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# ***Nietzsche's Non-Aesthetics. Nietzsche's Radical Critique of Traditional Aesthetics***

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ABSTRACT. By both opponents and supporters Nietzsche is often presented as one, if not *the*, central figure of modern aestheticism. In most approaches, however, little effort is spent on understanding what exactly Nietzsche means by terms like “art”, “aesthetics” etc. Following insights from Bull, Heidegger, Menke, and Laruelle the aim of this paper is to offer a close re-reading of some central passages of *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Genealogy of Morality*, and *Twilight of the Idols* which all demonstrate that Nietzsche should be read as a radical critic both of traditional philosophical aesthetics and of art as an institution separated from the rest of society. He should be read as a non-aestheticist.

*Art is boring.* (Peter Fuss)

*While it is easy for an aesthete to indulge into the powers of the outside like a good after-dinner drink, “letting loose, freeing up, and putting into play,” undoing can fulfill the higher purpose of nursing a hatred for this world [...]. For it is only when we locate something intolerable outside ourselves that we will “leap beyond shame” and “transform [our] paltry undertakings into a war of resistance and liberation” [...].* (Andrew Culp<sup>1</sup>)

## **I. Introduction: A World Without Music!**

By both opponents and supporters Nietzsche is often presented as one, if not *the*, central figure of modern aestheticism, i. e. the ideology that art is an autonomous realm within modern society which represents a certain other- or holiness within it (and is possibly its last resort). Besides the sentence with women and the whip, that one about music and error is surely his best-known. There is hardly a music teacher or other mediocre musician who has not cited it as a personal inspiration. And there

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<sup>1</sup> Culp 2016, p. 29.

are few sentences in the history of philosophy<sup>2</sup> whose meaning has been so terribly misunderstood. The main aim of this paper is to correct this misunderstanding and to demonstrate the – albeit provoking – opposite: That Nietzsche is no aestheticist at all but a radical critic of modern aestheticism.<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche does not teach to replace traditional religion with a new cult of art like so many of his contemporaries and his followers – including especially the ones that tried to aestheticize politics –, he tried to show a way out of religion in all its manifestations once and for all. He does not teach to flee from the “falseness” of life into the pure realm of music: He urges us to change a life that needs the escape into a fictional realm of dreams to be worth living.

Obviously, I cannot give a detailed analysis of the development of Nietzsche's conception of art throughout his whole oeuvre in a limited paper like this. I will focus, however, on some key passages from his earliest and from his latest writings that should clearly evidence the huge shift within Nietzsche's thinking over those almost two decades: Whereas he indeed stands in for an aestheticist point of view in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Nietzsche 2015; BT), he clearly denounces such a view and proposes an entirely different one in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Nietzsche 2012; GM) and *Twilight of the Idols* (Nietzsche 2011c; TI).

Of course, I am far from being the first to note that non-aesthetic trace within Nietzsche's philosophy. I will, however, give a new interpretation to it. In order to undertake this, I will begin my elaboration by discuss-

<sup>2</sup> For the moment, I will act as if Nietzsche can be regarded as a “philosopher” somehow. It does not seem obvious to me, however, that he regarded even himself as such – at least certainly not in certain stages of his intellectual development. While I cannot discuss that important – and all-too-often forgotten – aspect of the exact relationship of Nietzsche's odd thoughts to philosophy in any detail in this article, it should become clear, however, that Nietzsche surely is not a philosopher in the traditional sense of the word: His critique of philosophical aesthetics obviously implies a fundamental critique of philosophy as metaphysical scholarship as such. Inasmuch as Nietzsche is a non-aestheticist, he is surely a non-philosopher as well. Both aestheticists and philosophers should finally stop (mis-)using him for their anti-Nietzschean purposes.

<sup>3</sup> I have developed a critique of the usual understanding of the other sentence (that about women and the whip) in Stephan (2014). There, I make a point which is similar to the one made here: One should regard Nietzsche's sentence not as a sexist piece of advice but as a philosophical diagnosis that exactly expounds the problems of a sexist culture. It should be read as a critique of sexist violence, not as its affirmation.

ing Bull's, Heidegger's, and Menke's different approaches to Nietzsche's non-aesthetics and contrast them with my different approach which is systematically inspired by a tradition that goes from the avant-garde movements over Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno, and Debord to Deleuze, Rancière, and Laruelle; the last one being the inventor of the term "non-aesthetics" which will be explained in this section as well.

## 2. What Is "Non-Aesthetics"?

### 2.1. From Bull to Heidegger

The most recent prominent critic who repeated the old rumour of Nietzsche's (fascist and reactionary) aestheticism is Malcom Bull in a book bearing the provocative title *Anti-Nietzsche* (2014). There, he presents – with reference to *The Birth of Tragedy* – Nietzsche as an inconsequential nihilist who '[a]lthough he welcomed the devaluation of all moral values, [...] invested the aesthetic with heightened significance.' (ibid., p. 11) In order to overcome Nietzsche, we should 'read him like losers', i. e. from a non-aesthetic point of view, a point of view which is explicitly uncreative, unproductive, anaesthetic (which is *not* non-aesthetic), and unartistic; which is tasteless, boring, and philistine.<sup>4</sup> Leaving all the other shortcomings of his reading of Nietzsche aside<sup>5</sup>, he never discusses, however, what Nietzsche means by the terms 'art' and 'aesthetic' and how these terms may have changed their meaning during the development of his thought.

This is especially odd since Bull dedicates lengthy sections of his book to a discussion of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche and tries to show a structural similarity between Heidegger's exclusion of animals from 'existence' and Nietzsche's (alleged) exclusion of certain human beings (or even: races) from true creativity.<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, however, was probably the first to highlight the special meaning of terms such as art, artist, aesthetic, and so on in Nietzsche's writings – thereby polemizing against Nietzsche's aestheticist followers (among them of course – yet hidden between the

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-40.

