feeds the musicians, who respond to the groove as it emerges, propelling it further in a cycle of sound.

What are the prerequisites for such musical communication? Simon Frith has argued that "For musical communication to work, different people's experiences of inner time . . . must match. They must live together, as it were, in a shared temporal continuum."¹² This temporal cohabitation requires work on the part of the musicians involved in the process. Their absolute attention is required, the same attention that allows the collapse of the *principium individuationis*. When the musicians temporarily forget their identity in the pursuit of the groove, they are in a curious state of mediation between self and not-self. They must constantly be grounded in themselves, so as to be able to respond to the groove, but at the same time they must surrender themselves to the groove in order to fully participate in it. As Nietzsche puts it,

¹¹Hart, *Drumming at the Edge of Magic*, 118.

¹²Frith, *Performing Rites*, 146.

The attendant of Dionysos must be in a state of intoxication and at the same time he must lie in ambush, observing himself from behind. Dionysiac art manifests itself, not in the alternation of clear-mindedness and intoxication, but in their co-existence.¹³

The Dionysian experience, then, requires a curious attention that is twofold. The organism must have just enough self-awareness to be able to act, yet must be attentive to the larger environment around.

Attention And Flow

In Csikszentmihalyi's analysis of flow states, attention plays a key role:

Because attention determines what will or will not appear in consciousness, and because it is also required to make any other mental events—such as remembering, thinking, feeling, and making decisions—happen there, it is useful to think of it as psychic energy. Attention is like energy in that without it, no work can be done, and in doing work it is dissipated. We create ourselves by how we invest this energy... Attention is our most important tool in the task of improving the quality of experience.¹⁴

Attention, then, can be conceived in terms of psychic energy. Each individual has a certain amount of attention to be spent at any given time. Much of the time, an organism's attention is devoted to basic tasks of survival, such as walking in a crowded city without getting hit by a bus. Other times, attention is turned to creative endeavors. In the Dionysian experience, one's limited supply of attention is used on something outside the self; there is no more attention to be "spent" on a conception of the self. Hence, one's self-conception evaporates, leaving only a Dionysian awareness of the whole.

Csikszentmihalyi has identified eight major components to the "flow state," which he has described as a "phenomenology of enjoyment":

First, the experience usually occurs when we confront tasks we have a chance of completing. Second, we must be able to concentrate on what we are doing. Third and fourth, the concentration is usually possible because the task has clear goals and provides immediate feedback. Fifth, one acts with a deep but effortless involvement that removes from awareness the worries and frustrations of everyday life. Sixth, enjoyable activities allow people to exercise a sense of control over their actions. Seventh, concern for the self disappears, yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over. Finally, the sense of the duration of time is altered; hours pass by in minutes, and minutes can stretch out to seem like hours. The combination of all these elements causes a

¹³Nietzsche, "The Dionysiac World View," 121.

¹⁴Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, 33.

sense of deep enjoyment that is so rewarding people feel that expending a great deal of energy is worthwhile simply to be able to feel it.¹⁵

Each of these components also applies to the Dionysian experience, which is extremely similar to the “flow” state. First, if an organism is overwhelmed by the experience—such as a musician attempting to improvise within an alien context or with no expertise on his instrument—he will not be able to “lose himself” in the music; that musician still stands out, individuated against the alien context. The second component is unproblematic; if one cannot concentrate on the task at hand, one is unlikely to enter a flow state. In the context of free improvisation, the third and fourth components are fairly obvious; one must want to find the groove, and it is immediately obvious when one has found it (or when one loses it). The fifth component is related to the second: one must be able to focus on the task at hand without the distractions of everyday life. The sixth component is also essential in the context of free improvisation; it is very difficult to effectively improvise music without a certain amount of technical expertise involved in playing one’s instrument. The seventh component has already been discussed at length; the Dionysian loss of self is critical to the growth process of self-overcoming. The final component, the distortion of the perception of time, is most curious. When involved in a Dionysian experience—improvising music, reading an enthralling novel, having sex, exercising, and the like—it is very easy to lose track of time. How often do we get so involved in our work that we finally look at a clock, only to discover that several hours have passed? Indeed, time flies when you’re having fun.

This distortion of time that occurs alongside full attention to the present moment is an indicator of another aspect of conscious experience: the feeling of *emotions*. The feeling of emotion is, to a certain extent, a Dionysian experience. When one feels an intense love for another, time seems to drag when apart, and passes all-too-quickly when together. Feeling compassion is also, by definition, a Dionysian experience. Compassion—literally, “to suffer with”—is to feel the pain of another. One must step outside oneself and attend another, requiring a collapse of the *principium individuationis*. This same sort of attention, an expenditure of psychic energy, is required for compassion. Indeed, a lack of such attention is a defense against feeling compassion when it is inconvenient or otherwise undesirable to do so. It is, after all, very easy to walk quickly past a suffering homeless person laying in a back alley on a cold day. We simply do not allow that person’s suffering to enter our consciousness. We don’t spend any psychic energy on that person because if we did, compassion—along with a motivation to spend significant personal energy and resources to alleviate the suffering, a sometimes inconvenient predicament in our society—would be the result.

The ability to feel through attention and entrainment is also a prerequisite for creativity. As previously stated, a musician cannot effectively play without expending psychic energy and entraining with the groove. An artist cannot create without entraining with the process of creating art. A writer cannot write without a certain

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 49.

amount of attention to language. The creative individual is, by definition, involved in self-growth, which brings feelings of pleasure. It heightens one's awareness and appreciation of life. As Csikszentmihalyi noted,

when we are involved in it [creativity], we feel that we are living more fully than during the rest of life. The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal of fulfillment we all hope to get from life, and so rarely do. Perhaps only sex, sports, music, and religious ecstasy—even when these experiences remain fleeting and leave no trace—provide as profound a sense of being part of an entity greater than ourselves.¹⁶

To conclude, the Dionysian experience is an intense state of being in which an organism looks beyond itself and is open to new possibilities. It is a phenomenon of consciousness, and it is an absolute prerequisite for creativity and therefore for growth. It allows feeling of emotions, and gives one a heightened sense of being alive. It allows disparate organisms to feel their connections with one another, producing a powerful, synergetic flood of ecstasy for those attentive to it. With a deeper understanding of this groundwork for creativity, we now turn to the creative act itself.

¹⁶Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity*, 2.

The Hermetic Drive

The Creative Act

How does an artist create? What makes the creative act different from normal moments in the course of life? What is the artist's motivation? Can anyone indulge in the creative process? To answer these questions, we must first develop an understanding of the creative act itself. Or even more fundamentally: what is the nature of an *act*? In her book, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, Susanne Langer explores "the act concept." Acts, for Langer, are "elements in the continuum of a life."¹ Acts are, indeed, the measure of life. The more tightly integrated one's acts are with one's environment and one's past actions, the more impact one's life will have upon the world. Acts are by their nature rhythmic; they have a motivation, a preparation, an execution, a consummation, and a dénouement before passing away to a new act. In Langer's words,

They normally show a phase of acceleration, or intensification of a distinguishable dynamic pattern, then reach a point at which the pattern changes, whereupon the movement subsides. That point of general change is the consummation of the act.²

Acts can be understood in terms of the patterns that constitute them. Acts are responses, either positive or negative. When one acts, it is to change one's environment, either (positively) in response to a stimulus or (negatively) in response to a void in one's environment. Therefore, every act is by definition creative; by acting, we create a modified, and therefore new, environment. To coin a phrase by Alfred North Whitehead, "creativity is the actualization of potentiality."³

An act must be understood as a process. The act is a bridge between the past and the future. The past, or the situation one finds oneself in, is the impetus for the act.

¹Langer, *Mind*, 104.

²*Ibid.*, 105.

³Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 179.

With action, one is responding to the past. As Langer puts it, “every act arises from a situation.”⁴ But how does the act arise? There are two elements involved in the impulse to act. To borrow an existentialist term, I will refer to the first element as *facticity*. One’s facticity is the set of circumstances—some of which are direct results of one’s previous acts, others of which are beyond one’s control—that one finds oneself in. The second element is one’s *will*, or the ability to make a creative choice among several possible options. One’s will looks toward the future. It can perceive one’s facticity, and respond to it by affecting some desired change to one’s situation, in the hopes that one’s future facticity will be more to one’s liking. The fusion of the two elements, facticity and will, constitute the impulse to act. Because action must always be toward some goal, however loosely conceived, every impulse contains a “prepattern” of the entire act. In Langer’s words, “the essential form of a complete act is prefigured in its impulse.”⁵ Additionally, acts are processes which continuously flow toward consummation and satisfaction, thereby giving rise to new acts. When consummated, the now-dead act becomes part of one’s facticity, and nudges one’s will to further acts of creation.

The question is then raised: are all acts, which are by definition creative, artistic? Put differently, is there a difference between creation and art? An answer to this question requires an aesthetic system, a framework from which to judge. Such frameworks are the realm of the Apollonian and as such will be considered in the next section. From the perspective of the Hermetic drive, creation itself is all that matters. Whether or not a creation is a work of art is a judgment that exists beyond the Hermetic drive.

With this conception of the creative act in mind, I will return to the scenario introduced in the previous section: musical group improvisation. To review, such improvisation occurs when attentive musicians spontaneously play with the goal of becoming entrained together, thus allowing a certain musical structure—the groove—to emerge in real-time. In this situation, there are highly complex impulses in place from which the musicians act. In the first place, and most broadly speaking, there is a motivation of pleasure. As I discussed earlier, flow states such as group improvisation are highly intense and often are enjoyable experiences. A desire to have such an experience is central to effective improvisation. Secondly, the musicians have a desire to find the groove, to entrain. In order to entrain, which is a resonant synchronization of rhythmic patterns between two or more entities, there must first be a rhythm being played, otherwise there is nothing to entrain *to*.

