

The Agonist

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Cultures Of The Muses

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1.1 Disturbing effects of the enlightenment tradition

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of ‘world history’—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die. One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature.¹

By these gloomy thoughts Nietzsche famously opens his text *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* in which the human race appears as clever animals haunted by the manic delusion to be the center of the world—as if the world would pivot around man. The same hyper illusion a mosquito has when it “floats through the air [...], feeling within itself the flying center of the world.”²

¹ “In irgendeinem abgelegenen Winkel des in zahllosen Sonnensystemen flimmernd ausgegossenen Weltalls gab es einmal ein Gestirn, auf dem kluge Thiere das Erkennen erfanden. Es war die hochmüthigste und verlogenste Minute der, Weltgeschichte’: aber doch nur eine Minute. Nach wenigen Athemzügen der Natur erstarrte das Gestirn, und die klugen Thiere mussten sterben. So könnte Jemand eine Fabel erfinden und würde doch nicht genügend illustriert haben, wie kläglich, wie schattenhaft und flüchtig, wie zwecklos und beliebig sich der menschliche Intellekt innerhalb der Natur ausnimmt;” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne*, Collected Works, Kritische Studienausgabe Volume 1, Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Eds.) (München/Berlin/New York, DTV de Gruyter: 1980): 875. Cited as KSA by volume, section and page number.

² “...als ob die Angeln der Welt sich in ihm [um ihn herum] drehten.” Einer Mücke gleich, die mit demselben Pathos” durch die Luft schwimmt und in sich das fliegende Centrum der Welt fühlt.” Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.1, §1, 875.

In this somber fable—emphasizing the delusional character of life and the human intellect in particular—Nietzsche posits himself in direct opposition to most philosophers of his time: to Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx and others, who all prized reason as a faculty, precisely capable of overcoming the illusionary nature of life. Therefore, all of them embraced enlightenment as “man's release from his self-incurred tutelage”³ in asking us to use reason in order to overcome the irrational delusions of life. “*Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own reason!”⁴ This sentence was the famous motto of enlightenment formulated by Kant in his text “What is Enlightenment?” in 1784.—a slogan addressing itself to each one of us in asking us to get rid of the accidental nature in men.

To realize such a government of reason, each single member of human society is called to participate in the process of freeing us from irrational myths by the use of everyone's mind. It is obvious that this general call is the birth of modern citizenship and civil societies. A call, directed not only towards society in general but towards each member of it personally: singular/plural, to quote the title of a book written by Jean-Luc Nancy.⁵

Since this very moment, wherever a crime against the dignity of man takes place, every mature member of such an “enlightened” society is called to denounce it, stand up against it in public and resist it independently of the cause of such a violation of human right; either it should be the act of an inhuman God, of an unjust state or the act of a citizen who violates the dignity of man while treating others inhumanly, in inappropriate ways.

Reflecting this wise definition of man, one starts to question—to be more precise—we “Good Europeans” start to question ourselves. “What should be wrong with this idea?

³ “Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit.” Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Stuttgart, Reclam Verlag: 1974): p. 9.

⁴ “*Sapere aude!* Habe Mut dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.” Immanuel Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Stuttgart, Reclam Verlag: 1974), p. 9.

⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Être singulier pluriel* (Paris, Éditions Galilée: 1996). English Edition: *Being Singular Plural*, tr. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford California, Stanford University Press: 2000).

Could one imagine even any nobler, more accurate, more advanced, more human picture of man, anything greater in dignity than this humanistic concept of man, brought forward and enforced most powerfully by enlightenment philosophers? Can there be anything greater than this?—: being addressed by others as a free person?—as someone being able to posit one’s own goals rationally in order to make them true and become a reality? What should be wrong with this modern picture of man? Is it not pure madness to call this “universal truth” a myth, a tragic moment in world history, like Nietzsche does in his gloomy fable, when he calls the invention of the human intellect “the highest and most mendacious minute of ‘world history’?”

1.2 The restless being of modernity

Let us hear what Nietzsche himself has to say against these far reaching accusations. Does he actually have a strong counter argument against this picture of man, drawn by enlightenment philosophers?