<sup>5</sup> I have dedicated a lengthy critique to Bull's book in an article called *Anti-Bull* (Stephan 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. esp. Bull 2014, pp. 79-104.

lines – his fascist ones that are the main targets of Heidegger's entire reading of Nietzsche). During the winter term of 1936/37 Heidegger devoted an entire lecture to Nietzsche's aesthetics, entitled *Will to Power as Art*<sup>7</sup>. The title reveals its main thesis: That "art" for Nietzsche is *not* a special sphere of human culture in which special objects – works of art – are produced which stand in a special relationship to values such as Truth, Goodness, or Beauty, but art *is* will to power and thus, since will to power is the essence of all beings, art is the essence of all beings.<sup>8</sup> Art is essentially the production and self-production of life. The artist produces life insofar as (s)he takes part in this violent self-production (which consists in a constant interplay between creation and destruction). Insofar as nihilism is the negation of production (and thus: life), '[a]rt is the exquisite counter-movement against nihilism.'<sup>9</sup> Romanticist aestheticism – such as that of Richard Wagner – is a pseudo-counter-movement against the ubiquitous nihilism of modern societies since all it has to offer is the uninhibited indulging in wild emotions, which equals nothingness.<sup>10</sup> If there is an archenemy of true art (and thus: life) it is modern aestheticism. The first step in overcoming nihilism is accordingly to overcome aesthetics. This goes especially for philosophical aesthetics: The study of the realm of art is transferred from the realm of metaphysics (i. e. the study of over-sensual ideas such as Truth, Beauty, Goodness, etc.) to physiology, i. e. the modern scientific study of body and life (and even forces and machines).<sup>11</sup> While in truth we experience reality as chaos, art is the power to control it, to give it a certain form. Life, thus, takes place in the infinite interplay between truth (the experience of chaos) and beauty (the experience of order and lie).<sup>12</sup> In this interplay, art is (or, at least: should be) the dominant

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Heidegger 2008, p. 1-224. All translations in this article are my own.

<sup>8</sup> 'Die Kunst ist nach dem erweiterten Begriff des Künstlers das Grundgeschehen alles Seienden; das Seiende ist, sofern es ist, ein Sichschaffendes, Geschaffenes. Nun wissen wir aber: Wille zur Macht ist wesentlich ein Schaffen und Zerstören. Das Grundgeschehen des Seienden ist "Kunst", besagt nichts anderes als: es ist Wille zur Macht.' (Ibid., p. 69)

<sup>9</sup> 'Die Kunst ist die ausgezeichnete Gegenbewegung gegen den Nihilismus.' (Ibid., p. 73)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 86 f.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 90 f.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ibid., pp. 555 f.

force: 'In art it is decided what truth is; this means for Nietzsche always: what the true is, i. e. what essentially exists.'<sup>13</sup> Also, the true philosopher is always an artist 'insofar he shapes on existence as a whole'<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, we are creative in any instant of our existence: In any minute, we shape the chaos of the world according to some creative lies that we invent. Philosophers, artists, prophets, great politicians or scientists etc. might be especially powerful creators since they do not just follow given norms of shaping but invent new ones – however, we all possess this primordial capacity, we all have the power to become creator and inventors – and we all should strive to become ones. This reading of Nietzsche surely puts him in the line of a Foucauldian-Deleuzian ethics of joyful productivism: The production of life is seen as an end in itself; we have no choice but to affirm it.

As I will elaborate in the main section of this paper, I agree with this reading of Nietzsche in principle (despite I disagree – partly strongly – with many details of it). Nietzsche does not care much about 'art' in the narrow sense of the word: He is concerned with the dominance of nihilism and pseudo-productivity (of which official art is surely a part) in modern culture. When he praises creativity, he does not think of people who paint their walls in a "creative" manner, are part of a band, write novels etc. but of people who actually try to invent new forms of life.

Thus, if we ask if Nietzsche is an aestheticist the answer can be both 'Yes' and 'No'. He surely is no aestheticist in the sense of fans and admirers of the institution of art as it exists in modern societies; he surely is an aestheticist inasmuch he thinks that it is worthy in itself to create new forms of life, to be productive, to be experimental.

One might still follow Bull (and Heidegger himself) and ask if this ethics does not lead to a hyper-nihilism and to the exclusion of beings who do not have the power to produce – possibly, Nietzsche (and with him the maybe most consequent Nietzscheans after World War II, Deleuze and Foucault) is a hidden support of totalitarianism, fascism, neo-liberalism, and what not. Surely, this ethics is based on a basic assumption that can-

<sup>13</sup> 'In der Kunst fällt die Entscheidung, was die Wahrheit, dies sagt für Nietzsche immer: was das Wahre, d h. was das eigentliche Seiende ist.' (Ibid., p. 71)

<sup>14</sup> 'Dieser Philosoph [der "Künstler-Philosoph"; PS] ist Künstler, indem er am Seienden im Ganzen gestaltet[.]' (Ibid., p. 71)

not be logically proven: That life is good and that it is therefore good to help life to flourish. Obviously, there are many good reasons to neglect this basic assumption in a world of genocides, terrorism, and limitless exploitation of nature and human beings (to name but a few evils of our time). However, we would not be able to see such terrible things as “evils” if Life could be reduced to such violence – we still criticize life in the name of life. Within the deep hate we might feel confronted with in current world-society there is still a hidden love which is primordial to it. Surely not a love directed to the world as it is but to the world as it could be – but whose fragments are already before our eyes. It is maybe this attitude which could lead us to become artists – artists of a new world opposed to the affirmative adorners of the old one.<sup>15</sup>

Before we can dive in into Nietzsche himself and learn more about life and how to learn to love it, is it inevitable, however, to do a few more warm-ups. An important point of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche has been forgotten: The precise nature of his relationship to traditional aesthetics. For him, Nietzsche is not only a rebel against traditional aesthetics but still remains within its realm: He only pushes it towards its limits and brings it to its flipping-point, but he does not actually overcome it.<sup>16</sup> Against Nietzsche's affirmation of life, which is an ethics of production, the late Heidegger demands an ethics of Harkening to the Call of Being, a readiness and openness toward the Event which would be able to cure us of the evils of modernity. Despite his obvious contempt for them, Heidegger seems to be very close to Wagner and romanticism in general in this regard: Behind the evils of modernity there seems to be a pure place of origin to which we have to return in order to heal again – be it pre-Socratic Greek antiquity or Germanic mythology. The purpose of true art seems to be to present a genuine Truth to us that links us back to our roots. But how can we be sure that this origin is not already polluted by “defiance” and “machination”? Obviously, we can never be, and this seems to be the reason why Heidegger, after his wild adventures during the 30s and 40s, finally ends up like Wagner: As a Schopenhauerian who dreams of apocalypse, who seeks refuge from the evil world in silence, asceticism, and meditation (and his

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, all of these arguments can be found in Nietzsche.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

endlessly demonstration of despising for Schopenhauer might only indicate their deep intellectual familiarity which Heidegger feared to admit – *he* wanted to be one who was harkening). For Nietzsche, there are indeed no roots – and if there are such, they have to be invented by us. But why should rootlessness be a problem at all? Why become plant or stone if one can become a bird, a tiger, or a mouse? Is rootlessness not something good, a necessary condition for the flourishing of life? Even plants need air in order to mate and thus to develop further and to spread their seeds – and who wants to become a stone? Possibly people like Heidegger, Schopenhauer, Hitler, and their “stoned” followers – but surely not people like Nietzsche.<sup>17</sup> Non-aestheticists are strictly anti-fascist.