Most improvisations, in my experience, begin with one of the musicians introducing a simple, repetitive riff or musical phrase. Often each musician will warm up by noodling around on his or her instrument, getting the muscles loose and making sure their instrument is in tune. Many times, one of these noodlings will emerge into a pattern that the musician repeats and tightens, replicating it over and over. If this pattern is interesting and enthralling, another musician will hear it and play

⁴Langer, *Mind*, 110.

⁵*Ibid.*, 115.

in response to it. In some cases, the second musician will mimic the part. Other times, they will play a complementary phrase that also repeats, so that the two riffs ebb and flow together. Once at least two musicians are locked together in this way, a groove has been created. They are entrained. Other musicians often join in at this point. Eventually, the groove takes on a life of its own; each small pattern played by each musician is the building block of the synergetic groove.

In terms of impulse to act, each musician has essentially two choices once the groove has been established. The first and most common impulse is to act in such a way that the structure of the groove, its coherence, its order is not threatened but rather is reinforced. One can “play it safe” by sticking to simple, repetitive phrases that are known to work within the structure of the groove. These repetitive phrases that loop back and forth always change over time; it is of course impossible to perfectly replicate any phrase twice. There will always be some variation, however slight, perhaps inaudible. Additionally, one can consciously allow a phrase to breathe and evolve over time, deliberately introducing subtle variations as the phrases repeat. The structure of the groove has not been changed, but the harmonic or melodic content of the music riding the groove structure has evolved.

The second impulse is to deliberately introduce a musical phrase that will change the structure of the groove. In effect, this impulse is the same as the impulse of the first musician who spawns a groove with his or her musical phrase. The danger of this second impulse is that the other musicians may or may not recognize or comprehend the newly modified structure of the groove. Entrainment can easily be disrupted at this moment, creating a “train wreck.” Once a train wreck has occurred, the speed at which the musicians recover and re-establish entrainment is a testament to their skill and their familiarity with one another. Practiced musicians who know each other well can often make these transitions easily, jumping into the new groove and entraining before most listeners will notice the disruption. Other times, of course, they aren’t so lucky, and the groove collapses, leaving everyone feeling a sense of disorientation and unease. After the groove has collapsed, everyone’s awareness shifts staggeringly back to their individuated selves.

This sophisticated form of awareness of the emerging groove and the responses to it are a natural extension of Langer’s act theory. For Langer, the more complex the web of action that exists, the higher the degree of conscious awareness is in place around it. This complex web of interrelated acts is the birthplace of consciousness and feeling:

An act may subsume another act, or even many other acts. It may also span other acts which go on during its rise and consummation and cadence without becoming part of it. Two acts of separate inception may merge so that they jointly engender a subsequent act. These and many other relations among acts form the intricate dynamism of life which becomes more and more articulated, more and more concentrated and intense, until some of its elements attain the phase of being felt, which I

have termed “psychical,” and the domain of psychology develops within the wider realm of biology.⁶

Indeed, the climax of Langer’s investigation of mind is closely related to music, and more specifically to rhythm, as an integrator of actions which gave rise to what she terms “The Great Shift” from animal to human consciousness. For Langer, “it was very probably the drum, activated by the hands, that clinched the evolutionary shift.”⁷ This shift came from the social experience of improvising rhythms and dancing for prehistoric peoples. The dance contains elements that mere walking, though it too is rhythmic, does not:

If such basic patterns as the step—walking or dancing—were to be entrained by higher cerebral processes, something would have to effect a shift from footwork to a more versatile neuromuscular system which could entrain the precise, elaborate rhythms of the dance in a new activity.⁸

If Langer is correct, then for these prehistoric peoples there was no psychological mechanism in place by which entrainment could take place. Langer is arguing that these people were on the threshold of human consciousness; they did not quite have selves to lose in the Dionysian state of entrainment. The drum, however, provided the means of audible rhythm, bringing “into the center of communal life” a means of rhythm and entrainment:

The drum abstracts the form of the dance and holds it when otherwise it might become frenzied; beats assert their character as a framework more forcefully than movements or voices. Above all, the early and apparently universal use of the drum drew the human hand into the techniques of its expression.⁹

The drum, for Langer, is a likely candidate as the first instrument of *human* use. Certainly the rhythm of the drum was the first abstract thought that allowed these prehistoric people to entrain with one another.

I must confess that as a musician I find this theory of the origin of human consciousness to be intriguing, ingenious, and highly plausible. It also contains a certain romantic quality to it that I find irresistible. If rhythm was the first abstract thought, counting and numbers couldn’t have been far behind, since the understanding and analysis of rhythm requires counting. After counting, language must have followed, riding the system of symbolic reference embodied in the rhythm of the drum. Given the effects of entrainment and Dionysian flow states upon the self as articulated by Nietzsche and Csikszentmihalyi, one can only wonder what happened to the newly-identified selves involved in this primordial instance of entrainment *after* the groove

⁶*Ibid.*, 105.

⁷*Ibid.*, 398.

⁸*Ibid.*, 397.

⁹*Ibid.*, 397.

collapsed and the beats stopped. Was that moment the first instance of human consciousness? How must it have felt to the participants? I imagine there would have been a strong desire to return to the groove, given the pleasurability of Dionysian flow states. If so, then it is possible that one creature attempted to influence the other creatures to resume playing. This desire to influence one's environment that is the essence of the Hermetic drive can be expressed in another way, very familiar to even the most casual reader of Nietzsche.

The Will To Power and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

That is your whole will, you who are wisest: a will to power—when you speak of good and evil too, and of valuations. You still want to create the world before which you can kneel: that is your ultimate hope and intoxication.¹⁰

Earlier I criticized Nietzsche's dualistic model of the Apollonian and Dionysian as inadequate because it doesn't account for the creative act itself. In an attempt to rectify this shortcoming, I added the Hermetic drive to Nietzsche's binary. However, it should be noted that Nietzsche himself abandoned this dualistic model; it does not again appear in any of his writings after *The Birth of Tragedy*. Instead, other conceptions replace it; among them is the will to power. Others have argued that Nietzsche's will to power assimilated and replaced the Apollonian and the Dionysian:

When Nietzsche introduced the will to power into his thought, all the dualistic tendencies which had rent it previously could be reduced to mere manifestations of this basic drive. Thus a reconciliation was finally effected between Dionysus and Apollo.¹¹

If Kaufmann is correct, then the Dionysian and the Apollonian become moot as "mere manifestations of the will to power." I believe this assertion goes too far, partially because it explains the Apollonian and the Dionysian by explaining them away. The will to power, I believe, is a bridge between the two rather than a replacement for the two. The will to power is Nietzsche's term for what I have called the creative impulse. Power, in Nietzsche's theory, is not mere political power (as, for example, the Nazis would have us believe) but is rather the desire to exert one's influence upon one's environment. This desire manifests itself continuously throughout life as each organism is perpetually confronted with its facticity. Through will to power, the organism seeks to create a more favorable facticity for itself in the future. The will to power is "the unexhausted procreative will of life."¹² It is, for Nietzsche, the fundamental psychological drive underlying *all* human action.

The will to power is, for Nietzsche, tightly connected to his theory of self-overcoming and growth. In *Zarathustra*, the will to power is discussed in the section called "On

¹⁰Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 225.

¹¹Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 178.

¹²Nietzsche, "On Self-Overcoming," 226.

Self-Overcoming”; as Kaufmann points out, “the will to power is thus introduced as the will to overcome *oneself*. That this is no accident is certain.”¹³ Indeed, *Zarathustra* is full of such hardly accidental structures. One example, to which we will return, is Nietzsche’s discussion of the Dionysian, the will to power (which I have called the Hermetic), and the Apollonian in three consecutive chapters in Book II (The Tomb Song, On Self-Overcoming, On Those Who Are Sublime). All of these topics must be understood in order to understand Nietzsche’s doctrine of self-overcoming. The key to this understanding is that for Nietzsche, the self is not a fixed, static entity. Rather, it is a dynamic process of growth. In order to grow, one’s prior self must be overcome. The will to power is the continuous motivation of life to overcome itself. In *Zarathustra*, life itself speaks to Zarathustra:

“Behold,” it said, “I am *that which must always overcome itself*. Indeed, you call it a will to procreate or a drive to an end, to something higher, farther, more manifold: but all this is one, and one secret... Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it.”¹⁴

To repeat, the will of life—“unexhausted” and “procreative”—is the will to power.

The process of life is driven by the will to power. As a bridge between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the will to power is what motivates action in the present. Action, as argued above, is a continuous process, eternally recurring in “the continuum of life.” Acts come into being, are consummated, and fade away into the past, constituting one’s ever-changing facticity. The process of growth, which also recurs eternally, is a major theme of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and is exemplified in the aforementioned three-chapter sequence. In “The Tomb Song,” Zarathustra laments the Dionysian moments in his past, his “most loved ones” who “died too soon.” Zarathustra, who once possessed and is now possessed by those moments, is “the heir of [their] love and its soil, flowering in remembrance of [them] with motley wild virtues.”¹⁵ The Dionysian is the soil from which Zarathustra’s—or indeed anyone’s—life can flourish.

These Dionysian moments, however, are not enough on their own; they are fleeting, elusive, and unpredictable. Zarathustra speaks to his most loved ones, the Dionysian moments in his past:

Once I wanted to dance as I had never danced before: over all the heavens I wanted to dance. Then you [the Dionysian] persuaded my dearest singer. And he struck up a horrible dismal tune; alas, he tooted in my ears like a gloomy horn. Murderous singer, tool of malice, most innocent yourself! I stood ready for the best dance, when you murdered my ecstasy with your sounds.¹⁶

¹³Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 200.

¹⁴Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 227.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 224.