I read the following passage, “On Modern restlessness,” in *Human All Too Human. A Book For Free Spirits*, as such a strong counter argument.

On modern restlessness.—The farther West one goes, the greater modern agitation becomes; so that to Americans the inhabitants of Europe appear on the whole to be peace-loving, contented beings, while in fact they too fly about pell-mell, like bees and wasps. *This agitation is becoming so great that the higher culture can no longer allow its fruits to ripen; it is as if the seasons were following each other too quickly. From lack of rest, our civilization is ending in a new barbarism. Never have the active, which is to say the restless, people been prized more.* Therefore, one of the necessary correctives that must be applied to the character of humanity is a massive strengthening of the contemplative element. And every individual who is calm and steady in his heart and head, already has the right to believe that he possesses not only a good temperament,

but also a generally useful virtue, and that in preserving this virtue, he is even fulfilling a higher duty.”⁶ [emphasis added]

Nietzsche’s answer concerning the threat, inherently at work in the picture of man drawn by the myth of modernity, is clear and distinct at this point. As long as the dignity of man lies only in man’s capacity to make something out of his own life, this well-known picture of the self-made-man, the self-made-woman, will produce cultural conditions in which the value of the contemplative part of life will finally be ruined. The authority of this mystical “calling,” powerfully enforced by the enlightenment tradition, thus is not only an act that releases man from “self-incurred tutelage,” but will be the beginning of a tragic moment in world history as well to Nietzsche, in which the human race starts to be driven, captured, and damned precisely by this discourse of modernity to work all day long without having leisure and idleness anymore.—a new form of modern slavery, which finally will end up in an “enlightened” society inhabiting the human figure of “workers” only: subjects, apparently capable of producing themselves out of themselves, either in a solipsistic way, like in modern liberal societies, or in a communitarian way, like in modern socialistic societies, in which the entire human race assumes the form of a worldwide labor force capable of shaping the material world that surrounds it according to the rational needs of the human race.

Taking all this into consideration, Nietzsche’s critique of modernity obviously has nothing to do with pessimism, fatalism, or resignation⁷ but with his appreciation of the

⁶ “*Die Moderne Unruhe*—Nach dem Westen zu wird die moderne Bewegtheit immer größer, so daß den Amerikanern die Bewohner Europas insgesamt sich als ruheliebende und genießende Wesen darstellen, während diese doch selbst wie Bienen und Wespen durcheinander fliegen. Diese Bewegtheit wird so groß, daß die höhere Kultur ihre Früchte nicht mehr zeitigen kann; es ist, als ob die Jahreszeiten zu rasch aufeinander folgten. Aus Mangel an Ruhe läuft unsere Zivilisation in eine neue Barbarei aus. Zu keiner Zeit haben die Tätigen, das heißt die Ruhelosen, mehr gegolten. Es gehört deshalb zu den notwendigen Korrekturen, welche man am Charakter der Menschheit vornehmen muss, das beschauliche Element in großem Maße zu verstärken.” Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.2, §285, 232.

⁷ Concerning the question of “re-signation” as the highest expression of human lives far from any fatalism see: Theodor W. Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft II “Resignation”* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag: 2003): pp. 794-803 and Arno Böhler, *Politiken der Re-Signation: Derrida—Adorno*, in: Eva

contemplative, receptive aspects of life as virtues, generally more useful for the sake of a higher culture than the so called active parts of life, which, on the contrary, are always close to subtle forms of barbarism to him.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche repeats the argument that the human race needs leisure and idleness rather than a worldwide globalization of the figure of the “busy men” in order to survive in the literal German meaning of the word “survival”: *über-leben*.⁸ Because *überleben*, *survival*, means more than just following one’s own “will to live” (*conatus*) to Nietzsche. It rather executes a “will to power,” a step beyond the status quo of one’s life in order to stretch, extend and cultivate its limits virtually.⁹

