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1995

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Recommended Citation
Shapiro, Gary. "*Übersehen*: Nietzsche and Tragic Vision." *Research in Phenomenology* 25, no. 1 (1995): 27-44. doi:10.1163/156916495x00031.

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Übersehen: Nietzsche and Tragic Vision

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Toward the end of *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche sketches the possibility of a rebirth of tragedy and tragic culture. At this point Nietzsche's seductive language reaches a kind of crescendo; all along he has been inviting the reader to share his sense of what ancient tragedy was, and he does this in part by implying that the question of one's tastes and sensitivities here are crucial in determining whether one is hopelessly caught in the anemic Alexandrian world of modernity (sometimes called "the culture of the opera," later to be called nihilism) or whether one is a candidate for redemption through art. At a certain point Nietzsche begins to speak of (and, in a sense, *to*) a "friend" who is genuinely attuned to music and musical drama (the friend is no doubt a Wagnerian). What is extraordinary is that in this book so overshadowed, at least in most of its reception and criticism, by the Dionysian and the musical, Nietzsche, in attempting to delineate the nature of the musical drama that is being reborn, appeals to what and how such a friend will *see*. Such a friend will acknowledge that in "the effect of a true musical tragedy, purely and simply, as he knows it from experience," it will be

> as if his visual faculty [*Sehkraft*] were no longer merely a surface faculty but capable of penetrating into the interior, and as if he now saw before him, with the aid of music, the waves of the will, the conflict of motives, and the swelling flood of the passions, sensuously

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> visible, as it were, like a multitude of vividly moving lines and figures. (*KSA* 1: 140; *BT*, 130)[1]

Nevertheless, these visible forms (or virtually visible if we emphasize Nietzsche's "as if" and "as it were") do not reinforce the sense of individuation which the author believes that he has already established as the goal of Apollinian art. Rather

> He beholds the transfigured world of the stage and nevertheless denies it. He sees the tragic hero before him in epic clearness and beauty, and nevertheless rejoices in his annihilation. . . . He sees more extensively and profoundly than ever, and yet wishes he were blind. (*KSA* 1: 141; *BT*, 131)

How strange that sight and blindness would in some way be the key to understanding the new music. But Nietzsche has prepared the ground for this move in his analysis of the Greek theater and of tragedy. There is no theater without vision; as we are often reminded, our words "theory" and "theater" derive from Greek ancestors signifying acts of beholding or witnessing. Behind the strange complicity of vision and blindness that Nietzsche expects his friend to experience in the musical drama of his day, there is the similar structure that he articulates in the Greek theater. Oedipus and Teiresias are not only figures of the stage, but figures for what it is to see the visions of tragedy. Homer, too, whom Nietzsche will describe as the most visual of Greek poets, was blind as legend has it. What, then, is tragic vision in Nietzsche's radical theory and re-visioning of tragedy?

In the "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" that he added to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886, Nietzsche says that his book was "image-mad and image-confused" (*bilderwüthig und bilderwirrig*) (*KSA* 1: 14; *BT*, 19). No doubt he is referring to the images of his own rhapsodic prose in 1872, a voice that "should have *sung*. . . and not spoken!" (*KSA* 1: 15; *BT*, 20), and it is a judgment with which Nietzsche's readers have frequently concurred. But in addition to these poetic images, beginning with the very first sentence in which the fluctuating relations of the Apollinian and Dionysain forces are compared to the eternal war of the sexes, the notion of the image itself, in the sense of that which appears, and appears quite specifically to sight, is thematized and interrogated. Throughout the book Nietzsche insists that we *see* what he is proposing or revealing to us, and this insistence is already marked in the same opening sentence, which says that we will have made an advance in aesthetics "once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision [*Anschauung*]" the roles of the two great artistic drives (*KSA* 1: 25; *BT*, 33). If the translation of *Anschauung* as vision, rather than, say, intuition, seems tendentious, it appears less