Zarathustra's aspirations to be fully attentive to the Dionysian were dashed by the "horrible dismal tune" of his "dearest singer." Even if the attendant of Dionysus is ready and willing for ecstatic experience, it can go wrong. Zarathustra continues:

Only in the dance do I know how to tell the parable of the highest things: and now my highest parable remained unspoken in my limbs. My highest hope remained unspoken and unredeemed. And all the visions and aspirations of my youth died! How did I endure it? How did I get over and overcome such wounds? How did my soul rise again out of such tombs?¹⁷

This passage expresses Zarathustra's dissatisfaction and disappointment that the sweetness of the Dionysian has gone sour. The Dionysian experience of dance is Zarathustra's "highest parable," and because of the murderous singer—perhaps an allusion to Richard Wagner—Zarathustra's "highest hope remained unspoken and unredeemed." But Zarathustra did not perish. His soul was able to "rise again" in strength from the ashes of the Dionysian:

Indeed, in me there is something invulnerable and unburiable, something that explodes rock: that is *my will*. Silent and unchanged it strides through the years. It would walk its way on my feet, my old will, and its mind is hard of heart and invulnerable... What in my youth was unredeemed lives on in you; and as life and youth you sit there, full of hope, on yellow ruins of tombs. Indeed, for me, you are still the shatterer of all tombs. Hail to thee, my will! And only where there are tombs are there resurrections. Thus sang Zarathustra.¹⁸

The will, which Zarathustra later names as the will to power, is the vehicle by which one emerges intact—and indeed strengthened—from the Dionysian experience. The Dionysian experience, which for Zarathustra is by itself "unredeemed," lives on through one's will. The Dionysian is the foundation for action, it is creative nourishment. When these experiences fade away and are entombed, they can be resurrected and redeemed with one's will. Conversely, if one does not exercise one's will, one remains dead, in a state of stagnant experience and static identity. One has become a statue. In order to grow, one must continuously create; creation is driven by the will.

The next section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* contains the earliest analysis of the will to power in Nietzsche's work. It demonstrates that the soil of the Dionysian is not sufficient; a motivation to grow must precede any flowering. This impulse to act is the Hermetic drive—by creating, life exerts its influence upon the universe. Zarathustra begins "On Self-Overcoming" with the notion of "the will to truth," which he characterizes as "the will to thinkability of all being," or the desire to "make all being thinkable."¹⁹ This will to truth hearkens back to Nietzsche's analysis of the

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 225.

Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Recall that in that book Nietzsche set the Apollonian in opposition with the Dionysian, lamenting overemphasis on the Apollonian at the expense of the Dionysian. But here in *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche explains the Apollonian in terms of will. This reconception of the Apollonian indicates a dissatisfaction with the original Dionysian/Apollonian dualism; Nietzsche has placed the will between the two as mediator. There are hints of this later move in *The Birth of Tragedy* where Nietzsche asserts that tragedy represents a “coupling” of the Apollonian and the Dionysian “by a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic ’will.’”²⁰ But it is not until Nietzsche’s formulation of the will to power beginning in “On Self-Overcoming” that he explores the nature of this will.

The will to truth is driven by the will to power, or, in Nietzsche’s language, “my will to power walks also on the heels of your will to truth.”²¹ The will to power is the desire to exert one’s influence over one’s environment, the desire to “create the world before which you can kneel.” The will to power is behind much of Nietzsche’s philosophy: it drives self-overcoming, it lies behind morality, creating “master morality” and “slave morality” depending on whether or not it is expressed or repressed. At the root of Nietzsche’s condemnation of morality is the formulation of commanding and obeying found in “On Self-Overcoming”:

Wherever I found the living, there I heard also the speech on obedience. Whatever lives, obeys. And this is the second point: he who cannot obey himself is commanded. That is the nature of the living. This, however, is the third point that I heard: that commanding is harder than obeying.²²

One must obey, but the question is, *whom* will one obey? If one cannot obey one’s own will to power, then one lives under slave morality and is commanded by—or chooses to obey—another. But to command oneself is harder than obeying another—this central conflict of self-command is the mat upon which one wrestles with self-overcoming.

After one has been fueled by a Dionysian experience, self-overcoming does not end. There is the danger of passivity, in which one becomes entombed in the ashes of the Dionysian. After one has waded in the waters of self-forgetfulness, one must return to the self. The passive path would be to return to the same self that one was prior to the Dionysian experience, an act that requires no struggle. It is the path of least resistance. On the other hand, one can struggle to integrate the Dionysian experience into a newly-conceived self. This is the active path, the road less travelled, that requires struggle. Struggle leads to growth, but all creative action is not necessarily growth. One must reflect upon one’s actions and judge where one is, where one has been, and where one desires to go. It is in this mode of reflection—the Apollonian drive reflecting upon the actions of the Hermetic drive—that life becomes an aesthetic phenomenon and, according to Nietzsche, becomes justifiable.

²⁰Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, 33.

²¹Nietzsche, “On Self-Overcoming,” *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 227.

²²*Ibid.*, 226.

The next section of *Zarathustra*, “On Those Who are Sublime,” outlines the place of the Apollonian in the creative process of life. Recall that a decade earlier Nietzsche condemned overemphasis on the Apollonian, tracing many fundamental societal problems to this error. But here, just as Nietzsche argued that the Dionysian alone is not sufficient, he also argues that the Hermetic drive—the will—is not enough for artistic existence: “For the hero the *beautiful* is the most difficult thing. No violent will can attain the beautiful by exertion. A little more, a little less: precisely this counts for much here, this matters most here.”²³ A reflective, analytic perspective, in other words, is necessary for beauty to be attained. No will alone is sufficient. This perspective above all *judges*; it creates an aesthetic of life: “all life is a dispute over taste and tasting. Taste—that is at the same time weight and scales and weigher; and woe unto all the living that would live without disputes over weight and scales and weighers!”²⁴ This “dispute over taste” is Nietzsche’s more mature conception of the Apollonian. Gone are any outright condemnations of it; indeed, the fruits of Apollonian reflection are absolutely necessary for the process of growth. The ability to dream in abstraction is necessary to set goals, including Nietzsche’s ultimate goal for humanity, the *Übermensch*. One must transcend one’s current, static idea of self and imagine—dream up in abstraction—a future self: “For this is the soul’s secret: only when the hero has abandoned her, she is approached *in a dream* by the overhero.”²⁵ This ability to abandon the prior self and approach the future self in a dream is the function of the Apollonian that completes the process of creation.

²³*Ibid.*, 230.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 229.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 231, emphasis added.

The Apollonian Drive

The dreamworld is a fragile but ordered world, and it finds an appropriate patron in Apollo. Apollo is the god of sunlight, and thereby of illumination and vision, and also the god of order and restraint. Nietzsche associates the visual arts, primarily sculpture, with Apollo, and . . . he sees these art forms as being similar to dreams. As representational media, painting and sculpture produce images that resemble but do not counterfeit things in the external world. We do not mistake them for reality outside the art world; in fact, our enjoyment stems in part from our recognizing these images as illusions. We are delighted by visual artistic representations—we enjoy their proportion, their form, their order, and we find them soothing, a welcome respite from our everyday world.¹

Kathleen Higgins' depiction of Nietzsche's "fragile but ordered" dreamworld contains many of the main ideas I would like to emphasize in this chapter. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* sets the Apollonian drive in opposition to the Dionysian, lamenting its increasing dominance and hegemony beginning with Socrates and Euripides. Overemphasis on the Apollonian, Nietzsche argues, not only killed Greek tragedy but also atrophied a crucial aspect of human existence, a problem that has persisted in the modern world. What, then, are the characteristics of this problematic drive?

Dreams and Images

Nietzsche begins with the notion of dreams, which he sets against the Dionysian notion of intoxication. In a dream state, the individual is in a state of *observation*. One sees the dream as it unfolds in the mind. As such, the image, the object of contemplation is of fundamental importance to the Apollonian consciousness; hence Nietzsche's characterization of the plastic arts of sculpture and painting as being prime examples of the Apollonian drive. The mechanism of this artistic drive goes

¹Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 25.

something like this: the artist dreams up an image of a painting or a sculpture, and then painstakingly chips away at the marble or adds colors to the canvas until the work of art is fully realized. The production of works of art unfolds over a period of time, and the value of such art lies in the finished product, which one can behold and appreciate. Note the contrast with a more Dionysian art such as music, in which the experience itself of the work takes time to unfold. Unlike music, which requires a certain amount of time to fully experience, an Apollonian image can be beheld in an instant.

The Apollonian drive reinforces the mode of detached observation: “The Apollonian frenzy excites the eye above all, so that it gains the power of vision. The painter, the sculptor, the epic poet are visionaries par excellence.”² A prime aspect of the Apollonian drive, therefore, is the capacity to dream up a vision of reality distinct in every way from observable reality. An initial idea for a painting, the selection of an appropriately-sized canvas, the choice of certain colors, textures and shadings, the realization that the painting still needs work, and finally the decisive judgment that the painting conforms to the artist’s conception of its appropriate form and is therefore finished; all these are the Apollonian drive at work. Dream, imagination, abstraction, observation, and judgment are its modes.

The Apollonian drive exists in the abstract, though it can provide an impetus for the Hermetic drive to act. The Apollonian artist must be able to focus his or her attention, either in a mode of detached observation of the concrete or in an mode of abstract thought and imagination. A curious—and for Nietzsche critically important—example of this mode of observation occurred in the spectator of Greek tragedy. “The right spectator,” Nietzsche argued, “must always remain conscious that he was viewing a work of art and not an empirical reality. But the tragic chorus of the Greeks is forced to recognize real beings in the figures on the stage.”³ Nietzsche is arguing that the detached mode of Apollonian observation is wrapped up with an awareness of the scope of the spectacle. There is an overly enforced distinction between the work of art on the stage and the larger empirical reality. In Greek tragedy, this distinction was blurred; in the actors, Nietzsche supposes, the Greek spectator recognized real—not imaginary—beings on the stage. In addition, most performances of Greek tragedy took place outdoors during daylight hours, with other parts of the city in full view during the performance. This setting for tragedy is in contrast to a modern performance, which typically occur indoors and in darkness. The action on stage or screen is brought to the forefront of consciousness for the modern spectator; one can barely even see the rest of the audience, much less the larger community around. Modern theater, in this way, reinforces the distinction between spectacle and everyday life. In Greece, Nietzsche argues, the Dionysian collapse of the boundary between stage and world was a fundamental aspect of tragedy; once this undifferentiating Dionysian perspective was lost, the power of tragedy was destroyed.