Leisure and idleness.—There is an Indian savagery, a savagery peculiar to the Indian blood, in the manner in which the Americans strive after gold: and the breathless hurry of their work—the characteristic vice of the New World—already begins to infect old Europe, and makes it savage also, spreading over it a strange lack of intellectuality. One is now ashamed of repose: even long reflection almost causes remorse of conscience. Thinking is done with a stopwatch, as dining is done with the eyes fixed on the financial newspaper; we live like men who are continually ‘afraid of letting opportunities slip.’ ‘Better do anything whatever than nothing’—this principle also is a noose with which all culture and all higher taste may be strangled. And just as all form obviously disappears in this hurry of workers, so the sense for form itself, the ear and the eye for the melody of movement, also disappears.¹⁰

Laquieze-Waniek/Erik Vogt (Eds.), Derrida und Adorno—Zur Aktualität von Dekonstruktion und Frankfurter Schule (Wien, Turia & Kant: 2008): pp. 167-188.

⁸ On the notion of sur-viving see: Jacques Derrida, *Leben ist Überleben* (Vienna, Passagen Press: 2005).

⁹ On the connection of “virtus” and “virtuality” in Nietzsche see: Arno Böhler, *Nietzsches virtuelle Wanderung im Sprachzeitraum des ‘Gefährlichen Vielleicht’*, in: *Nietzscheforschung, Jahrbuch der Nietzsche-Gesellschaft, Volume 11* (München, Akademie Press: 2004): pp. 251-264.

¹⁰ “*Muße und Müßiggang.*—Es ist eine indianerhafte, dem Indianer-Blute eigentümliche Wildheit in der Art, wie die Amerikaner nach Gold trachten: und ihre atemlose Hast der Arbeit—das eigentliche Laster der neuen Welt - beginnt bereits durch Ansteckung das alte Europa wild zu machen und eine ganz wunderliche Geistlosigkeit darüber zu breiten. Man schämt sich jetzt schon der Ruhe; das lange Nachsinnen macht beinahe Gewissensbisse. Man denkt mit der Uhr in der Hand, wie man zu Mittag isst, das Auge auf das Börsenblatt gerichtet, —man lebt wie einer, der fortwährend etwas ‘versäumen könnte’. Lieber irgend etwas tun als nichts’—auch dieser Grundsatz ist eine Schnur, um aller Bildung und allem höheren Geschmack den Garaus zu machen. Und so wie sichtlich alle Formen an dieser Hast der Arbeitenden zugrundegehn: so geht auch das Gefühl für die Form selber, das Ohr und Auge für die Melodie der Bewegungen zugrunde.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.3, §329, 556.*

One is ashamed now of repose; long reflection almost causes remorse of conscience, we live like men who are continually afraid of letting opportunities slip. Better do anything whatever than nothing. Pertinent, if not prophetic sentences which presage by 130 years this contemporary dilemma.

Obviously Nietzsche himself still had enough time and idleness to develop the seismic sensibility that allowed him to anticipate and foresee, in a creative way, the lack Europe will factually experience in the centuries to come: the loss of leisure and idleness. He was the first one, probably, to clearly understand that a new specter haunts Europe to-day:¹¹ the silent, and therefore mostly unheard and displaced demand of a new politic of idleness which finally allows us, us other “Good Europeans,” to get and stay in touch with the muses again: the messengers of joy, pleasure and gay cheerfulness, producing life-affirming values in a soul whenever they touch it.¹²

1.3 Old Europe

¹¹ “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies. Where is the party in opposition that has not been decried as Communistic by its opponents in power? Where is the Opposition that has not hurled back the branding reproach of Communism, against the more advanced opposition parties, as well as against its reactionary adversaries?” Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (London, Bildungsgesellschaft für Arbeiter: 1848).

German version: “Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa - das Gespenst des Kommunismus. Alle Mächte des alten Europa haben sich zu einer heiligen Hetzjagd gegen dies Gespenst verbündet, der Papst und der Zar, Metternich und Guizot, französische Radikale und deutsche Polizisten. Wo ist die Oppositionspartei, die nicht von ihren regierenden Gegnern als kommunistisch verschrien worden wäre, wo die Oppositionspartei, die der fortgeschritteneren Oppositionsleuten sowohl wie ihren reaktionären Gegnern den brandmarkenden Vorwurf des Kommunismus nicht zurückgeschleudert hätte? Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Das Manifest der kommunistischen Partei* (London, Bildungsgesellschaft für Arbeiter: 1848).