## 2.2. *From Menke to Laruelle*

Menke clearly distinguishes his own project of re-founding philosophical aesthetics from Heidegger:

‘Nietzsche’s reflection on art moves within the traditional path’, as Heidegger says correctly but has understood wrongly. ‘This path is defined in its particularity by the name “aesthetics”.’[<sup>19</sup>]

One has to note that he does not offer an explicit argument to support this claim against Heidegger; neither does he even name the exact misunderstanding of Heidegger. Implicitly, it is rather obvious, however: Their main point of difference is exactly their relationship to Nietzsche. While Heidegger develops his own philosophy of art (or, one might even dare to say: his aesthetics) by distancing himself from Nietzsche, in *Kraft* (i. e. *Force*) Menke develops a clearly Nietzschean aesthetics even if the major part of his explicit discussion of Nietzsche does not take place until the book’s sixth chapter.<sup>18</sup> Explicitly, he grounds his conception of ‘Kraft’ in Herder and Baumgarten – Heidegger himself states, however, that Nietzsche often uses the word ‘Kraft’ to refer to ‘Will to Power’<sup>19</sup>. In this instance, the difference between Heidegger and Menke becomes obvious:

<sup>17</sup> Menke 2008, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup> In the subsequent volume *Die Kraft der Kunst* (2014) Menke quotes Nietzsche more prominently and extensively.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger 2008, p. 61.

Heidegger defines 'Kraft' as 'ability which is collected in itself and ready for an effect, the power to ...'<sup>20</sup> The decisive point of Menke's conception of 'Kraft' is, however, to distinguish sharply between 'Kraft' as ability and 'Kraft' as force. While 'Kraft' as ability indeed enables us to do something successfully (be within the realm of praxis or of theory), 'Kraft' as force transcends our conscious aims: It stands as a metaphor for that which lies beyond our practices and abilities but yet enables and endangers them. 'Aesthetics' are defined by Menke as the sphere in which we are confronted with this "dark" side of our existence, in which we experience the uncanny force of 'Kraft' without being actually endangered by it.

What does it mean to read Nietzsche not as a thinker of ability but of force? While Heidegger reads Nietzsche as a thinker who favours activity over passivity, production over destruction, life over Death, clarity over disorder, form over content, Menke turns the tables upside down: He presents Nietzsche as an advocate of passivity and de-subjectification (or, in Heidegger's view: as a Wagnerian). In this understanding, Heidegger's failure seems to be that he could not see that aesthetics are not a mere part of metaphysics but an actual alternative to it – a separate realm within modern culture in which the experience of something radically *other* is possible.

This is definitely an aestheticist point of view in the tradition of Schopenhauer, Wagner, and romanticism (and, one might add: Adorno). Aesthetics and art may not be seen as a realm in which a distant origin reappears but in which in the midst of doomed modernity something "Holy" appears – surely, art is its last resort. Aesthetics are a result of modernity – but they represent a different form of modernity, a modernity not of domination but of reconciliation.<sup>21</sup>

One might ask if this view is not undialectical: What if aesthetics and art do represent an alternative form of modernity indeed, but a realm which opposes modern normality only in order to affirm it? As we will see shortly, Nietzsche has no doubts about the affirmative character even of the most critical forms of art: Art has to be tragic, critical, utopian,

<sup>20</sup> 'Kraft, das in sich gesammelte und wirkungsbereite Vermögen, das Imstandesein zu ...' (ibid.).

<sup>21</sup> Also Bertram presents Menke's philosophy of art as an exemplary version of such an aestheticist view (2014, pp. 35 ff.).

subversive, non-productive etc. exactly in order to play a *productive* role in the functioning of modern society as a whole. The confrontation with the force of '*Kraft*' may actually disturb some confused idealists: In sum, it enables capitalist society to work. If religion was the opium of the masses of the 19th century, art is the opium (and maybe even: the cocaine) of the creative elites of the 21st – and especially critical art. Critical theory may even play a very productive role within post-modern cultural industry as well, as long as it does not reflect on its own social position.

In his impressive attempt to lay a new foundation for critical social philosophy, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, Hartmut Rosa confronts Menke's aesthetics with a similar objection: Against Menke (and in that case: Nietzsche, too) he insists on the fact that in art we do not only experience a sublime happiness which consists in the mere promise of happiness: We experience not the mere appearance of happiness but actual happiness as we experience an actual relation of resonance between the world and ourselves.<sup>22</sup> We experience this kind of happiness not only – as Menke suggests – in particular works of “high” art such as Beckett's plays or Wagner's operas but in any form of art even in the most “primitive” forms of pop or techno. This insight enables Rosa to move one big step beyond Menke (and one might add: Adorno) and develop an actual critical theory of the function that art (even in its highest forms) plays in modern societies: It replaces religion as the main sphere in which individuals are compensated for the lack of happiness that they experience in their everyday life. In art we experience not something mystical and dark but something very clear: The feeling of resonance, of being in a dynamic, vivid relation of responsiveness towards the world, which we are deprived of in our everyday lives. And this feeling of resonance is even intensified in works of art that reflect our daily experience of alienation, that are tragical, negative, subversive, and so on since we can more easily relate to them.<sup>23</sup>

From this, we might follow that every form of art in its institutionalised, “autonomous” form, as a realm separated from society, is affirmative art in the sense that it – willingly or not – affirms the functioning of capitalist society. If we insist on the destructive, death-affirming character of

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<sup>22</sup> Rosa 2016, pp. 482 f.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 472-500.

this society, it follows that institutionalised art, art in the narrow sense, cannot be truly life-affirming. As – as already Marx knew – critical theory can only be truly critical as it reflects and tries to transcend its own boundaries as mere theory (and thus tries to change its own form, its own institutionalisation, i. e. its own praxis), critical art can only be truly critical insofar as it ceases to be mere art, insofar as it tries to overcome the separation between art and life and tries to become part of the life-affirming movement which tries to create new forms of life.

Of course, this kind of art and its corresponding aesthetics do not have to be invented but already exist: There is a whole tradition of artists and aestheticians who were unsatisfied with being mere artists and mere aestheticians but tried to be actual creators. Let us name but a few: Schiller's vision of theatre as an educational institution, Wagner's vision of opera as a democratic art (which he later betrayed), the avant-gardists' attempts to radically reform modern life, Benjamin's and Debord's critique of capitalist aestheticism, and, recently, Rancière's attempt to think aesthetics as an always-already political enterprise. Despite their huge differences, these attempts have in common that they do not want to reform or revolutionize modern society from the point of view of art as a holy realm of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness (or: the Sublime), but they realise that art has to transform itself into an impure, ugly, and dirty enterprise in order to transform itself *and* modern society at the same time. They do not want (as Heidegger) to aestheticize society nor do they want to keep art as a holy governor (*Statthalter*) of utopia such as Menke and Adorno – but to politicize art.