²Nietzsche, “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man,” *Twilight of the Idols*, §10, 519.

³Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §7, 57.

It is important to note that Nietzsche backed off from this condemnation of the Apollonian later in his career. Though he remained convinced of the importance of the Dionysian right up to the point of his mental collapse,⁴ he later began to see that the Apollonian drive in itself is of great value. As noted in the previous chapter, Kaufmann has argued that Nietzsche was able to synthesize the Apollonian and Dionysian drives into a his new conception of the will to power. Indeed, even the earlier work of Nietzsche provides clues to the importance of the Apollonian mode of detached observation. Returning to a passage from “The Dionysiac World View,” Nietzsche notes that, even in the Dionysian mode of intoxication,

The attendant of Dionysos must be in a state of intoxication and at the same time he must lie in ambush, observing himself from behind. Dionysiac art manifests itself, not in the alternation of clear-mindedness and intoxication, but in their co-existence.⁵

Dionysian experience, in other words, is impossible without the Apollonian drive. The two drives are co-existent and interdependent.

In addition, the Apollonian modes of consciousness are necessary for aesthetics. An aesthetic requires observation, reflection, analysis, judgment, and the ability to communicate one’s conclusions. In this sense, the ability to relate to others also comes from the Apollonian drive and its aesthetic ability of judgment:

The aesthetic state possesses a superabundance of means of communication, together with an extreme receptivity for stimuli and signs. It constitutes the high point of communication and transmission between living creatures—it is the source of languages.⁶

Note the *prima facie* similarity here between the Apollonian mode of communication and the Dionysian collapse of the *principium individuationis*. Communication in this manner, however, still occurs between two or more essentially individuated selves, while the Dionysian mode is the collapse of individuation entirely. Communication—and language—reinforces individuation; although two people can grow closer through a good conversation, this closeness is but a further indicator of separation. They are closely bonded, but not identical.

Individuation and Identity

The notion of individuation—or the bestowal of identity—is perhaps the prime function of the Apollonian drive. Once one is able to think in abstraction, one can begin to classify aspects of experience and the world. This ability to classify, fundamental to both philosophy and science, stems from Apollonian consciousness:

⁴Nietzsche’s letter written to Franz Overbeck on January 6, 1889, mere days after his collapse, was signed “Dionysus.” As an indicator of his new opponent for Dionysus, he signed another letter the day before, written to Peter Gast, as “The Crucified.”

⁵Nietzsche, “The Dionysiac World View,” 121.

⁶Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §809.

The Apollonian perspective on the external world interprets it as being composed of distinct things that can be ordered, classified, and differentiated from one another. The Apollonian view focuses on the form of a thing, the characteristic by which a thing can be enjoyed as beautiful, and also the characteristic by which a thing is distinguished from everything else. The external world seen from this perspective is a world of boundaries.⁷

This Apollonian perspective which orders the world in a mechanistic fashion allows one to account for a very wide range of experience. One of the problems that arises when this mode of consciousness dominates, however, is that the world becomes one's classification of the world; the map becomes the territory. One commits what Alfred North Whitehead has termed "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness," which "is merely the accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete."⁸ Under this error, one's dreamt image of the world becomes the world. There are aspects of existence that simply cannot be explained by isolating them from the rest of the universe, given a label, and classified into a mechanistic system of thought. At bottom, this is Nietzsche's argument against Apollonian hegemony. Ecstatic Dionysian experiences are not rational and do not lend themselves to this mode of analysis; in a sense they are explained by being explained away.

By the time Nietzsche wrote *The Gay Science* in 1882, he had (as previously stated) backed off from an outright condemnation of the Apollonian. Indeed, the Apollonian mode of attention, isolation, interpretation, and classification is a necessary component for appreciation of music. Even more strikingly, Nietzsche compares this mode of Apollonian appreciation of music to love:

One must first learn to love.— This is what happens to us in music: First one has to *learn to hear* a figure and melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and good will to *tolerate* it in spite of its strangeness, to be patient with its appearance and expression, and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are *used* to it, when we wait for it, when we sense that we should miss it if it were missing; and now it continues to compel and enchant us relentlessly until we have become its humble and enraptured lovers who desire nothing better from the world than it and only it.⁹

This mode of loving music that Nietzsche describes is Apollonian through and through, which is quite surprising given his earlier polemic against the Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. One must engage in the activity that Nietzsche regards with such suspicion in order to experience the very form of art that can reclaim the Dionysian. On the other hand, Nietzsche's description of love and music reinforces the notion that one can only be as Dionysian as one is Apollonian. In order to fully appreciate

⁷Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 26.

⁸Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 51.

⁹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §334.

a piece of music, one must first “detect,” “distinguish,” “isolate,” “delimit,” and “separate” it—in short, one must individuate it. Only then, and with “exertion” and “good will” can we finally learn to love it. In other words, before we can love something, we must first be clear about what exactly it is we are going to love. Nietzsche pushes the point further, in that this method of loving applies beyond mere music appreciation:

But that is what happens to us not only in music. That is how we have *learned to love* all things that we now love. In the end we are always rewarded for our good will, our patience, fairmindedness, and gentleness with what is strange; gradually, it sheds its veil and turns out to be a new and indescribable beauty. That is its *thanks* for our hospitality.¹⁰

This hospitality, this ability to welcome and attend to what is before us, is the source of beauty and a catalyst for love. Our “gentleness with what is strange” bears the fruit of widening our world; our perception of existence is enriched by our attentive contemplation. As such, one’s experience with music is an effective model for living.

Growth, therefore, is possible via the Apollonian experience. Indeed, growth requires the Apollonian experience. When we encounter something new, we are able to delimit it and integrate it into our conception of reality. This process of individuation and integration indicates growth. Indeed, Nietzsche believes that we should examine our very lives with this Apollonian, quasi-scientific eye: “We . . . who thirst after reason, are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment—hour after hour, day after day. We ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs.”¹¹ The Apollonian perspective is our source of identity. We observe, contemplate, and interpret our past experiences, and thus construct a self-identity. We compare our present identities with a self-ideal, and strive to rectify any shortcomings so that we can move ever closer to our self-ideal. The Apollonian is able to remember the past and dream the future. To have a clear sense of self, we must have an understanding of what differentiates us from the rest of the universe:

The self of the Apollonian perspective on the external world, in keeping with the dream analogy, stands at a distance from what it observes. One might conceive of oneself as related to the external world while assuming the Apollonian perspective; nevertheless, one understands oneself as separate from the things that one observes, just as these things are separate from each other. The Apollonian mode of self-understanding is essentially the same as the conception of one’s individual existence that is entailed by the Schopenhauerian *principium individuationis*.¹²

Self-understanding, which is a prerequisite for Nietzsche’s prescription of self-overcoming, can only be achieved in Apollonian consciousness. Therefore, Apollonian consciousness is a prerequisite for self-overcoming.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §319.

¹²Higgins, *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, 28.

To conclude, the Apollonian drive is the resting place of analytic thinking in general. It requires attention, and through this attention a unique kind of detached observation. It allows a thinker to identify and delimit novelty, so that the thinker can intelligently integrate this novelty into his or her worldview. As such, it is a prerequisite for growth, including growth of the self, which for Nietzsche is of primary importance. Given these conditions, it becomes clear that in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche is not lamenting the presence of the Apollonian, but rather the absence of the Dionysian. Indeed, both are necessary, as shown in the closing sentence of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “But now follow me to witness a tragedy, and sacrifice with me in the temple of both deities!”¹³

¹³Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §25, 144.

5

Musical Group Improvisation

Throughout this paper, I have used musical group improvisation as an example of the theories I have been developing. Improvised music is a particularly useful example of the metaphysics of art because it combines the creative act of composition with performance; they both occur simultaneously. The performance *is* the composition. In an improvisation, one gains insight into the entire creative process through analysis of a single act. A detailed analysis of improvisation, and particularly of group improvisation, will be the goal of this chapter.

Before an analysis of improvised music can be given, a clear distinction between improvised and non-improvised music must be made. At its most fundamental, a description of improvisation has to do with intentionality, or rather a lack thereof. A simplistic definition of improvisation would go something like this: “a spontaneous performance or composition in which the performer(s) had no preconceived notion of form or structure prior to the performance.” This definition, however, implies that there is such a thing as a non-improvised performance. This implication is problematic; a certain element of improvisation cannot be divorced from any given performance. Conversely, there is no such thing as a purely improvised performance; any musical performance is in some way delimited, even to the sonic capabilities of each instrument used in the performance. For example, a piano has 88 keys, each tuned to a specific pitch. Each tone produced by the improviser must be one of these 88, or a combination of these 88. An improviser has a certain amount of experience and/or training with their instrument; this training provides a context for the improvisation. There is the cultural and aesthetic tradition that, in the West, insists that there are but 12 musical notes and certain common rhythmic structures. Any Western musician will know that a root note, its third, and its fifth together constitute a major chord, while the same root and fifth with a flattened third together constitute a minor chord; even if not known in these theoretical terms, an experienced musician will recognize these harmonic relationships by ear. Major chords sound “happy,” minor chords sound “sad.” These characterizations are, of course, not inherent in the

harmonic structure of the tones; rather they are a result of centuries of cultural and aesthetic construction and consensus.