¹² On the notion of touching see: Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, Werner Hamacher (Ed.), tr. by Christine Irizarry (Stanford California, Stanford University Press: 2005).

At this point of my text it may be wise to remember that Nietzsche's untimely call for a new culture of leisure and idleness, as the indispensable means to prepare somebody in such a way that one regenerates the capacity to be amused of life again, was, on the one hand, almost a one-man vigilance committee against the hype of enlightenment philosophies during his time. But, on the other hand—being a professor of classical ancient philology—Nietzsche knew better than anybody else that his call for a new politic of the muses was untimely only within the context of his times, while, on the other hand, it was a simple quote¹³ of the most ancient Greek concepts of the political.

A fact that becomes obvious in particular whenever Greek philosophers speak about “a-mousia”: a status, in which a person or society in general has lost contact with the muses. The effects of such an unpleasant state are, at least in the view of ancient philosophers, absolutely predictable. What necessarily follows such a condition is a cultural decline towards barbarism, ignorance, corruption and decadence.—a “culture” of resentment, in which the muses, the sources of corporal amusement, creativity, and gayness have been replaced by the uncanny guest of (European) nihilism.¹⁴

In his *Politeia* Plato referred to this state of “a-mousia” in a passage in which Socrates expresses his concern that everybody who has failed to stay in contact with the muses will finally become weak, deaf, blind, and insensitive.¹⁵ And in respect to somebody who really has lost any sense for the muses, Socrates even proclaims that such a person will become entirely irrational and incomprehensible in the end, since losing one's sense for

¹³ On the gesture of “quoting history” see: Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech A Politics of the Performative* (New York, Routledge: 1997) and Jacques Derrida, *LIMITED INC* (Illinois, Northwestern University Press: 1st edition 1988).

¹⁴ Concerning the function of the muses in ancient Greek culture see Walter F. Otto, *Die Musen und der göttliche Ursprung des Singens und Sagens* (Düsseldorf-Köln, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: 1955): p. 68.

¹⁵ “Wie aber, wenn er nun gar nichts anderes tut noch mit irgendeiner anderen Muse irgend Gemeinschaft hat? Muß nicht, wenn auch etwas Lernbegieriges in seiner Seele war, dieses, da es keine Kenntnis noch Untersuchung zu kosten bekommt, an keiner Red noch anderer Musik teilhat, notwendig schwach, und taub und blind werden, da es weder aufgeregt noch genährt wird, noch seine Wahrnehmungen gereinigt?—So verhält es sich.” Platon, *Politeia*, in *Collected Works*, tr. by F. Schleiermacher, Vol.2, 3rd Book 411d-e (Hamburg, Rowohlts Enzyklopädie: 1994): p. 309.

the rhythm of things would make a soul entirely tact- and graceless, out-of-tune and barbaric, until such a person, finally, will have lost any means to solve his/her problems other than by savageness and brutality.¹⁶

1.4. Nietzsche's Politics of a New Dance Culture

What ancient philosophers called “amouisia,” the barbaric lack of any sense for the rhythm of things, is precisely what Nietzsche had in mind when he developed his own concept of decadence as the condition of somebody who has been corrupted physiologically.—a theory deeply combined with Nietzsche's critique of a certain Christian heritage that has separated man from his bodily instincts and finally taught us to misunderstand our bodies and reject our corporeal being while putting everything “natural,” “instinctive,” and “resolute” under quotation marks. After two thousand years of Christianity, modern man necessarily expresses a contradiction of values to Nietzsche. Not only discursively but even bio-physiologically, because the incorporation of the discourse of Christianity has poisoned and corrupted our corporeal status up to a point where everything “natural” and “corporal” has been replaced successively through discursive practices till this second, cultural nature has become a first one.