Laruelle has proposed the term 'non-aesthetics' in order to describe this attitude<sup>24</sup>: 'Non-aesthetics' refers to the mutual merging of philosophy and art and the political and art; philosophy becoming aesthetic and aesthetics becoming philosophical and politics becoming artistic (i. e. a conscious part of the movement of the creation of new forms of life) and art becoming political. In other words: As "non-Euclidian geometry" signifies the attempt to project traditional, narrow Euclidian geometry onto a new, broader plane in which new forms and figures and new and richer

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<sup>24</sup> I will cite Nietzsche always giving the number or (translated) title of the section or aphorism in addition to the page number.

connections to and mergings with other disciplines become possible, non-aesthetics is not anti-aesthetics insofar it does not simply want to destroy art – such a cheap attempt would remain deeply metaphysical as we can see both in Plato, and Christian and Muslim iconoclasts who hate art because it is too alive not because it is too metaphysical (i. e. too dependent on given metaphysical values and word-views) – on the contrary, it takes art and aesthetics as a starting point in order to become *more* than art and *more* than aesthetics. Something richer, something more alive, and something more productive (while this “productivity” has to be distinguished sharply from capitalist pseudo-productivity – it may express itself even in forms of mere destructivity under given circumstances).

Is Nietzsche (as Heidegger claims) a non-aestheticist and non-artist or (as Menke claims) a aestheticist (and maybe also: an artist)? On the one hand, I can only repeat Menke: Heidegger correctly calls Nietzsche (without using the word) a non-aestheticist, but has understood the actual meaning of that idea wrongly. Menke, on the other hand, correctly stresses the subversive, Dionysian character of Nietzsche's thought against Heidegger's misreading but limits this subversion to the narrow realm of the “Holy” by reading Nietzsche as an aestheticist. In order to get the right picture, we have to contradict both.

### **3. Nietzsche Ruminated Once More**

#### ***3.1. The Dionysian and the Trauma of Revolution***

Both Heidegger and Menke take the *Birth of Tragedy* as the starting point of their analysis – and so will we. If there is a work of Nietzsche which can undoubtedly be called “aestheticist” it is this first essay. Deeply inspired both by Schopenhauer's aestheticist ideology (which is not too far from both Menke's and Heidegger's approaches) and Wagner's dream of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, it presents itself from the beginning as a productive contribution to ‘aesthetical science’ (BT, p. 25; I[<sup>27</sup>]). It is here, where Nietzsche declares famously: ‘[O]nly as *aesthetic phenomenon* are existence and world eternally *justified*’ (BT, p. 47; V).

In his preface to the book, written in 1886, he describes the main aim of the book as ‘*to view science under the optic of the artist, art under that of life...*’

(BT, p. 14; *Attempt of a Self-Critique*, II) One has to understand, however, that this preface is explicitly meant to be a 'self-critique'. Accordingly, this sentence should be understood as a critical comment on the treatise's first sentence: While the essay presents itself as a scientific theory, it is in fact an artistic construction – that means at least that it is unauthentic, it lacks a proper self-understanding of its own methodology. Early Nietzsche has, from the point of view of the older one, not yet become what he is. What this is remains at least ambiguous, however: A poet? Apparently not, since late Nietzsche clearly states that he is not able to 'sing' while the young Nietzsche could have (BT, p. 15; *Attempt of a Self-Critique*, III). Late Nietzsche presents himself – at least in this particular text – as a psychologist and a scientist, a strict analyst of morality who regards his early work as 'badly written, clumsy, embarrassing, *bilderwüthig* and *bilderwirrig*, sentimental, here and there sweet up to the feminine, uneven in tempo, without will to logical tidiness, very convinced and therefor positing itself beyond proof[.]' (BT, p. 14; *Attempt of a Self-Critique*, III) He calls the famous sentence mentioned above 'insinuating' (BT, p. 17; *Attempt of a Self-Critique* V) and heavily polemicizes against the religious world-view implied by it. For the late Nietzsche, the Nietzsche of *Zarathustra*, there is no need for any kind of metaphysical consolation – be it even aesthetic. Rather, we should learn to laugh in the face of the worst evils of life just like Zarathustra teaches. (BT, p. 22; *Attempt of a Self-Critique*, VII) To put it in other words: For the late Nietzsche, we should not comfort ourselves with watching bacchantes, we should become them ourselves. We should leave the institutions of art behind.

Of course, already the 'aesthetics' of the *Birth of Tragedy* are unusual – to say the least. It is no surprise that Wagner did not recognise it as an accurate reconstruction of his aesthetic project. Aesthetics are not analysed immanently but are reduced to two non-aesthetic faculties which do not belong to the realm of art only but form the basis of human existence as a whole: dream, the faculty of form, and intoxication, the faculty of content. Young Nietzsche needs a decent dose of Schopenhauerian metaphysics in order to support the rather bold claim (although endlessly repeated by our pious atheists) that art is a realm in which some sort of "inner truth" of the world comes to appearance.

Beyond this metaphysical element – which obviously contradicts later

Nietzsche's vigorous critique of objectivism –, already young Nietzsche develops a “proto-sociology of art” which directly refers to the later Nietzsche's cultural criticism<sup>25</sup>: Art is a means for society to confront itself with suppressed impulses in a form that cannot actually disturb social order. In order to fulfil this task, art even has to be critical, subversive, “forceful”, tragic: In comic art – which ideologically conceals the actual problems of society – the suppressed cannot really be confronted and therefore remains unconscious and, thus, dangerous, as it may lead to an explosion someday.

Early Nietzsche combines this claim with an explicitly reactionary cultural-political agenda. It is strange that so many “progressive” readers of the book (including Menke) fail to acknowledge this point. The conception of *Volk* plays a central role in its conception. It is not so much a single genius but it is a whole *Volk* which should be seen as the true Dionysian artist. However, this is explicitly not the heterogenous, chaotic *dêmos* of Attic democracy (BT, p. 52; VII) – in other words: it is not the *peuple* of revolutionary France, of modernity –, but the archaic “authentic” *Volk* of *Volkslied* and *Volksprache*; it is Heidegger's *Volk*, it is German *Volksgemeinschaft* and *Kulturnation*. This original mass of bacchantes is not a destructive rabble but a well-ordered and productive collective – whose order is not artificial, however, but springs from a natural authenticity. It constitutes tragedy but it also constitutes itself by assembling inside the theatre and viewing its own aesthetic projections on the dramatic scene. Their concrete Dionysian experience, however, appears to be quite “subversive”: Citing Schiller's *Ode to Joy* (having in his mind Beethoven's version of course) Nietzsche describes it as an overwhelming feeling of unity in which all social boundaries and hierarchies are forgotten and ‘slave is a free man’ (BT, 29; I). In aesthetic *Volksgemeinschaft*, all contradictions between classes are reconciled. Only momentarily, however: When the show is over, the members of the mass become individuals again and lead their everyday lives according to their place within social order. Having ex-

<sup>25</sup> Adorno correctly highlights this central element of Nietzsche's ‘aesthetics’ – and, thus, clearly sees its non-aesthetical character: ‘Of all, until now Nietzsche has contributed the most to the social study of music [...]. Any sociology of music which prohibited itself this speculative element would remain as below its object as below the level of Nietzsche's insight.’ (Adorno 1973, p. 365)

perienced this symbolic unity, they can now bear their usual sorrow more easily: While in the empirical world man is *homini lupus* and some have to work hard while others laze around, in the “true world” which opens its doors for a short moment in art, the actual unity of *Volk* is shown.