In a non-mechanical musical performance, improvisation will always, to some degree, play a part. Tempos can be modified from the original score; indeed it is impossible to maintain an exact tempo while playing a piece. Even if a score indicates a precise tempo, say 126 beats per minute (b.p.m.), it is nearly impossible for us to distinguish between 126 b.p.m. and 125.996 b.p.m. Indeed, in any performance, the tempo will always fluctuate in a certain measurable sense; in a mechanical performance, such as that by a drum machine, the perfect tempo often sounds “non-human” and unnaturally artificial to even an untrained listener. Additionally, many classical pieces do not specify a specific tempo but rather a range of tempos, such as *adagio*, *allegro*, etc. Some differences are even more subtle. As Carol S. Gould and Kenneth Keaton note:

a player will respond to a variety of elements in performance. While melodies and harmonies may be specified in advance, the precise realization of dynamics, rhythmic subtleties, timbre, intonation, and articulation arises at the moment of performance, and will vary (often considerably) from performance to performance, even when the piece is played by the same musician.¹

After establishing the non-repeatable nature of musical performances—which automatically makes science a poor methodology with which to study music, since science relies on controlled, repeatable experiments—Gould and Keaton look at some of the parameters of this variance:

The arranging of all these elements to create a coherent structure and performance is also a matter of the moment, and is influenced not only by the artist’s preparation, but also by her or his mood. One might have a feeling of conquest or victory, pain or loneliness, longing or despair, or perhaps pure joy. This may arise from the performer’s personal situation, or from her or his imagination or memory. This may be expressed in the timbre or mood the player elicits from her or his instrument.²

Fundamentally, Gould and Keaton are noting a connection between feeling and music; whatever the musicians are feeling at their performance will influence the delivery of music. Though I believe they are on target, the relationship between music and feeling needs further attention.

In 1854, Eduard Hanslick wrote that the connection between feeling and music was an error. His influential study, *On The Musically Beautiful*, reflected the 19th century preoccupation with scientific methodology. It remains one of the few—perhaps the only—full-length study of the metaphysics and aesthetics of music. Its primary insight is that music, and a musical aesthetic, can be derived scientifically

¹Gould and Keaton, “The Essential Role of Improvisation in Musical Performance,” 145.

²*Ibid.*, 146.

based on the phenomenon of the music itself, without regard to the psychological effect music has upon the listener. In this study, Hanslick argues that

musical aesthetics up until now has for the most part laboured under a serious methodological error, in that it occupies itself, not so much with careful investigation of that which is beautiful in music, but rather with giving an account of the feelings which take possession of us when we hear it.³

If Hanslick is correct, then there is no possibility of a reliable connection between feeling and music. To conflate the two is an “error.” Hanslick bases his argument and his aesthetic upon the scientific method: “a scientific knowledge of things, of which the effects are being felt in all areas of knowledge in our time, must necessarily also have an impact upon the investigation of beauty.”⁴ But as I noted earlier, music, and indeed any musical aesthetic, is not a good candidate for scientific study. The scientific method demands repeatable, reliable, controlled experiments, and no musical performance can be perfectly duplicated. Improvisation is also problematic for scientific study, since the very goal of improvisation is to create something spontaneous and new, not controlled and repeatable. It is in precisely this area where Hanslick’s argument for an objective musical aesthetic based on science and *not* feeling is weakest. Hanslick himself notes that the connection between feeling and music is strongest in an improvised performance:

The highest degree of immediacy in the musical revelation of mental states occurs where creation and performance coincide in a single act. This happens in free improvisation... Whoever has experienced at first hand this uncensored discourse, this reckless abandonment of the self to the grip of a powerful spell, will already know how love, jealousy, rapture and grief come roaring, undisguised yet unbidden, out of their night, to celebrate their feasts, sing their sagas, clash in battle, until their master the player recalls them, quietened, disquieting.⁵

So even Hanslick is enchanted by the powerful feelings induced by an improvised performance. As I have argued above, however, improvisation exists in *all* nonmechanical musical performances. Therefore, Hanslick’s argument undermines itself: since all musical performances contain improvisation, and since improvisation expresses a connection between music and feeling, one must conclude that all musical performances reveal a connection between feeling and music.

Given that all performances contain some degree of improvisation, we must clarify the varying role of improvisation in musical performance. American Jazz is one of the most well-known forms of Western music that places a high importance in spontaneity. Improvisation in jazz was most prevalent in its earlier roots and also

³Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 1.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1.

⁵*Ibid.*, 49.

in later, more experimental forms of jazz beginning with bebop in the 1950s. Interestingly enough, the emergence of the recording industry in the first half of the 20th century had a heavy impact on the role of improvisation in jazz. Since recording technology allows for an audible historical record of a performance, it is reasonable to assume that recording technology could have encouraged improvisation, since each performance, once recorded, would not be so precious; it would forever exist in posterity. Experimentation could have been encouraged, with “good” improvisations pressed into albums for public circulation and “bad” improvisations discarded. History shows, however, that the opposite turned out to be the case:

in the 1930s and 1940s, recordings may have paradoxically fostered the critical and commercial dominance of “swing” or “big band” styles that relied on large scale instrumentation. . . and used “through-composed” arrangements that downplayed improvisation but enabled commercial interests to exploit popular numbers with newfound efficiency. While big band arrangements almost always left room for improvised solos and “breaks” by individual performers, these were subordinated to the prearranged number as a whole, carefully “charted” and rehearsed in advance.⁶

The situation would be made worse if a player improvised a solo on a recording that became a hit; when performing, these players were then “obliged to repeat solos note for note because they had become record hits,”⁷ further stifling improvisation in popular music for the sake of reinforcing the popularity of the commodified recording. The original creative performance, in other words, is exploited for profit, and part of the exploitation is to suppress other instances of creativity, thereby increasing the economic value of the first performance.

These examples of the exploitation and homogenization of music by the recording and broadcasting industries is not unique; indeed, in the 70 years since the big band era, music has become arbitrarily confined to narrower and narrower categories. For evidence of this narrowness in popular music, one need only look to modern FM radio: a handful of broadcasting corporations own a majority of radio stations, at which the vast majority of songs and artists played on these stations are affiliated with the 5 major record distribution conglomerates.⁸ Each of these radio stations is confined to an extraordinarily narrow playlist. In nearly every town in America, there is a “country” station, a “top 40” station, an “oldies” station, a “classic rock” station, a “modern rock” station, an “easy-listening” station, an “album-oriented rock” station, an “urban/R&B” station, and an increasingly misnamed “alternative rock” station, all of which have at most a few dozen songs in their “rotation” at any given time.

A detailed analysis of this artistically stifling situation is beyond the scope of this paper, but I believe it is sufficient to point out that its root cause is a primary emphasis on profit, as opposed to artistic or aesthetic integrity. It is no accident that nearly every public, community, or college radio station, not motivated by this will

⁶Brown, “Feeling My Way,” 120.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸At this time, the five main record companies are Universal, Sony, Time-Warner, EMI, and BMG.

to profit, typically has a much wider variety of programming than any commercial station. Additionally, it explains the recording industry's distaste for newer technologies (such as the ill-fated Napster), which allow music fans to find extremely original, rare or unusual pieces of music that would never have been played on a commercial radio station.

This examination of the recording industry is fundamental to our contemporary view of the value of music—and particularly of improvised music—from the point of view of society as a whole. Several generations of homogeneity imposed by the recording and broadcasting industries have left audiences very jaded and unresponsive to the power of music. For many, music has become something that serves as background noise while housecleaning, not a means of opening oneself to ecstatic experiences that transform and enrich conceptions of self and community. Rather than being open to new forms of music, most people want to hear what they are already familiar with. DJs are replacing live bands, and many live bands that play at social gatherings (weddings, parties, etc.) play only cover tunes. These cover bands are, in turn, aesthetically judged by the sole parameter of how precisely they are able to reproduce recordings of popular songs. As a result, improvisation is often the last thing that many people want to hear. Put differently, a musical culture that emphasizes homogeneity tends to reduce the cultural and aesthetic value of improvisation.

To return to improvisation itself, it is difficult to identify the precise boundary between improvised music and non-improvised music. One difficulty, as previously stated, is that any musical performance demands some degree of improvisation. A musical score is not an absolute document; there is a wide variety of interpretive possibilities from which the performer(s) must choose. Additionally, in traditional modes of improvisation, such as the aforementioned big band subgenre of American jazz, the space for improvisation is constrained within a relatively narrow structure: often the improvising soloist plays a spontaneous variation of a central melodic motif of the tune over a predictable chord progression that is played by the rest of the band. So there is some freedom for the soloist, but the structure within which they play is predetermined and fixed.

A further mode of improvisation is what I have been calling “musical group improvisation,” where there is no musical score that the musicians follow. But even this (relative) freedom exists within limits, such as the capabilities of the instruments used and the cultural and stylistic tradition within which the musicians are working (or that they are consciously rejecting). Therefore, there is no absolute definition of “improvisation.” However, for the purposes of my discussion, the notion of improvisation must be delimited; I will therefore provide a definition, rooted in the pragmatic method and based on the intentionality of the performer(s). The pragmatic method conceives of truth as that which makes a tangible difference in people's lives. Therefore, my definition of improvisation is that which makes a difference in a musical performance. I will define musical group improvisation as *any musical performance in which the performer(s) do not intend to reproduce an interpretation of a previously existing song*. There are two immediate complications to this defini-

tion: first, what is a “song,” and second, what if a preexisting song is accidentally produced by the “improvising” musicians?

A precise definition of “song” has troubled legal experts of “intellectual property” for decades. But, legally speaking, a “song” is defined as, essentially, lyrics plus melody plus a harmonic structure (i.e., chord changes). This definition, I believe, will suffice for my discussion, as it allows a wide variety of interpretations and arrangements. For example, in the 1980s, Devo released their interpretation of the Rolling Stones’ “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” that sounded very different from the original. However, from an intellectual property point of view, this new interpretation does not qualify as a new song, because it used the same lyrics, melody, and chord progressions as the original. Thus, if the performers have a specific melody, lyric, and/or harmonic progression in mind, then they are not improvising. If they don’t, then they are improvising.