For since we are now the products of earlier generations, we are also the products of their aberrations, passions, mistakes, and even crimes. It is impossible to loose oneself from this chain entirely. When we condemn that confusion and consider ourselves released from it, then we have not overcome the fact that we are derived

¹⁶ “Ein Redefeind, meine ich, wird also ein solcher, und ein ganz Musenloser; und mit Überredung durch Worte weiß er nichts mehr anzugreifen, sondern nur mit Gewalt und Wildheit wie ein Tier will er alles ausrichten, und in Unverstand und linkischem Wesen, taktlos und ohne Anmut lebt er.” Platon, *Politeia*, in *Collected Works*, tr. by F. Schleiermacher, Vol.2, 3rd Book 411d-e (Hamburg, Rowohlt's Enzyklopädie: 1994): p. 309.

A recently published philosophical approach on the fundamental function of leisure and idleness for our lives one can find in Hans-Dieter Bahr, *Der Babylonische Logos* (Vienna, Passagen Press: 2004) and Christoph Wulf/Jörg Zirfas (Eds.), *Muße*, in: *Paragrana, Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie*, Vol.16, Book 1, (Berlin, Akademie Press: 2007).

from it. In the best case, we bring the matter to a conflict between our inherited customary nature and our knowledge, in fact, even to a war between a new strict discipline and how we have been brought up and what we have inherited from time immemorial. We cultivate a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that the first nature atrophies. It is an attempt to give oneself, as it were, a past a posteriori, out of which we may be descended in opposition to the one from which we are descended.¹⁷

Even though Nietzsche vitally criticizes this process of replacing the powerful “natural”¹⁸ instincts of our bodies by a discourse that treats bodies as if they would be the devil themselves, this weak, deaf, blind, to wit decadent status of our modern bodies does not just indicate a sad bio-cultural condition to him. It can notify the condition of somebody too who is able, to wit, actually on the way to transform this fate into a gift. Like Nietzsche did himself, when he supposed that his “sickness prevented him from conforming to the expectations placed upon him by his family, religion, profession, or society.”¹⁹ He recovered from Christianity himself precisely because his sickness compelled him, autobiographically, to resist the expectations placed upon him by the Christian environment he was born in. The regular dysfunctions of his corporal condition were nothing else than the driving force that forced him to overcome the status quo of his corporal weakness to regain a health stronger and more powerful than the health of those who think that they have no need to resist expectations in order to overcome themselves.

¹⁷ „Denn da wir nun einmal die Resultate früherer Geschlechter sind, sind wir auch die Resultate ihrer Verirrungen, Leidenschaften und Irrthümer, ja Verbrechen; es ist nicht möglich, sich ganz von dieser Kette zu lösen. Wenn wir jene Verirrungen verurtheilen und uns ihrer für enthoben erachten, so ist die Thatsache nicht beseitigt, dass wir aus ihnen herstammen. Wir bringen es im besten Falle zu einem Widerstreit der ererbten, angestammten Natur und unserer Erkenntnisse, auch wohl zu einem Kampfe einer neuen strengen Zucht gegen das von Alters her Angezogene und Angeborne, wir pflanzen eine neue Gewöhnung, einen neuen Instinkt, eine zweite Natur an, so dass die erste Natur abdorrt. Es ist ein Versuch, sich gleichsam a posteriori eine Vergangenheit zu geben, aus der man stammen möchte, im Gegensatz zu der, aus der man stammt —“ Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.1, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung II §3, 270.

¹⁸ A body, as a will to power, and not merely a will to survive in a certain status quo (conatus), follows its very own nature as long as it moves beyond itself, stretching and extending the borders of its very own being-in-the-world. It is this act of re-signing ones very own corporal existence as a singular mode in which a will to power survives, and not only the human race or the common place of a rational being, that Nietzsche embraces when every he asks us to affirm a life in an all embracing act of a great affirmation: amor fati.

¹⁹ Kimerer L. LaMothe, Nietzsche’s Dancers (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 103. Reviewed by Arno Böhler, Nietzsche Circle Reviews <http://www.nietzschecircle.com/review14.html>.