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so when we realize the pervasive visual language as well as the visual thematics of the *Birth,* dimensions that have been somewhat overshadowed by the book's obvious celebration of the musical. And if we are tempted to dismiss such language and concerns as merely "metaphorical" (as if we knew what that status was) and as standing in at least a potential conflict with the apparent melocentrism of this work (thus confirming its status as "image-mad and image-confused"), we should recall that in the *Birth* Nietzsche says that "for a genuine poet, metaphor is not a rhetorical figure but a vicarious image (*stellvertretendes Bild*) that he actually beholds in place of a concept" (*KSA* 1: 60; *BT,* 63). In the framing essay of 1886, Nietzsche emphasizes the visual dimension of his analysis of tragedy in this summary of its "artist's metaphysics":

> The world—at every moment [*Augenblick*] the *attained* salvation of God, as the eternally changing, eternally new vision [*Vision*] of the most deeply afflicted, discordant, and contradictory being who can find salvation only in *appearance or shining* [*Schein*]. (*KSA* 1: 17; *BT,* 22).

Even if Nietzsche now looks at his youthful book with "a much older, a hundred times more demanding, but by no means colder eye" it still has the significance of placing things in the proper perspective, or nested set of perspectives, namely "*to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life*" (*KSA* 1: 14: *BT,* 19). The terms in which the older Nietzsche formulates the import of his first book call for some comment. The *Augenblick,* the moment of vision, usually translated as "moment," does not play a large role in the 1872 text of the *Birth,* but it does become crucial in all of his texts concerning the eternal recurrence; and as the highly visual concern with the *Augenblick* in *Zarathustra*'s chapter "On the Vision and the Riddle" indicates, the sense of a look, the phenomenological sense of the experience of a blink or twinkling of the eye, ought to be heard in this term.[2] *Vision,* although alphabetically equivalent to the English word, has the sense of that which is visionary, of seeing something beyond the mundane. *The Birth of Tragedy,* as Nietzsche's later account confirms, is indeed a visionary text. *Vision* and *Schein* play major roles in the *Birth. Schein* is conventionally translated (by Walter Kaufmann, for example) as "appearance," but that term can be fraught with unnecessary metaphysical and epistemological baggage, insofar as it suggests the importance of a distinction between appearance and reality, or between that which gives rise to appearance and the appearance itself. Translating *Schein* only as illusion or "mere appearance" (Walter Kaufmann often chooses the latter) enforces the impression that Nietzsche is simply following Schopenhauer; but we can read the *Birth* more productively as adopting

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Schopenhauer's metaphysics in a much more provisional and tentative fashion. As John Sallis suggests, in *The Birth of Tragedy* "the word *Schein* will have to be read in its full range of senses: shine, look, appearance, semblance, illusion."[3]

I am dwelling on the rhetoric of vision in Nietzsche's text and his later self-criticism because I want to suggest that the story told by *The Birth of Tragedy* is largely one about becoming visible, of the arrangement and projection of visual images whether actual, virtual, or hallucinatory. If, as Giorgio Colli suggests in the afterword to his edition, the *Birth* can be read as a kind of written equivalent of a Greek mystery ritual, we should remember that often the crucial or culminating stage of such rituals was the display of some scene or object charged with meaning (*KSA* 1: 902–3). Nietzsche's story is precisely one of a birth, of a passage from the hidden to the manifest, of that which suddenly becomes visible (and noisy). It tells of how the cult and rituals of Dionysus, penetrated and impregnated by Apollo, give birth to a set of images, visions, and appearances. *The Birth of Tragedy* is about the genesis of a certain kind of vision and of the framework or setup whose structure makes that vision possible. At crucial points in developing his articulation of the Dionysian or of the tragic, Nietzsche asks us specifically to visualize. This is remarkable because the Dionysian is said to be a nonimagistic force, affiliated with the nonimagistic art of music. But in giving us instructions on how we ought to realize or comprehend the Dionysian, Nietzsche moves, not from the visible to the musical, but the other way around:

> Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature, which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man. Freely, earth proffers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey of the rocks and deserts approach. The chariot of Dionysus is covered with flowers and garlands; panthers and tigers walk under its yoke. Transform Beethoven's "Hymn to Joy" into a painting; let your imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck—then you will approach the Dionysian. (*KSA* 1: 29; *BT*, 37)