Young Nietzsche polemicizes against ‘Alexandrian’, democratic culture explicitly because it does not limit social equality to the symbolic realm of art but acts as if this equality could become real one day. The attitude of the ‘fifth class [*Stand*], i. e. that of the slave’ (BT, p. 78; XI) becomes dominant within culture and with it the slave’s gaiety and carelessness<sup>26</sup>. The interesting point about this critique is, however, that Nietzsche does not argue for it from a merely external point of view but tries to show that this culture is internally contradictory: On the one hand, it is based on the exploitation of a majority of slaves, on the other hand, it acts as if this inequality could and should actually be overcome and thus ideologically empowers the slaves until they actually revolt – and, consequently, destroy their own culture. (BT, p. 117; XVIII)<sup>27</sup> Modern, democratic culture, thus, is essentially unauthentic and self-contradictory: It is based on an ideological lie about its own violent essence.

If there is a proto-fascist side in Nietzsche, it can surely be found in this Wagnerian conception of the aestheticization of politics. Even anti-Semitic undertones do not miss.<sup>28</sup> The concrete political meaning of this theory becomes fully obvious in a series of letters and notes in which Nietzsche laments faked news according to which the revolting workers of the *Commune* destroyed the Louvre and all its works of art. Young Nietzsche viewed this event as a deep crisis, as an attack against culture as a whole<sup>29</sup> – just as we might be deeply irritated by and angry at the iconoclasm ex-

<sup>26</sup> Cf. early Heidegger’s cultural criticism which uses exactly the same metaphors.

<sup>27</sup> Also later in his works, Nietzsche repeats this claim in various instances. It is the most sophisticated version of his anti-egalitarianism.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the distinction between ‘Aryan sacrilege [*Frevel*]’ and ‘Semitic sin’ (BT, pp. 69 f.; IX) and the strange talk of ‘malicious dwarves’ – just like the *Nibelungen* in Wagner’s opera – from which German culture should be purged (BT, p. 154; XXIV) (Nietzsche later reinterprets this passage as being an allusion to Christian priests [Nietzsche 2011b, p. 310; *The Birth of Tragedy*; I] – a move which is completely implausible and is clearly motivated by his desire to distance himself from his early anti-Semitism.)

<sup>29</sup> Cf. my detailed analysis of this often-overlooked episode in Stephan 2016b, pp. 266 f. (fn. 29).

ecuted by the “Islamic State” and other terrorist organisations.

The strange think about young Nietzsche’s enthusiasm for *Volk* is, however, that its existence is already defined as being Apollonian: It possesses always-already a “natural form” (a metaphysical conception later Nietzsche would forcefully reject), it exists primarily as a *dream*, an aesthetic spectacle. Would it not be much more plausible to link the imagination of a horde of bacchantes unleashed with the picture of plundering workers? Is it not young Nietzsche himself who remains too optimistic in this regard, who does not view the Dionysian consequently enough, who still combines it with romantic ideals? Later Nietzsche will put the word “*Volk*” in quotation marks<sup>30</sup> and will radicalise his affirmation of the Dionysian: This leads him to a fundamental break with his own bourgeois identity and his early aestheticist ideology (which was not very “untimely” at that time). By becoming who he is, Nietzsche had to move beyond of all these illusions – and so do we.

Maybe, Nietzsche fell into madness because he was not brave enough to undertake the last final step of this development: To see his own struggle for individual liberation and the workers’ (and women’s) struggle for collective emancipation as two sides of the same coin. This last step would have enabled him to come out of his bourgeois-aestheticist closet and to become a part of an actual collective enterprise for the fight against capitalist economy of Death in the name of the ugly beauty of life; a total unleashing of the Dionysian and the drive for experimentation from any institutional constraints.<sup>31</sup>

### **3.2. Master vs. Slave Art: While Artists Aren’t Authentic Producers**

The aesthetic is painted in an entirely different manner in *On the Genealogy of Morality* 16 years later. First of all, the true “artist” is described neither as an individual genius nor a homogenous *Volksmasse* but is a social class of masters – whose work of art, however, is not art in the narrow sense of the word but social life in its totality:

Who is able to command, who is ‘master’ by nature, who appears forcefully in work and gesture – what has he to do with contracts?

<sup>30</sup> BT, p. 14; *Attempt of a Self-Critique*, III

<sup>31</sup> I have elaborated this idea in Stephan 2016b.

With such beings one does not count, they come like fate, without cause, reason, consideration, excuse, they are there like thunder is there, too terrible, too sudden, too compelling, too 'different' just to be hated. Their work is an instinctive creation of forms, impressing of forms, they are the most involuntary, unconsciousness artists that exist: – in short there stands something new where they appear, a construction of domination that *lives*, in which parts and functions are defined and made respective, in which nothing finds a place which is not inserted a 'meaning' in respect to the whole. They do not know what guilt, what responsibility, what consideration is these born organisers; in them acts this terrible egoism of artists who gazes like o and feels itself justified in its 'works', like the mother in its children. (GM, p. 325; II, 17)

These masters produce better works of art than any "artist" in the narrow sense could do. Accordingly, the poet Theognis is introduced in another passage in the book as a mere 'mouthpiece' (GM, p. 263; I, 5) of Greek nobility – who surely gives very good artistic expression to their values but who does not *create* them, who is only a "second maker" in this regard. Also in the third section of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche describes the artist – taking here Wagner as an example – as a mere passive figure who is not able to stand alone, to be independent, but who fully depends on someone else who dictates to him his taste and his values: Artists

have always been valets of a morality, or a philosophy, or a religion; aside from the additional fact that they unfortunately have been often enough all-too-lissom courtiers of their followers and sponsors and well-sniffing flatterers of old or newly emerging powers. (GM, pp. 344 f.; III, 5)

In rather strict Marxist terms, Nietzsche regards art in the narrow sense as a mere ideological sphere without any philosophical interest: Not only artists do not stand independently within the world, they do not stand against it – they do not produce, they only reproduce it in a more or less felicitous manner.<sup>32</sup>

Philosophers are characterised in this section by their strong individuality and self-reliance which clearly distinguish them from artists. They

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<sup>32</sup> GM, p. 344; III, 5.

are truly able to think against the world and its powers – they seem to be more suited to becoming genuine creators who actually are able to engage in the task of not just passively describing existing values of a society, but in creating new ones and thus creating an entirely new social order, just like the masters did in former days.