In regard to the second objection where supposedly “improvising” performers accidentally reproduce a previously conceived song, I propose that there are two possibilities. First, as they play, the performers will recognize that they have stumbled onto a known song. If they embrace this known song and continue it, then they are no longer improvising because they have, in the course of their performance, acquired an intentionality to reproduce a known work from memory. Secondly, if they do *not* recognize the sound as a previously completed “song,” then they have no intentionality to reproduce it. Therefore, they are still improvising, even though the result of that improvisation may be very similar to a known song. Finally, I would add that this scenario is highly complex. Musical structures tend to repeat themselves; one need only look at the 12-bar, I-IV-V blues progression that is the basis for thousands of songs. Given that music is a social phenomenon, there is likely to be a certain amount of imitation inherent in music. Improvisations, therefore, are likely to also be imitative to some degree.

But to further unpack the nature of an improvised, group musical performance, I return to the triadic model of the creative drive that I set forth in the first four sections of this paper. All artistic endeavors contain the Dionysian, Hermetic, and Apollonian drives to some extent; musical group improvisation is no exception. To illustrate the presence of these three drives, I now turn to a specific, recorded instance of improvisation. This instance involves a performance by a musical ensemble, of which I am a member, called Wheel. Wheel’s instrumentation is as follows: 2 guitars, keyboards, bass, drums, percussion, vocals. The core of the ensemble has, as of this writing, been playing together for over a year. We have spent most of that time learning how to improvise as a group. In that time, I have found it to be a wonderful well of instances available for analysis of the theories developed in this paper. Group musical improvisation is a good candidate for analyzing these three drives, because in such a context all three co-exist to a highly discernible degree. As opposed to more traditional modes of music, in which there is a separate composition stage and a performance stage, in an improvisation everything happens at once in real-time. Therefore, I supposed, I should set out to make a good recording of one of

these improvisations to use as an example of the analysis developed in this paper. In retrospect, this goal turned out to be more challenging than I ever imagined it would be.

Capturing Dionysus

DIONYSUS: I made a fool of him. He thought he'd tied me up,
but he never laid a hand on me—he only fed himself on hope.⁹

Since Wheel began to play together, I have been frustrated by our lack of ability to get a decent recording. Because I have a background in studio recording, I have very high standards about what constitutes a “good” recording. We have been able to capture very rough recordings of our improvisations, but none of them, I felt, were useful for anything beyond a historical record for our own use. These recordings were like rough sketches of germs of songs that we could use to later craft finished, arranged songs. Unfortunately, in the past year and a half we never got that far. We were so fascinated by the thrall of Dionysian improvisation that we wanted to stay there as much as possible. As a result, we haven't yet spent much time finishing songs in fixed, arranged forms. Given this overemphasis on the Dionysian drive, in retrospect it is no surprise that I have had such difficulty in procuring a good recording. In the past year and a half, there have been many, many technical glitches in my attempts to get a good recording. I literally had equipment malfunction, just as I had set up and was about to record, on at least three occasions. Dionysus was fated, it seemed, to remain ever-elusive.

To make matters even more frustrating, we completely missed a wonderful chance to try to capture the Dionysian drive in a recording. We had a gig playing the Witches' Masquerade Ball at USM on October 26th. At this show, we had an extra percussionist sit in with us, filling out the foundation of our sound—the rhythm—tremendously. Drums have a wonderful way of producing primal energy; most of the time, dancers respond to the drums. There were indeed many dancers in the crowd, who had been warmed up by prerecorded dance music before our set began. Like many musicians, we feed off the energy contributed by the dancers. We play better when people are responding to our music. That night, the energy flow between the new percussionist and our regular drummer was unmistakable. As the last prerecorded song was ending—a song which emphasized a very primal style of drumming—the two of them began drumming along to the CD. That served as the launching point, and the rest of us began to play along as the CD faded out. Almost instantly, everyone was entrained: the drummers, the rest of the musicians, the sound engineer, the dancers. This entrainment created a synergy, an energy flow, stronger than anything I'd felt in a long time. All of us contributed to this energy flow. It was truly a community experience; our attention was collectively focused on one thing: the groove.

⁹Euripides, *Bacchae*, 616-617.

In the history of Wheel, it seemed like everything had come together for the first time. We played well, we listened and responded to one another as we played, and we had more energy than usual to drive us, since there was a room full of people dancing. We had certainly had similar powerful moments when playing alone, but without the extra energy and attention provided by the dancers and percussionist. There was just one problem: the show didn't get recorded. We had arranged to record it by borrowing a portable DAT recorder. Additionally, one of the band members worked at WMPG and could easily have borrowed a recorder. Had any one of four of us remembered to hook up the recorder, that night would have been recorded. But Dionysus, as it was shown to be yet again, is not so easily captured.

“Tip Of My Tongue”

After the Witches' Ball performance did not get recorded, I knew that I was running out of time. Thankfully, the USM School of Music graciously allowed me to make use of their recording facilities on short notice. Going in, we knew that our sole purpose was to procure a recording, which is by nature a predominantly Apollonian task that doesn't lend itself so well to our overly Dionysian style of music. We had the same instrumentation as the show at the Witches' Ball, but the lack of a crowd, combined with the fact that we hadn't played together in the three weeks since, meant that there was far less energy flowing in the room. Additionally, because I was responsible for the technical side of making the recording, it was difficult for me to concentrate on playing music. In my experience working in a studio, I have on numerous occasions observed the adverse effect a microphone has on performance; it's as if the performers know that they're being observed, and they don't open up to the energy flow as easily. Indeed it is quite possible that one reason for the success of the Witches' Ball show is that we *weren't* recording. Recording, as an Apollonian form of observation, tends to emphasize individuation and therefore tends to thwart Dionysian energy flow and entrainment. Our recording, I believe, reflects this phenomenon. On one hand, I got what I needed: a sonically clean recording of one of our improvisations. On the other hand, our performance that night was not our best. To my ears, it sounds constrained, as if we were playing it safe. We stuck to a very simple, predictable, bluesy chord progression. However, despite my aesthetic dissatisfaction with it, “Tip of my Tongue” will suffice as an example for this overall analysis.

The recording begins with a fade in during a a bit of sonic chaos, with the drums playing and other musicians noodling on their instruments. No one is entrained, and there is little or no evidence of any artistic drive. At 0:17 in the recording, the rhythm guitarist begins a simple, 2-bar chord progression in the key of Gm: Gm7 - C7 - Bb7 - D7. This newly introduced chord progression is an example of the Hermetic drive: it represents an instance of creation distinct from any preexisting structure (in this case there was no structure). In philosophical terms, this riff is a proposition of a particular structure. By 0:30, the other musicians have recognized that there is a pattern repeating itself; everyone stopped their noodling in order to recognize the

pattern. Listening in this way is where the Apollonian drive is active; it requires a kind of attention, a kind of openness to the proposition presented. This receptivity and analysis occurs quickly; before the end of the second repetition of the pattern all the musicians are receptive to it.

By the fourth repetition of the short pattern, the musicians have adopted this simple harmonic structure as the foundation of the improvisation that follows. At the end of the fourth repetition, the drummer plays a fill that serves as a cue to emphasize the first downbeat of the fifth repetition. At 0:42, everyone is playing within the structure. We all understand it, and after a few more repetitions, we are comfortable with it and have entrained together. At 2:02, the singer begins his lyrics with a spontaneous verse:

Well I was about to say something to you
But I forget what it was
I was about to share something with you
But I forget because
It slipped my mind, just like that
It slipped my mind, just like that

The simple musical structure of this improvisation lends itself to a simple rhyme scheme, in this case A - B - A - B - C - C. This verse occurs over 8 repetitions of the main chord structure, thus imposing a larger structure upon the improvisation. In other words, eight repetitions of the 2-bar chord progression constitutes a single verse of 16 bars. After the first verse, there are four repetitions of the chord progression—8 bars—where the singer lays out, at which point the keyboard player steps up and plays a short solo over the same repeating chord progression.

At the end of the keyboard solo, the singer comes in with a chorus:

Right at the tip of my tongue
Right at the tip of my tongue
I had something, something profound and it's gone
It's gone

This time, the singer followed the same 8-bar structure of the keyboard solo, rather than the 16-bar structure of the first verse. After this shorter verse, the keyboard and the lead guitar trade melodic riffs for four measures, when there is another verse:

Right on the top of my head
Right on the top of my head
I was about to say it, then it fled
It was right on the top of my head

Each of these two smaller verses, which are four repetitions of the 2-bar chord progression, have simpler schemes where each line rhymes. Also, one line is repeated at least once in each verse.

Following those two verses, there are six repetitions of the chord progression, in which the keyboard and the lead guitar again play melodic embellishments of the main chord progression. The singer then adds another chorus:

Right at the tip of my tongue
Right at the tip of my tongue
All the things that I left unsung
Because they're trapped on the tip of my tongue

This verse has the same structure as the previous verse, with three repetitions of the same line at lines one, two, and four supplementing a development of the main lyrical idea in line three. In the previous verse, he speaks of a present idea not easily expressed by language ("I was about to say it, then it fled"), while in this verse he laments that it has happened more than once ("all the things that I've left unsaid/Because they're trapped on the tip of my tongue").