Image-madness, image-confusion? Or is there an implicit principle here that nothing is grasped in its full import until it has generated the vision appropriate to it? This passage appears in the first section of the *Birth*, following quickly on the heels of Nietzsche's celebration of Apollinian dreaming. Is it a thoughtless transference of that enthusiasm of the dreamer who can declare "it is a dream—I will dream on!" (*KSA* 1: 23; *BT*, 35), or does it reflect some of the deeper aims of the work? Apollo,

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it seems, is already at work in the manifestations of Dionysus, although it would be difficult to find analogous passages in which Dionysus was at work within the highly individuated images of the dream (although we might experience our own dreams as much more Dionysian than Nietzsche's accounts of the dream state). Just a few lines after this instruction to transform music into painting, the Apollininan art of sculpture appears (Apollo is called the *Bildnergott* at one point) in order to help us appreciate the meaning of the Dionysian mysteries.[4] The Dionysian man, we are told

> is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity. The noblest clay, the most costly marble, man, is here kneaded and cut, and to the sound of the chisel strokes of the Dionysian world-artist rings out the cry of the Eleusinian mysteries: "Do you prostrate yourselves, millions? Do you sense your Maker, world?" (*KSA* 1: 30; *BT* 37–38)

Here the musical, aural world of Dionysus is something of a secondary accompaniment to the activity of the sculptor. Man is reshaped and reconfigured in a material and visible form while the sculptor's radio plays Beethoven.

In telling us to imagine a painting or imagine a sculpture, Nietzsche is performing a kind of inverted ekphrasis. In this genre of ancient rhetoric, a visual work of art becomes the subject of a discourse, serving to generate a speech or a text that clarifies the original and sometimes vies with it, suggesting that the rhetorician can provide a verbal equivalent of the work of the artist. Often the ekphrasis dwells on that which is not strictly visible in the painting or sculpture, taking the seen as a sign of unseen meanings.[5] It is curious that, so far as I know, Nietzsche never refers explicitly to this genre, although some of his most important passages, such as the appropriately named chapter "Of the Vision [*Gesicht*] and the Riddle" from *Zarathustra*, can be read as ekphrases of imaginary scenes. As the paradigmatic instance of literary ekphrasis, Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, makes clear, the object of description need not be an actual work; indeed, given Homer's legendary blindness, it is remarkable that the touchstone for all future ekphrases would be one of an imaginary work of art by a man who could not see. Nietzsche does not speak of Homer's blindness, and one can imagine that it might be difficult for him to reconcile it with his status in the *Birth* as the supreme Apollinian poet. "How is it," he asks, "that Homer's descriptions are so much more vivid [*anschaulicher*] than those of any other poet? Because he visualizes [*anschaut*] so much more vividly" (*KSA* 1: 60; *BT*, 63–64). But perhaps he glancingly alludes to the legend

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when after remarking on "the incredibly precise and unerring plastic power of their [i.e., the Greeks'] eyes, together with their vivid, frank delight in colors," he concludes that

> we can hardly refrain from assuming even for their dreams (to the shame of all those born later) a certain logic of line and contour, colors and groups, a certain pictorial sequence reminding us of their finest bas-reliefs whose perfection would certainly justify us, if a comparison were possible, in designating the dreaming Greeks as Homers and Homer as a dreaming Greek. . . . (*KSA* 1: 31; *BT*, 38–39)

Perhaps the thought is that, especially among the Greeks, even the blind have visions, an idea which is to be distinguished from the looser and more common notion that they may, like Teiresias or the old Oedipus, have powers of knowledge and prophecy denied to those with sight.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche employs a more conventional ekphrasis in order to lead us further in our Dionysian initiation. He provides a reading of Raphael's *Transfiguration* to demonstrate how "the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision [*Vision*], the pleasurable appearance [*Schein*], for its continuous redemption." The structure of the painting will turn out to be an analogue of that of tragedy, with the emphasis on how each one issues in certain visions, illusions, or images. We ought to look carefully at this ekphrasis, the longest and most detailed that Nietzsche ever devotes to a single work of visual art:

> In a symbolic painting, *Raphael,* himself one of these immortal "naive" ones, has represented for us this demotion of appearance to a lesser appearance [*des Scheins zum Schein*], the primitive process of the naive artist and of Apollinian culture. In his *Transfiguration,* the lower half of the picture, with the possessed boy, the despairing bearers, the bewildered, terrified disciples, shows us the reflection of suffering, primal and eternal, the sole ground of the world: the "appearance" here is the reflection [*der "Schein" ist hier Widerschein*] of eternal contradiction, the father of things. From this appearance arises, like ambrosial vapor, a new visionary world of pure appearances, invisible to those wrapped in the first appearance—a radiant floating in purest bliss, a serene contemplation beaming from wide-open eyes. Here we have presented, in the most sublime artistic symbolism, that Apollinian world of beauty and its substratum, the terrible wisdom of Silenus; and intuitively we comprehend their necessary interdependence. Apollo, however, again appears to us as the apotheosis of the *principium individuationis,* in which alone is consummated the perpetually attained goal of the primal unity, its redemption through appearance. With his sublime gestures, he shows us how necessary is

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> the entire world of suffering, that by means of it the individual may be impelled to realize the redeeming vision, and then, sunk in contemplation of it, sit quietly in his tossing bark, amid the waves. (*KSA* 1: 39–40; *BT*, 45–46)

Perhaps the most radical aspect of this ekphrasis is that Nietzsche manages to discuss the *Transfiguration* without mentioning that its subject is Christ; as he remarks in the "Self-Criticism," the *Birth*'s "*antimoral* propensity is best inferred from the careful and hostile silence with which Christianity is treated throughout the whole book" (*KSA* 1: 18; *BT*, 23). There is something extraordinarily Hölderlinian about the displacement of Christ by Apollo and Dionysus here (or is it their fusion?), and when "his sublime gestures" are spoken of, it seems that they are those of Apollo, conceived as the central figure of the painting, the one who would normally bear the name Christ. In his description of the painting, Nietzsche tells us that "Apollo, however, again appears to us." If this painting, despite its ostensibly Christian theme, can illustrate the eternal and fundamental play of the two Greek divinities and of their collaboration in projecting beautiful illusions on the ground of suffering, chaos, and contradiction, then it may provide an initial indication of how Nietzsche's frequent opposition or question "Dionysus versus the Crucified" can be read as the juxtaposition of two very different modes of theater and vision.

Now let us look more carefully at the structure that Nietzsche finds within Raphael's painting. The painting is a vision; in principle we might analyze the structure that allows that vision to appear to us and by virtue of which we receive it, just as Nietzsche will analyze the underlying setup of Greek tragedy (the festival, the space of the theater, the orchestra, the scene, the mask). To follow out that path would be to attempt to clarify the space in which the painting is found (church or museum), how the work is framed and presented within that space (labelling, lighting, arrangement in rooms and on the wall), and the expectations aroused in the spectators when they enter into the viewing space. Although we do not get that sort of analysis of the painting's way of being set up (what Michel Foucault or Jean-François Lyotard would call its *dispositif*) in the *Birth*, it will be useful to mark its possibility here as we approach the analysis that Nietzsche will provide of the structure of tragic presentation, a structure which, like that of painting, is somehow positioned prior to the Apollinian and Dionysian forces that play themselves out in the actual work of art. For Nietzsche, Raphael is exemplary of those naive artists who produce beautiful illusions that are either literally visible, or which, like Homer's poetry, evoke clearly defined images that are akin to the perceptually visible. There are