Taking his own formula for greatness in human beings, *amor fati*,²⁰ autobiographically,²¹ serious in applying it in his own life on his own life,²² Nietzsche transfigured his bodily pain into a fate while embracing it. As Katja Brunkhorst expressed this issue in her book. Nietzsche's "genius was at its strongest as when making a virtue of a necessity, turning his personal suffering into art."²³

From this one can learn that the decadent status of a body, denoted by ancient Greek philosophers by the word "a-mousia"—a body, which has lost any contact with the muses—is an ambivalent condition in itself, since "a-mousia," "Un-bildung," can indicate two things to Nietzsche. It can be the bodily expression of a corrupt and weak corporeal status. But it can, as well, denote the status of a body ready to revolt against its own unpleasant state in order to overcome it. "Today there is perhaps no more decisive mark of a higher nature, [...] than that of being divided in this sense and a genuine battleground of these opposed values."²⁴

²⁰ "My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity." German original: "Meine Formel für die Grösse am Menschen ist *amor fati*: dass man Nichts anders haben will, vorwärts nicht, rückwärts nicht, in alle Ewigkeit nicht." Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.6, Warum ich so klug bin §10, 297.

²¹ On the auto-bio-graphical aspect of Nietzsche's corpus see: Arno Böhler, Der auto-bio-graphische Körper, in: GRENZ-film (Ed.), Philosophy On Stage, Double DVD (Vienna, Passagen Press: 2007).

²² On the difficulties that occur in applying a general formula on a proper name see: Jacques Derrida, As if I were Dead (Vienna, Turia + Kant: 2000).

²³ Katja Brunkhorst, 'Verwandt-Verwandelt' Nietzsche's Presence in Rilke (München, IUDICIUM: 2006): p. 147.

²⁴ "Man könnte selbst sagen, [...] dass es heute vielleicht kein entscheidenderes Abzeichen der 'höheren Natur,' der geistigeren Natur giebt, als zweispaltig in jenem Sinne und wirklich noch ein Kampfplatz für jene Gegensätze zu sein." Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.5, Erste Abhandlung §16, 285-286. See too: Kimerer L. LaMothe, Nietzsche's Dancers (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 82.

Once, the revolt against the displacement of the muses factually takes place in a body, a Dionysian power has started to ex-scribe²⁵ and overrule its former condition in order to become somebody else: a Dionysian body, liberated from all kinds of bio-politics²⁶ which denounce Earth and the corporality of our human, all to human being-here.

In *Nietzsche's Dancers* (2006) Kimerer L. LaMothe has shown that dance, dance as a bodily practice, is precisely the muse Nietzsche was longing for to induce this physiological transformation in modern (wo-)man in order to newly regenerate the corrupt status of our bodies that have been enslaved and suppressed by both cultural strains dominating Western Europe: Christianity as well as its secular arm, the enlightenment tradition which disciplines everybody to make one a decent member of a worldwide economic labor force: a homo oeconomicus.

To realize such a historical fate in which one begins to ex-scribe these traditional misunderstandings of the “natural” needs of our bodies, one has to become a free spirit first to Nietzsche. Someone “unbound by convention, tradition, or habit,” someone who has “the vitality and discernment needed to do what is necessary for her own health. One who finds in the death of God an occasion to love her bodily becoming.”²⁷ However, every artist per se is “a person who has not forgotten his bodily becoming, and who, in making art, speaks to the artist in each of us”²⁸—what is special about a dancer is that the dancer communicates bodily movements, kinetic signs rather than semantic significance only.

²⁵ Concerning the concept of ex-scribing a body see: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Paris, Éditions Métailié: 2000).

²⁶ It is Michel Foucault, of course, who did analyze the governmentality of biopolitics in contemporary politics. Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la biopolitique: cours au Collège de France 1978-1979* (Paris, Gallimard & Seuil: 2004).

²⁷ Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Nietzsche's Dancers* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 56.

²⁸ Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Nietzsche's Dancers* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 98.