To take part in this re-evaluation of all values, philosophers, however, have to overcome their dependence on an ascetic ideal of 'wisdom' as mere passive contemplation, which has dominated philosophy since its beginning. In particular, they have to change their relationship towards art entirely: While in traditional aesthetics (e. g. in Kant and Schopenhauer), art is viewed from the standpoint of the mere uninterested spectator (which is the general relationship of traditional philosophy towards the world), art – just like the world in general – should be viewed from an engaged, involved, creative, and active perspective which is artistic in itself. That means: A perspective that *knows* that perception is not only a passive but always also an active relationship toward to the world, that theory is always-already praxis in itself. In an explanatory note towards the book's first essay, Nietzsche writes: 'All sciences have henceforth to prepare the future-task of the philosopher: This task understood in the direction that the philosopher has to solve the *problem of value*, that he has to define the *rank order of values*.' (GM, p. 289) The 'problem of value' cannot be solved in a solely theoretical, contemplative manner: It has to be solved practically, *decisions* have to be made.

While the problem of the artist consists in the fact that he is too unreflective and thus too engaged into the world and its dominating powers, the problem of the traditional philosopher is that he is too unengaged, too similar to the religious ascetic. What is needed is a figure which is artist and philosopher at the same time: Whose perception is consciously always creation and whose creation is consciously always perception – whose perception is therefore *real* perception.

Like the quoted remark from the first essay already implied, one can reformulate all these issues within the language of values: True art is the genuine creation of values, i. e. practical and theoretical "truths" which govern social life.<sup>33</sup> This genuine creation is first and foremost a social

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<sup>33</sup> For the history and complexity of the conception of "value" cf. the comprehensive

enterprise – that is, the result of a continuing struggle of power between classes of masters and slaves. Art in the narrow sense plays only a mere supporting role within this struggle as artists take up existing values and give them an aesthetic expression within their works of art. They are very uncreative – true artists are powerful groups of individuals who change society according to their collective will.

In modernity, however, Nietzsche seems to have in mind another form of genuine creativity: The activity of the authentic philosophers who finally has moved beyond his ascetic boundaries and has truly become what he is. In these figures, art as the art of the creation of values becomes finally independent from social powers and becomes an autonomous force which fights for nothing but its own good, its own truth, its own beauty. Here, we can clearly see the modernist and avant-gardist tendency of Nietzsche's aesthetics: The artist-philosopher or philosopher-artist should take the position of a master and replace both existing elites (i. e. capitalists – for whom Nietzsche had nothing but disgust) and priests (i. e. the leaders of the slaves) as the leading creators of values of society.

Obviously, there is a contradiction between these two narratives: While the first one resembles historical materialism, the second one adds an idealist element to it – and the relationship between both is not very clear. Both narratives have in common, however, that both the artist and the aesthetician in the traditional sense are confronted with non-aestheticist polemic: It is not seen as a realm of genuine, but only of secondary creativity. In order to get rid of his confinement within already-existing powers, the artist would have to become a philosopher; in order to overcome the limits of traditional contemplative aesthetics, the philosopher has to become an artist – that is: a genuine creator – himself.

### **3.3. *Music Sucks: While a World Without Music Wouldn't Be an Error***

In order to get the full picture of Nietzsche's non-aesthetics we have to view another dimension of his criticism of traditional aesthetics in *On Genealogy of Morality*: The perspective of the slaves, i. e. those who are uncreative and therefore the mere victims of their masters' will. They are

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essay *Werte. Warum man sie braucht, obwohl es sie nicht gibt* by Sommer (2016).

degraded to a status of mere passivity, even their thoughts are not free since all language and all values are solely the artistic creations of the masters. One can say that the artist in the narrow sense, the institutionalised artist, is also a slave in this regard, a mere tool according to the masters' will. If he works well – i. e. his creations actually reflect the values of the masters, glorify their way of life, inspire them to new honourable deeds –, he gets rewards; if not, he is punished. Of course, this “glorification” can also take a critical, subversive, tragic form: The masters will even enjoy being confronted with the contradictions of their existence from time to time. Their whole worldview is shaped by a tragic sense of affirmation of life in the face of the worst evils. They are authentic in the sense that they are conscious of the contradictions of their existence – and affirm it despite of them.

Since the slave can only think using concepts created by his masters, there is first and foremost no way in which he can develop an authentic relationship towards his own existence. While the master's way of life is based upon a deep affirmation for the world, all the slave is left with is a deep sense of negativity, of *ressentiment*. He hates the life-world that surrounds him – and this pure hate, this mere negativity, is all the remaining “creativity” he has left. For Nietzsche, the best he can become is a villain who has a clear cynical consciousness of society: He sees it as a play of brute forces, stripped from all value and meaning, and tries to manipulate them in his own favour. While he is no master, this is as close as he can get to being one. Also, the traditional ascetic philosopher may be a kind of villain. Both the villain and the traditional philosopher are far from being genuinely creative, however.

There is another type of slave, however: the priest. Just like the master (and the philosopher) he possesses a strong will to power. In him, *ressentiment* and this will to power are merged: Thus, he possesses the power to affirm – but he does not affirm affirmation, but he affirms negation.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, what he does is *inauthentic creation*, he is an *anti-aesthetic artist*: It is the creation of a system of values – and, thus, a whole social order – which is based on the negation of genuine creativity. It is a society based

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<sup>34</sup> This understanding of the psychology of the priest follows the paths laid out in Deleuze 1983.

on ascetic values and the glorification of passivity.<sup>35</sup> This is, of course, the

<sup>35</sup> In a very interesting article, Menke (2013) attempts to argue that slave morality can be understood as a felicitous attempt by the slaves to affirm their passivity and to re-evaluate passivity as a virtue – an attempt that he – unsurprisingly – sees as the opportunity for a culture which is based on an emancipatory self-conception, a reconciliation between activity and passivity (a thought that obviously stems from Adorno's vision of peacefully lying on the water in aphorism 100 of *Minima Moralia* (2001, pp. 295-298)). While such an authentic affirmation of passivity is possible for Nietzsche in the case of masters who choose passivity voluntarily (an example for that would be the philosopher), they do this only in order to gain more power, to demonstrate, or to test their power. Slaves, however, do not choose their passivity voluntarily, thus they *cannot* authentically affirm it. (In order to support that claim one has not – as Menke asserts – to accept the rather implausible point – which is indeed sometimes made by Nietzsche in his weaker moments – that there are slaves or masters “by nature”. Of course, their slavery is a matter of second nature, they are born into a social condition which systematically prevents them from becoming truly active.) The same goes for the priests in Nietzsche's description. In it, there is no room for an authentic affirmation of passivity and a society led by the ideal of passivity would be a nihilist culture of “last men”. Of course, this does not prevent Nietzsche from polemizing against pseudo-activity (and thus, modern glorification of labour) in various instances.