Immediately after this verse, there is another quatrain where the lead guitar plays a little melody line with the singer repeating the main lyrical hook ("the tip of my tongue") in the background. Then he repeats the previous chorus, but with an inverted structure, thus forming a bridge:

All the songs that I left unsung
All the songs that I left unsung
All the songs that I left unsung
Because they're right at the tip of my tongue

Following this verse is another lead guitar/keyboard solo that lasts for 16 bars. After the solo is a new verse, with a different (A - A - B - B) rhyme scheme:

Well I know I have something important to say
Then all the words, they just seemed to fly away
I had something profound that I wished to impart
But I think I am finished before I start

This verse is followed by another repetition of the main lyrical theme with no break between:

It was right on the tip of my tongue
It was right on the tip of my tongue
All the songs that I left unsung
They were all on the tip of my tongue
On the tip of my tongue

By this time, 7:56, nearly six minutes have passed since the first sung verse. The musicians continue playing for just over a minute, repeating the main theme with several melodic embellishments. At 9:04, the bass drops out, and by 9:45 everyone has stopped playing.

Metaphysically speaking, what has happened here? How did the three artistic drives show themselves? Any act of creation must begin with the Hermetic drive, and this improvisation is no exception. It began when it took on a coherent structure, occurring at 0:17 when the rhythm guitarist first asserted the 2-bar chord progression that repeated for the rest of the song, which took nearly $9\frac{1}{2}$ minutes to unfold. On one hand, it is possible that one simple, 2-bar chord progression repeated for over nine minutes would be extremely boring. However, given that this song was improvised, a simple, repetitive structure such as this one is necessary. One's intellect—the Apollonian artistic drive—must be able to easily grasp the form and structure of the groove to an extent that the players do not spend all their attention analyzing a complex groove. If the players never get beyond this sort of analysis, then they will never be able to let go enough to entrain, allowing the Dionysian drive to enter the improvisation. The threshold of complexity will, of course, vary for each improviser at any given time; more accomplished musicians will be able to recognize and assimilate more complex patterns more quickly. The act of recognition is a function of the Apollonian drive; once the groove is assimilated, the Apollonian drive falls away to be replaced, hopefully, by the Dionysian drive. Once the musicians are entrained, they will continue in this Dionysian mode, repeating the musical pattern until something new comes along.

Inevitably, one of the musicians will introduce a novel sound over the groove; this novelty is where the Hermetic drive comes back in. Once a new element has been introduced, the other musicians kick into the Apollonian drive again until they can recognize and assimilate this new element in the musical pattern, then returning to the Dionysian state. Sometimes, this process is seamless and each drive flows in and out of each other without interruption. Other times, the passage isn't as smooth. For example, in the recording, the rhythm guitarist introduced the main chord progression that constitutes the structure of the improvisation. As such, he knew the pattern as well as anyone; he created it, after all. For the first minute or two, all of us became entrained to that pattern. However, when the singer began the first verse, he introduced a complex novelty—language—into the situation. In the recording, one can hear a small glitch in the rhythm guitarist's playing just as the singing begins. This glitch occurred as he was pulled out of a Dionysian state of entrainment and forced into an Apollonian state of analysis when he was presented with a complex novelty—the sung language of the first verse. Of course, he quickly recovered and fell back into the groove, entraining with the rest of the musicians. There are several more such glitches in the recording as the musicians shifted between the different modes.

Musical group improvisation, like any other form of creation, requires the Dionysian, the Hermetic, and the Apollonian. But unlike other forms of creation, musical group improvisation needs all the drives to be in relative balance with one another. Not one of them can be overly dominant for too long. Without the Hermetic drive, nothing would have happened in the recording. No one would have played anything; the structure introduced by the rhythm guitarist would never have appeared. Without

the Dionysian drive, there would be no continuity in the improvisation. There would be nothing but sonic chaos if the musicians hadn't been able to lock together in a coherent, entrained groove. And without the Apollonian drive, the musicians wouldn't have been able to comprehend the structures delimiting the improvisation. Each drive is necessary, but not sufficient for creation to occur.

The three artistic drives have a triadic relationship; each one mediates the other two. For example, the Apollonian drive allows the group to assimilate the novelty created by the Hermetic drive into the entrainment and cohesion of the Dionysian drive. Similarly, the Hermetic drive can extract novelty from the unity of the Dionysian drive, giving the Apollonian drive a proposition to analyze. Finally, the Dionysian drive represents the goal of a musical group improvisation; the players want to entrain with one another. However, simple entrainment is not enough. There must be a certain amount of complexity in the entrainment. In this way, the Dionysian mediates the Hermetic and Apollonian drives. Novelty is introduced via the Hermetic drive, and this novelty is understood via the analysis of the Apollonian drive. Thus higher and higher complexities are attained within the Dionysian drive, which if integrated into entrainment, increase the intensity of the energy flow that accompanies the Dionysian state. Taken together, this metaphysical system provides a source for an aesthetic system from which to judge group music improvisation.

An Aesthetic Model For Musical Group Improvisation

The very notion of creating an aesthetic for an improvised piece of music creates a metaphysical problem, in that the distinction between improvised music and non-improvised music is undermined. Earlier, I defined improvised music as having to do with intentionality—for a piece to be improvised, the performers must not have intended to reproduce a previously-known song. However, in order to craft an aesthetic judgment of an improvisation, the improvisation must be treated as a finished, coherent piece of music. The aesthetician must work with a representation of that piece of music, either from memory, from notes written during the performance, or from a recording of the improvisation. A recording provides a record of a performance; in a sense, a recording fixes a spontaneous process of improvisation into a finished, coherent musical product that can be judged aesthetically. So we must be more clear—in providing an aesthetic for improvised music, are we judging the performance itself in terms of the process of spontaneous music-making, or are we judging the finished product of the improvisation in its entirety? This fundamental question reinforces the importance of the distinction between an improvised performance and a non-improvised performance, based on the intentionality of the musicians.

The “intentional fallacy” articulated by 20th century critical theorists is worth investigating here. Essentially, the intentional fallacy claims that whatever was in the mind of an author concerning his or her work is irrelevant to subsequent analysis or interpretation of that piece of literature. As Andy Hamilton noted, some have asserted that the intentional fallacy also applies to an improvised per-

formance; he notes “the formalistic claim that there is an ‘intentional fallacy’ concerning improvisation—reminiscent of the suggestion that extraneous knowledge of authorial intention is irrelevant to critical evaluation.”¹⁰ If this claim were true, then it would undermine even my definition of improvisation. But I believe it falls short, primarily because music is not text. With a text, the author must craft language, which will have specific meanings and connotations. Each word signifies something else. Musical tones, however, do not have specific, referent meanings attached to them. A musical tone is not a signifier in the same way that a word is. The word “mug” stands for this white, cup-like object with a handle and a chip on the rim that holds the coffee I am presently drinking. A G# tone, however, has no such specific meaning attached to it. Therefore, when an author writes a poem, he or she is weaving together words, which are at least partially abstract representations of objects or ideas and their relations. On the other hand, music—and particularly improvised music—is of *presentational* character. No one is interested in the act of an author typing a novel; only the produced novel itself is of interest.

There are, of course, uses of language in which this generalization begins to break down. Particularly poetry, as Heidegger and others have argued, transcends normal semiotic properties of ordinary language. While it is certainly true that poetry has a much wider range of interpretive possibilities than a VCR manual, I still maintain that the interpretive possibilities for a poem are narrower than that of a piece of music. For instance, to interpret “love is a rose,” one must still know what “love” means, and what a “rose” is. The highest variability in this example is the relationship between love and rose. Since love obviously is not a rose, one must develop an alternative interpretation of the metaphor. But the interpretation will involve some conception of “love,” some conception of “rose,” and some conception of the relationship between the two. Note that interpretations of the poem are delimited by the text itself—whether or not there is anything outside the text, the text gives us plenty to work with. We are mostly interested in the product—the poem itself—rather than the process of composing the poem. Musical improvisation, on the other hand, is in itself of aesthetic interest, as is the product of improvisation—which is a representation of the act of improvisation. Therefore, the intent of the improviser is of interest to us, though I do concede that intentionality is irrelevant to an aesthetic judgment of the product of improvisation, which as a product is not ontologically different from any other musical work.

In a recent issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Lee B. Brown articulates three very useful parameters of improvisation: “situation,” “forced choice,” and “no script.” Situation involves the difference between the improviser and the composer: “while the composer can erase moves subsequent to the gambit and redo them, the . . . improviser cannot do so. He can only build upon the steps he has just taken. This is what I mean by referring to the improviser’s *situation*.” Similarly, forced choice means that the improviser must choose *now*: “composers are allowed to take time out, but the improviser must plunge ahead. He must go on to do *some-*

¹⁰Hamilton, “The Art of Improvisation,” 178.

thing.” Finally, “no script” indicates that the improviser has a much wider range of options from which to choose: “the work-performer is guided in the placement of the notes by the highly specific directions provided by the scores. In dealing with his options, the improviser cannot, qua improviser, rely upon such directives.” Brown then summarizes these parameters:

Putting these together, the improviser is continuously faced with decisions that are forced upon him, not prescribed for him, and unrevisable once made. He finds himself in a feedback loop. He must produce on-the-spot responses to something unalterable, namely, the music already laid down; and his responses continually force further choices.¹¹

Note that Brown’s characterization of improvisation has strong resonances with basic tenets of existentialist theory: the improviser finds himself thrown into a situation that is partially of his own devising and partially not (facticity), he must choose how to respond to this continuously unfolding situation (will), and there is a wide range of possible choices, yielding a highly ambiguous mode of experience. Brown notes this similarity to existentialism, but then summarily rejects it:

As it stands, our bald characterization gives a picture of the improviser as an existential hero taking irrational leaps into darkness. This is a perspective to be avoided, not only because it is unwarranted, but also because its implausibility feeds the opposite, equally unwarranted, point of view—cynicism about the process.¹²

This rejection, I believe, is hasty. Brown does not explain why this perspective is “unwarranted” or “implausible.” Granted, decisions made while improvising music do not carry the same existential weight as fundamental life-choices, but they do follow a very similar pattern. In that sense, one could argue that improvising music is a good metaphysical model for human existence as a whole, a possibility to which I will return in the next section.