A dancer works with the physiological aspects of a signifier rather than with its fixed semantic meaning, with tensions rather than with fixed extensions, with intensive corporal rhythms rather than with things located at a distinct place. Therefore Jean-Luc Nancy could simply call it a tension. “A body is therefore a tension. And the Greek root of this word is ‘*tonos*’, the ton. A body is a ton [...] A body is a tonus.”²⁹

Since bodies are capable of experiencing, intensively, the tensional aspect of ex-tensional things, they are the local *tonos* of worldwide strings (ex-tensions) in the precise ancient Greek sense of the word “*mousikós*.” Their seismic capacity puts them into a position in which they are able to detect the movements of corporal things so that a body, in itself, becomes a kind of “thoughtful,” fragile being, being exposed to the physical eruptions of others.³⁰

Since dance is a praxis that weights the significance of a body while moving it from one place to another (Greek: *metaphoréo*), it finally becomes the most primordial means to Nietzsche to evaluate the “real” weight, significance and value of things, at least in the corpus of his latest works.

For one cannot subtract dancing in every form from a noble education—to be able to dance with one’s feet, with concepts, with words: need I still add that one must be able to do it with the pen too—that one must learn to write?³¹

²⁹ “Ein Körper ist folglich eine Spannung [*tension*]. Und die griechische Wurzel des Wortes ist ‘*tonos*’, der Ton. Ein Körper ist ein Ton. [...] Ein Körper ist ein Tonus.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (Berlin, Diaphanes: 2003): p. 124.

³⁰ Calling himself a dynamite, a kind of earthquake, Nietzsche’s corpus can largely be read as a testimony of his seismographic body by virtue of which he was able to sense, check, and evaluate the corporal sound of things with the well tuned “hammer” of his senses, especially of his ear that was capable to reveal the unheard, forbidden truth of things while testing the sound of their corporal *tonos*.

³¹ “Man kann nämlich das *Tanzen* in jeder Form nicht von der *vornehmen Erziehung* abrechnen, Tanzen können mit den Füßen, mit den Begriffen, mit den Worten; habe ich noch zu sagen, dass man es auch mit der *Feder* können muss, — dass man *schreiben* lernen muss?” Friedrich Nietzsche, *KSA Vol.6, Was den Deutschen abgeht* §7, 110. See too: Kimerer L. LaMothe, *Nietzsche’s Dancers* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2006): p. 93.

From this point of view one can even read his Zarathustra as the story of somebody who wants to make his body dance. In teaching the human race to educate its senses, to believe in Earth and our bodies, Zarathustra invites everybody to resist ascetic ideals, at least in the priestly sense of this word, in order to learn to see, think, speak and write anew while performing an artistic kind of asceticism that does not denounce but refine the sensuality of our corporal existence in a noble way.

You have to learn to *see*, you have to learn to *think*, you have to learn to *speak* and *write*: in all three cases the goal is a noble culture.—Learning to *see*—accustoming the eye to rest, to patience, to letting things come to it; learning to defer judgment, to encircle and encompass the individual case on all sides. This is the *first* preparatory schooling for intellectuality: *not* to react immediately to a stimulus but to take in hand the inhibiting, isolating instincts. Learning to *see* as I understand it, is almost what is called in unphilosophical language ‘strong will’: the most important thing about it is precisely *not* to ‘will’, to be *able* to defer decision. Every lack of intellectuality, every vulgarity is based on the inability to resist a stimulus—you *must* react, you follow every impulse.³²

It is this artistic practice of a sensomotoric asceticism that makes the receptors of our bodily sensory noble ones because one has learned to resist stimuli already on a corporal level almost immediately when they take place. Such a noble mode of sensual perception therefore is always already a re-flected one. A corporal form of “thinking,” not in the sense of a conscious, rational judgment, as enlightenment philosophers interpreted thinking in an intellectualistic way, but as a passive, receptive way of cogitatio that widely takes place unconsciously: via passive synthesis rather than through intentional acts, according to the necessities of our corporal needs rather than according to