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several levels of *Schein* here, the first of these being the lowest spatial level of the painting which is also "the sole ground of the world." This appearance reflects that suffering ground; it is the mirroring (*Wiederspiegelung*) or reflection of that ground: "*der 'Schein' ist hier Wiederschein des ewigens Widerspruchs.*" That which is not in itself visible *becomes* visible in the mode of mirroring or reflection, that is, in the images of the possessed boy and others. A certain music has been transformed into a painting or, to be more precise, into certain images within a painting. For what is remarkable about this painting for Nietzsche is that it demonstrates the genesis of a second level of images and, in doing so, articulates what makes painting possible. For from the *Schein* of the lower painting there "arises, like ambrosial vapor, a new visionary world of appearances, invisible to those wrapped in the first appearance."[6] So the painting, itself a vision, contains both a vision reflecting primal pain and contradiction and then shows the genesis of a "redeeming vision" out of that first one. It is, as Nietzsche reads it, a *mise-en-abîme* of appearance and of painting, foreshadowing both Zarathustra's announcement that "all vision is seeing abysses" (in "On the Vision and the Riddle") and the ways in which Foucault, with Velasquez's *Las Meninas* or Magritte's *This is not a Pipe*, or Derrida (in at least one of his voices) with van Gogh's *Old Shoes*, attempts to read a certain painting as an emblem of painting itself.

Nietzsche amplifies the theme of the visual when, in the crucial eighth section of the *Birth*, he addresses Schlegel's conception of the chorus as the "ideal spectator (*Zuschauer*)" of the tragedy. This is a view that Nietzsche can endorse, but only insofar as it is taken to mean that the chorus is "the only *beholder* [Schauer], the beholder of the visionary world of the scene" (*KSA* 1: 59; *BT*, 62; emphasis added). In the dense analysis of the structure or setup of the tragic theater that follows, there is a rigorous explication of what is involved in such beholding or seeing; it involves not only the question of who sees but the place of seeing and the content of what is seen. One standard reading of the *Birth* emphasizes that Nietzsche can be seen as reversing the order of importance of the "parts" of tragedy that Aristotle had delineated, specifically as displacing what the *Poetics* had called the "soul" of tragedy, the plot (*mythos*), and substituting music (*melos*) for it. This view is in need of some qualification. While Nietzsche does indeed revalue the position of music in tragedy, he does so along with the visual aspect of what happens in the theater, what Aristotle called the spectacle (*opsis*), and which he had held, along with music, to be one of the two least essential elements of tragedy. The reversal is quite explicit, and Nietzsche not only denies the centrality of plot, but he claims that the

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conception—reigning from Aristotle on and given its German expression by Lessing and Hegel—that tragedy is centrally concerned with action (*Handlung*) is fatally flawed. As he says in his lecture *Das griechische Musikdrama*, given in the period of the gestation of the *Birth*, all modern drama, in its emphasis on plot and intrigue, derives not from ancient tragedy but from the Greek new comedy (*KSA* 1: 527–28).[7]

The two artistic divinities, Apollo and Dionysus, preside over the two types of art, the visual and the musical, that Aristotle (and most of the tradition following in his wake) had relegated to accessory positions. The first full title of Nietzsche's book, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, emphasizes only *melos* and not *opsis*. The "Self-Criticism" makes it fairly clear that one motive for revising the title to *The Birth of Tragedy, or Hellenism and Pessimism* was Nietzsche's radical change of heart and tune with regard to Wagner. But another effect of the change is to downplay the earlier stress on music; this would allow the reader to focus on the "artist's metaphysics" in which the world appears "as the eternally changing, eternally new vision of the most deeply afflicted, discordant, and contradictory being who can find salvation only in *Schein*" (*KSA* 1: 17; *BT*, 22).

Suffering, rather than acting, has to be seen as the condition of the spectators and of the chorus; and it is this suffering, in its musical and choreographic expression, that manifests itself in visions. But to explain the apparatus or structure that enables this requires the complex analysis of section eight of *The Birth of Tragedy*, a part of the text that is not so rhapsodic as much of the rest, but which is perhaps the most definite statement in Nietzsche's book about the actual genesis of tragedy. In fact we should speak here of structure rather than genesis; for if the discussion indeed presupposes everything that has been said about the Apollinian and Dionysian artistic impulses, it proceeds now, not by way of narrative, but by offering an account of the synchronic relations of audience, chorus, actors, within a space divided into *theatron* (the space for the spectators), *orchestra* (the circle within which the chorus sings and dances), and *skene* (the rather small and narrow space from which the individual actors emerge and within whose precincts they remain).[8] I would like to suggest that the architecture of the Greek theater (using the latter word now in our broad, contemporary sense, which would include the *theatron*) is itself neither Apollinian nor Dionysian. As a formative or plastic art, one might place it within Apollo's realm; on the other hand, Nietzsche remarks at one point that the bowl-like shape of the theater could be reminiscent of the valleys in which Dionysus manifested himself to his followers (*KSA* 1: 60; *BT*, 63). But neither of these possible identifications, nor the fact that the