From a Nietzschean point of view, thus, the affirmation of passivity is never a truly liberating response to experiences of victimisation. It does not empower the weak; on the contrary, it only increases their status as victims but making an identity out of it. What follows from this odd move, is exactly *ressentiment* and its awful fruits can be observed not only in so many “progressive” circles but also in German *Pegida*-movement. A Nietzschean answer to experiences of passivity would be exactly the opposite: To stop defining oneself as a victim, to try to become active again, to rebel against those structures that make you passive.

Accordingly, I do not see any political profit in Menke's “progressive” re-interpretation of Nietzsche's critique of slave-revolt. On the contrary: If one wants to fight capitalism, one has to teach workers, blacks, women etc. to actively rebel against the passivity enforced upon them; not to “enjoy” their passivity somehow or even to see it as a virtue. The problem with capitalism is not that people are “too much subjects” or “too autonomous” but that they are forcefully desubjectified and deprived of their autonomy. First and foremost, they have to become subjects in order to fight. Menke's apology of “force” does strip anticapitalist resistance from any force it still might possess. It is unforceful.

Adorno is very aware of this problem despite of his (however: ambiguous) philosophical apology of passivity. This goes even for his reflection of aesthetics: ‘Fostered passivity integrates itself into the total system of cultural industry as one of progressing stupidification. [...] [T]he *fan* whose need towards that which is imposed upon him may increase up to the point of dull euphoria, the sad relict of old intoxication [*Rausch*], is taught a passivity by the total system of light music which transmits itself probably also to his thought

ultimate reason why Nietzsche thinks that true creativity can take place in modernity only in great individuals or small elitist circles: Because it is dominated by this ascetic spirit of passivity and negativity.

Just as the artist in the narrow sense had been the mere tool for the amusement of the masters, he has now become the mere tool for the amusement of the priests and, thus, the amusement of the slaves. The relationship between art and ascetic culture is ambiguous, however: Since all art is affirmative and creative somehow, ascetic ideology is characterised by a deep mistrust in all forms of art. Under the dominance of ascetic ideology, art is forced to affirm uncreativity and negativity: It is forced to become bad art. In ascetical aesthetics, it has to subordinate itself solely under metaphysical values: the Good, the True, the Beautiful. Since these values possess, ultimately, no foundation in sensible reality, art becomes over-sensible, it has to serve the impossible task of representing something that cannot be represented (for one simple reason: it does not exist, it possesses only a parasitical, secondary actuality).

According also to late Nietzsche, the socialist movement of his days would serve as a perfect example for such a movement of *ressentiment*: They cannot do otherwise but to destroy the art that has been created in order to glorify the values of the former aristocratic masters (which is displayed in museums like the Louvre), they have to create a new art dominated by “modern ideas” such as liberty, equality, and solidarity, by realism, and, ultimately, by *décadence* (which means mainly the absence of aesthetic form, i. e. of the Apollonian, within art).

As a contemporary example of a movement of *ressentiment* Islamism can surely serve well: From a Nietzschean perspective, it can easily be regarded as a movement driven primarily by hate and envy, not by a genuine will to produce something positively new. Their hate for art can easily be seen as a symptom of their hate for life in general – and it is, as Connell Vaughan demonstrated in detail at his most instructive presentation for the annual conference of the European Society for Aesthetics 2016 in Barcelona – deeply inauthentic: The “Islamic State” glorifies its destruction of works of art by producing highly-aesthetised movies of it. One main feature of

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and his social behaviour. The befogging effect which Nietzsche feared from Wagner's music, has been taken over by the light one and has been socialised.’ (Adorno 1973, pp. 208 f.)

these movies is that they are highly emotional and intoxicating music is added to them.

While in Islamist politics, art is degraded to a mere instrumental role in order to deliver aesthetic support for an anti-(*not*: non-)aesthetical ideology, there is also an “autonomous” form of ascetic art: In the third section of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche describes ascetic culture as a culture which does not actually solve the problems and contradictions of life but only varnishes them. He gives a detailed analysis of the various techniques of varnishing. Among these techniques, art – especially music – plays a decisive role: Using its soul-manipulating force, it can easily be used to distract slaves from their actual sorrows – and even to implement diverting pseudo-emotions into their minds. Art, and especially music, thus serves primarily as a measure of consolation. It works especially well when combined with artificial intoxicating ideas. Wagner’s operas serve as a main example for this consoling type of art – and Adorno correctly stated that in his polemic against Wagner, Nietzsche already sketched a critique of modern cultural industry.<sup>36</sup>

What to make out of Nietzsche’s alleged praise for music under these premises? Let us have a close look at the whole aphorism:

How little is necessary for happiness! The tone of a bagpipe. – Without music life would be an error. The German even thinks God as singing songs. (TI, p. 64; *Sayings and Arrows*, 33)

It is hard not to see that the sentence about music in the middle of this aphorism is not meant as a philistine apology of the “magic of music” viewed in its context: A first suspicion should be raised by the fact that the example for music here is not a sophisticated composition but the simple tone of an instrument which is largely considered to be rather “primitive”. More suspicions should occur when one keeps in mind what late Nietzsche has to say about happiness and Germans.<sup>37</sup>

What Nietzsche has in mind here is music as a means for reaching fictional, symbolic pseudo-conciliation. A music that is bad music indeed insofar as it lacks all formal structure – even rhythm –, which is reduced

<sup>36</sup> Cf. for example Adorno 2001, pp. 411-413.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the instructive analysis of this aphorism in Vogt 2005.

to mere musical material, tone; i. e. which is pure Dionysian music or music in its purest Schopenhauerian form. It is this music that fits well to an ascetic form of life: In ascetic ideology, all life is viewed from the perspective of metaphysical values; accordingly, it is judged as being an error. Or, to turn it upon its feet: Ascetic cultural is based upon the judgement that life is an error. It is only from the point of view of this judgement that music is necessary for happiness. A truly happy, reconciled life (such as the masters live it in Nietzsche's imagination) would not need any music of this kind; it would prefer complex music which showed life not only in its beauty but also in its ugliness and complexity.

These entire considerations can be summed up by the short remark by Nietzsche that Beauty is based on the judgement "I am ugly"<sup>38</sup>. Of course, this goes only for ascetic aesthetics. Life-affirming aesthetics would be based on the judgement "I am beautiful".