³² „Man hat sehen zu lernen, man hat denken zu lernen, man hat sprechen zu lernen: das Ziel in allen Dreien ist eine vornehme Cultur. — Sehen lernen — dem Auge die Ruhe, die Geduld, das An-sich-herankommen-lassen angewöhnen; das Urtheil hinausschieben, den Einzelfall von allen Seiten umgehn und umfassen lernen. Das ist die erste Vorschulung zur Geistigkeit: auf einen Reiz nicht sofort reagieren, sondern die hemmenden, die abschliessenden Instinkte in die Hand bekommen. Sehen lernen, so wie ich es verstehe, ist beinahe Das, was die unphilosophische Sprechweise den starken Willen nennt: das Wesentliche daran ist gerade, nicht ‚wollen‘, die Entscheidung aussetzen können. Alle Ungeistigkeit, alle Gemeinheit beruht auf dem Unvermögen, einem Reize Widerstand zu leisten — man muss reagieren, man folgt einem Impuls.“ Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol. 6, 108-109.

intellectual needs. “There is more sagacity in your body than in your best wisdom. And who could know wherefore your body requires your best wisdom?”³³

1.5 Aristocratic democracy

It was this promising “Ode to Joy,” devoted to the muses, that once moved Europe almost enthusiastically, in which somebody still has leisure and idleness enough to discover a receptive, joyful form of “thinking” that takes place in the seismic sensitivity of every body that has learned to resist, almost immediately, external stimuli in a contemplative way.

In fact, once there were times in which Europe indeed was amused by this aristocratic vision of a “great politic,” a politic of the muses, prizing the contemplative part of life more than the so called “active” one, represented by the unholy alliance of two figures in modern times: the figure of the “worker” and the “businessman” as the real proponents of a global, bourgeois labor force.³⁴

If one considers these historical circumstances we are in right now, one may be compelled to ask oneself, at least in silence: “Isn’t it a shame what contemporary Europe has made out of this Old European dream that once laid at the bottom of ancient Greek philosophy and the most primordial myths of ancient Europe: Hesiod’s *Theogony* and Homer’s *Hymn to the Muses*. Hasn’t it been entirely replaced, meanwhile, by the dream

³³ “Es ist mehr Vernunft in deinem Leibe, als in deiner besten Weisheit. Und wer weiss denn, wozu dein Leib gerade deine beste Weisheit nöthig hat?” Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.4, Also sprach Zarathustra I, Von den Verächtern des Leibes, 40.

³⁴ Since these times, in which the restless people are most prized in our societies, in fact we all became “independent” in a certain sense. Now we are all “free” and “self responsible persons”; free to install the software of our computer alone, to manage our bank accounts ourselves via internet banking, to earn the money oneself needed to make our own living, to educate our children, to provide our family with health insurance etc., etc., etc. In fact—actually we all have become “mature, self responsible persons in a free and open society.” Free in the sense that we are compelled and enslaved to be productive all the time.

of the self-made man and self-made woman? A modern dream that has started to occupy and ‘enlighten’ Europe in the very moment the values of idleness have been devaluated and the contemplative values, most prized in former Europe, have been replaced by the overvaluation of the active part of life?”

But if there should be any truth in Hegel’s and Heidegger’s concepts of historical origins: that the chronological beginning of something is the archeological opening of all possibilities which inherently constitute the form of the arriving guest—the political promise of ancient politics necessarily would still haunt Europe to-day.

It is clear that in postmodern times, the historical circumstances we are living under right now, such a vision has to sound foolish—at least totally sentimental—especially once one would start to believe in it politically. Since these ancient times, at least for postmodern times, have gone forever.

It is true. Within a postmodern world, globally installing the homo oeconomicus everywhere on Earth, an aristocratic form of democracy has no chance to become a real political force. Indeed one would have to get rid of these conditions and replace them by a better, namely a more aristocratic, form of democracy in order to make this alternative dream happen.

From this perspective another sentence of Nietzsche starts to make sense. “You don’t think that by leisure and idling I’m talking about you, do you, you lazybones?”³⁵

³⁵ “Ihr meint doch nicht, daß ich mit Muße und Müßigkeit auf euch ziele, ihr Faultiere?—” Friedrich Nietzsche, KSA Vol.2, §284, 232.