Brown continues his analysis, reviewing and developing an “aesthetics of imperfection,” contrasted with the more traditional “aesthetics of perfection.” The aesthetics of imperfection emphasizes process over product, instance over form. In Hamilton’s words, “the aesthetics of imperfection . . . focuses on the moment or event of the performance, while its rival emphasizes the timelessness of the work.”¹³ The aesthetics of imperfection, therefore, is not exclusively concerned with the result as a perfected object. The way in which it came to be is also of aesthetic interest. As Brown argues,

with improvised music, . . . I obviously have an interest in how the musical line will proceed. However, I am also interested in the player’s activity itself. I am interested in his on-the-spot gambits and responses. If things

¹¹Brown, “Feeling My Way,” 114.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Hamilton, “The Art of Improvisation,” 170.

are going well, I wonder if he can sustain the level. If he takes risks that get him into trouble, I worry about how he will deal with it. If he pulls the fat out of the fire, I applaud. My overall interest in such music is predicated on both aspects of it—the quality of the result *and* the adventurous character of the actions that generate it.¹⁴

This quality ends/adventurous means model is useful in the context of most jazz, where a soloist improvises over a more tightly structured, premeditated musical form played by the rhythm section. In my own terms, it accounts for the Apollonian drive (quality ends) and the Hermetic drive (adventurous means). However, this model is inadequate when applied to collective group improvisation. Without the presence of a fixed score—a set of instructions that, if followed, will guarantee an artificially imposed unity among the players—one must account for the unity and coherence between collectively improvising players. In short, this model neglects the Dionysian drive. It neglects the flow state that can come about in group improvisation. Hamilton does touch upon this “mystical” element: “Improvisation makes the performer alive in the moment; it brings one to a state of alertness, even what Ian Carr in his biography of Keith Jarrett has called ‘the state of grace.’ This state is enhanced in a group situation of interactive empathy.”¹⁵ But both Brown’s and Hamilton’s aesthetic of imperfection neglect this Dionysian element crucial to group improvisation.

To correct this shortcoming, and to give a fuller aesthetic account of group improvisation, one must include all three creative drives I have been outlining in this paper. The Apollonian drive has traditionally been the primary source of aesthetic analysis. Indeed, the very act of creating an aesthetic interpretation of a work of art is a largely Apollonian task. This is the area of the “aesthetics of perfection.” Additionally, the “aesthetics of imperfection” articulated by Brown and Hamilton accounts for the creative act itself, or the Hermetic drive. But we must also account for the Dionysian drive, which would measure how tightly interlocked the improvising musicians are. In short, there are three parameters I would include in this aesthetic system: unity, novelty, and quality. These parameters constantly push and pull against each other in an improvisation; for example, once entrained into a groove, there will be a high degree of Dionysian unity. The more unity that exists between the performers, the better. However, if there is only unity, then the improvisation will be very boring and predictable. Therefore, the Hermetic drive must introduce novelty, which happens when one of the musicians plays a new phrase in contrast with the pattern of the groove. The more novelty there is in the improvisation, the better. Again, this must be balanced with the entrained unity of the Dionysian state. In short, the musicians must be able to quickly shift between the phases; when a new phrase is introduced, how quickly is it assimilated into the groove? Is the Apollonian drive of attention, analysis, individuation, and integration able to deal with the novelty without losing the Dionysian entrainment? The novel phrase will change the

¹⁴Brown, “Feeling My Way,” 121.

¹⁵Hamilton, “The Art of Improvisation,” 181.

groove; how well is the novelty integrated into the larger whole? Does it allow the groove to grow in interesting and provocative ways? Finally, how does the product of the improvisation measure up to traditional, composed pieces of music? Most likely, an improvisation will not have the same degree of coherence as a carefully crafted score. However, the closer the musicians can get to this ideal, the better. In short, all three artistic drives must be present, and the stronger the presence of each drive, the better the improvisation.

This new aesthetic requires a different kind of audience. They must be sympathetic to the creative process inherent in the improvisation, as well as the end product. If the audience comes to a performance expecting to hear reproductions of songs on the band's albums, then they are likely to be disappointed with the end product. However, if the audience is aware that what they are hearing is a unique event, they are likely to be more sympathetic and will appreciate the music to a higher degree. In the modern era, such audiences have existed primarily as fringe subcultures, outside mainstream society. Perhaps the most famous example is the Deadhead community, who would religiously follow the Grateful Dead night after night with an eye toward the novelty of what the band would create each night. Indeed, this sympathy toward the creative moment is another facet of the Dionysian drive. It was exhibited when the dancers responded to our improvisation at the Witches' Ball. If the audience is attuned to this energy flow of the creative moment, then they can become part of the process, part of the energy flow itself, because the musicians will respond to the audience, just as the audience responds to the musicians.

This mode of listening and appreciation is becoming more and more common in modern music, particularly in the "jam band" genre. With the commercial success of jam bands, fringe subcultures such as the Deadheads are slowly becoming large enough that they are influencing mainstream society. For example, in a recent issue of *Rolling Stone*, Stewart Copeland discusses how he and his band, Oysterhead, are going to approach their shows. Oysterhead includes guitarist Trey Anastasio, the former guitarist for Phish. Phish is a well-known jam band, famous for their spontaneous and daring improvisations on stage. Many Phish fans, because of Anastasio's involvement, are also Oysterhead fans, which Copeland regards as a positive:

"There will be a lot of indulgences," Copeland says. "That's how we get to the cool stuff. What I like about Phish's audience is that they're ready for that. They don't mind train wrecks. And there will be some, because we're definitely gonna try some shit."¹⁶

In other words, Copeland is happy that he will have an audience sympathetic to the spontaneous process of improvisation. In one sense, this style of music is "indulgent," and can lead to "train wrecks." These train wrecks are part of the risk involved with improvisation. On the other hand, this risk is necessary to get to the "cool stuff" where the musicians and audience entrain with a high degree of energy flow, resulting in intense and vivid experiences. The musicians and fans of Wheel, Oysterhead,

¹⁶"Random Notes," *Rolling Stone* 883/884, Dec. 6-13 2001, 32.

Phish, The Grateful Dead, and many other bands who adopt this aesthetic attitude toward music are indeed chasing the vivid event.

Live Life Like A Song

With this aesthetic based on the three creative drives in mind, I would like to return to the notion of the improviser as an “existential hero.” Because it involves many of the same patterns as existential life choices, I believe that improvised music is a good model—a simulation, if you will—of life. Indeed, if Nietzsche’s famous assertion that “it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*”¹⁷ is correct, then a good life aesthetic must be developed in order to justify life. Since living is choosing, and choice is a creative act, it follows that the three drives I have developed in this paper are constantly at work as we live our lives. We have our identity, which is based on our actions up to the present moment. Identity is an interpretation, and is therefore an Apollonian act. In order to grow, we must strive beyond our static identity and sail into uncharted territory where there is no clearly defined self. We must interact with a larger environment. This self-overcoming, this transcending of the prior self into an open-ended environment of possibility, is a Dionysian act. And finally, when we are in these moments, we must choose, which is to create. This action, this choosing, is the Hermetic drive at work. The life aesthetic based on these three drives is identical in form to the aesthetic for improvised music: how well are we entrained with our environment? How well do we live in the moment? The sense of unity in these Dionysian experiences give intensity to our lives. How well do we choose? How well do we get our hands dirty in life and act? The sense of novelty in these Hermetic experiences give growth to our lives, so that we do not stagnate as individuals. And finally, how often did we choose and act wisely? What have we learned from our previous choices? How have our past actions shaped our identity? The sense of quality revealed in the insights of Apollonian experience strengthen our sense of self. The stronger these three drives, and the more coherently they pass from one to the other, the stronger the self.

To illustrate this process of personal growth, and to close out this paper, I return to a passage from Dewey’s *Art As Experience*:

Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance. And in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by the temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more

¹⁷Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, §5, 52.

extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.¹⁸

Life, then, is a constant process of navigation involving all three creative drives. We entrain with our environment, we fall out of step with it, and we recover unison with it. Reflection on these constantly unfolding processes allows us to grow, assuming we survive the transition. Indeed, in dealing with these troublesome transitions between entrainment and discontinuity, “what does not destroy [us] makes [us] stronger.”¹⁹ The “existential hero” finds himself in the same metaphysical processes as the improvising musician—she is situated, she must choose, and her choices, once made, are not revisable.

This connection between life and song did not go unnoticed by Nietzsche: in *Zarathustra*, which is Nietzsche’s parable of the existential hero seeking the *Übermensch*, many of the most powerful insights are revealed in songs. “The Night Song” proclaims that “my soul is the song of a lover.”²⁰ “The Dancing Song” shows Zarathustra looking into the “unfathomable” eyes of life itself. “The Tomb Song” recalls his “dearest friends among the dead,” the Dionysian experiences of his youth. “The Other Dancing Song” celebrates the “deep, deep eternity” of eternal recurrence. “The Seven Seals (Or: The Yes and Amen Song)” is where Zarathustra first fully embraces the doctrine of eternal recurrence: “For I love you, O eternity!” “The Song of Melancholy” is a lament that Zarathustra has few companions on his quest for the *Übermensch*; even the higher men “smell bad.” Finally, “The Drunken Song” is where Zarathustra fully affirms all of life’s joys and woes. At this realization, Zarathustra sings that “just now my world became perfect.” In short, all of Nietzsche’s main motifs—one’s soul is the song of a lover of life, the need to look life in the eye, the necessity of the Dionysian, eternal recurrence, ultimate affirmation of life with all its joys and woes (*amor fati*)—are revealed to us in song. As a lover of music, and a lover of life, Nietzsche’s method can certainly be no accident. From the man who “would only believe in a God who could dance” and for whom “without music, life would be an error,”²¹ it is clear that one should live life like a song.

¹⁸Dewey, “The Live Creature,” 535.

¹⁹Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 467.

²⁰Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 219.

²¹Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 471.

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