### **3.4. Beyond Nietzsche**

It should have become evident by now how low late Nietzsche thinks of art and aesthetics in general – and especially that of his life-time. Of course, he could not see the emergence of an entirely new kind of art only a few years after his death: The attempts of the avant-garde movements to overcome the boundaries of art in the narrow sense can be regarded as a response to Nietzsche's critique of the place of art within modern society. Since in modern society all individuals are more or less reduced to slaves, to a mere "herd without herder"<sup>39</sup>, art is more or less completely reduced to its social function of giving fictive distraction and consolation to the depressed and emptied, of making the unhappy happy at least for short moments.

In order to escape this dead end, art has to attack the ascetic values of modernity – not just theoretically, but also in its actual aesthetic practice. It has to spread unhappiness amongst the slaves, it has to call on their '*instinct of freedom*' (GM, p. 325; II, 17), their genuine creativity, which still exists despite all efforts to tame it. Nietzsche's writings can serve – and evidently have served – as a blueprint for similar attempts. Their main aim is not to spread a certain philosophical doctrine but to encourage the

<sup>38</sup> GM, p. 326; II, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Nietzsche 2011a, p. 20; *Proem*, V.

reader to stop being a mere “sheep”, but to start living and thinking for him-/herself. Obviously, such an art has to stop being mere art – it has to become non-art, it has to engage in philosophy, politics, science, religion, etc.

Accordingly, after Nietzsche philosophical aesthetics – if it actually wants to understand modern art – can no longer work with traditional categories such as Beauty, Goodness, and Truth – and even the Sublime would be an inadequate conception to describe modernist productions. First and foremost, however, aesthetics has to emancipate its own production from the orientation towards these categories and become free aesthetic production itself – in the name of love for a world which is yet to be produced.

From a modernist point of view, however, Nietzsche himself appears to be as a figure of transition: He rightly criticizes the old but fails to fully immerse himself into the new. He is only a prophet. He is still not non-aesthetic enough.

This last point can be seen in various elements of his aesthetics and his entire philosophy, especially in its contempt for the movements of women and workers for emancipation. While he dreamt of wild Dionysian outbreaks and life-affirming resistance to the major tendencies of his time (namely: the capitalisation of the entire life-world), he could not see that an actual movement which embodied his visions and hopes already existed in these rebelling workers, slaves, women, ... His bourgeois ideology only allowed him to view them as a repetition of Christianity – and he correctly stressed the resentful, moralistic elements of many parts of these movements. He could not see however – in opposition to most parts of his avant-gardist successors – that the authentic parts of the modern socialist movements had nothing to do with Christian *ressentiment* or asceticism, on the contrary: They were driven by a genuine, self-conscious will to power, an authentic drive to create a world in which everyone can produce and consume freely according to his or her individual desires. It was this vision – driven by the highest affirmation of life imaginable – that brought the protagonists of these movements to their deep refusal of institutionalised art, and sometimes indeed to outbreaks of iconoclasm. This iconoclasm has to be distinguished sharply, however, from the iconoclasm of premodern or of reactionary movements like Islamism: In the former, false images are destroyed in the name of the imagine of a coming world more beautiful

than all of them – in the later, images are destroyed in order to destroy all images and thus all life. As Deleuze (1983) correctly stresses, the key point about Nietzschean thinking is to learn to distinguish between symptom and type: A certain phenomenon may be a symptom of two essentially different types who share only a superficial similarity. Nietzsche failed to make that difference with regard to modern socialism (and many of his reactionary pseudo-followers still do).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Bull, Heidegger, and Menke are wrong or at least not satisfying in various regards. While Bull fails to see the modernist, emancipatory main line of Nietzsche's thought – which shows itself especially in his non-aestheticism –, Heidegger, who ignores Nietzsche's social philosophy completely and is thus blind enough to read Nietzsche's analysis of various power relations as a metaphysics, also transforms Nietzsche's non-aesthetics into just another spiced-up variation of traditional aesthetics. Menke, finally, also ignores the connection between Nietzsche's 'aesthetics' and his cultural criticism and social analysis and thus transforms him into just another champion of modernist aestheticism – ignoring that authentic modern aesthetics have to be non-aesthetics in essence: His philosophy of force remains unforceful.

It has been shown that Nietzsche has to be regarded primarily as a social philosopher on the edge between early and late modernity, a citizen of the 20th (or even: 22nd) century lost by an odd coincidence in the 19th – but still too bound up in Victorian-Wilhelminian ideology that he was not able to see certain tendencies of his time in their full meaning. Of course, if we truly want to engage in contemporary non-aesthetics, we also have to lay Nietzsche aside.

The big problem of our day is clearly that it is hard to see a similar emancipatory force comparable to the workers' and feminist movements in Nietzsche's time or the emancipatory movements following the Second World War. Therefore, it may appear plausible and (unfortunately) very realistic to return to Nietzsche or even go back to earlier thinkers (just like Menke does). Bull delivers a more "optimistic" approach in this regard – it seems dubious, however, if his picture of emancipation is not driven

by *ressentiment* and therefore falls back behind Nietzsche instead of going beyond him. The situation is even more hopeless when it comes to contemporary art, which more and more replaces Nietzsche's avant-gardist project for an unforceful post-modernism, which is nothing more than a mere sub-category of cultural industry, which uses its traditional role as an autonomous realm for the experience of an alterity only as an ideology to foster business. If one truly wants to experience some kind of actual "alterity", contemporary "high culture" is surely the wrong place. It is only in those few places and times where authentic resistance is practiced where genuine life shows itself in blinks of the eye.

Surely we (as non-aestheticists and non-artists) cannot wait for a new emancipatory movement to come. If we cannot invent this movement, we can at least prepare ourselves for its emergence – an event which will possibly take place in the not-too-distant future given the current structural crisis of the global empire<sup>40</sup> –, open ourselves for harkening to its call, sharpening our gaze in order to recognise its traces and emissaries. Going back to Nietzsche before forcefully going behind or beyond him appears to be a first step in order to undertake this preparation.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For the conception of "empire" cf. Hardt & Negri 2000.

<sup>41</sup> I would like to thank Frederick Myles and Gabriele Schimmenti for their insightful remarks and linguistic corrections to this paper and also Marcus Döller for his helpful comments. Moreover, I want to thank all who attended my presentation at the conference, especially those who contributed to the very inspiring discussion, and Christoph Menke for his kind support in many respects. I thank both my parents and the "Freunde und Förderer der Goethe-Universität" for their generous financial support without which my attendance at the conference and the elaboration of my paper would not have been possible. And, finally, I also want to thank the organizers of the conference for all their great efforts.

A little report on the conference written by me in German can be found online (Stephan 2016a). It focusses on the question of the destruction of art (which seemed to be one of the main issues in Barcelona) and also gives a short impression of the discussion following my own presentation.

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