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tragic theater was indeed the theater of Dionysus, nor the common saying in antiquity that "tragedy has nothing to do with Dionysus" ought to be regarded as definitive. What *happens* in the theater is strongly Dionysian, but the structure of the theater, including its architecture and the expectations and identifications linking (and dividing) audience, chorus, and actors is a matrix in which Apollo and Dionysus are allowed to play out their complex and fragile mutual epiphanies.

Much of this matrix is described in a specifically visual way, and much of what it makes possible is itself visionary. The chorus itself in "its primitive form" (but Nietzsche implies that this identification continues through the classical development of tragedy) is said to be the self-reflection or self-mirroring (*Selbstspiegelung*) of Dionysian man. If this is simply a metaphor—or perhaps an image—to suggest that the audience, insofar as it is Dionysian, can identify with the chorus, the account of the visual aspect of tragedy that follows immediately surely has to do with that which is seen; and even if these visions appear mainly to the mind's eye, it is as visions that they appear:

> This phenomenon [of *Selbstspiegelung*] is best made clear by imagining an actor who, being truly talented, sees the role he is supposed to play quite palpably before his eyes. The satyr chorus is, first of all, a vision [*Vision*] of the Dionysian mass, just as the world of the stage, in turn, is a vision of this satyr chorus: the force of this vision is strong enough to make the eye insensitive and blind to the impression of "reality," to the men of culture who occupy the rows of seats all around. The form of the Greek theater recalls a lonely valley in the mountains: the architecture of the scene [*Scene*] appears like a luminous cloud formation that the Bacchants swarming over the mountains behold from a height—like the splendid frame [*Umrahmung*] in which the image of Dionysus is revealed to them. (*KSA* 1: 60; *BT*, 63)

Visions in the theater have a frame, but so do visions had by Bacchants in the mountains. What I take Nietzsche to be implying here is that all visions are framed in some way and that for those who want to understand them, that is, for those who want to make the progress in aesthetics promised in the first sentence of *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is necessary to articulate the structure of the frame rather than simply to focus on what might appear to be the immediate content of the vision—whether it is dream, artfully generated theatrical vision, or hallucination. We should realize that when Nietzsche speaks of aesthetics at the beginning of the *Birth*, the term refers to *aisthesis* as well as to art; he is interested in the Apollinian and Dionysian ways of manifestation or appearing. To put a somewhat more modern construction on it, where the two divinities preside over specific realms of experience whose

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differences and intersections may be analyzed, he is proposing something that bears an analogy to Kant's use of the term in his "transcendental aesthetic." Later in section eight, Nietzsche again speaks of the frame, when he narrates the development from the pretragic Dionysian chorus to "drama" (the latter word is typically in quotation marks in the text to mark Nietzsche's reservations to construing tragedy as action rather than passion or suffering). While Dionysus was not at first present to the chorus, but merely imagined,

> Later the attempt was made to show the god as real and to represent the visionary figure [*Visionsgestalt*] together with its transfiguring frame [*verklärenden Umrahmung*] as something visible for every eye—and thus "drama" in the narrower sense began. (*KSA* 1: 63, *BT*, 66)

The verb *umrahmen*, which generates the noun *Umrahmung* (frame) may mean either to frame or to re-frame. If Nietzsche writes of a transfiguring framing or reframing, he emphasizes the variability of the frame. Every framing is a reframing. This variability and the possibility of reframing is deployed, again in the language of vision, when Nietzsche reformulates the entire argument of the *Birth*, saying in the 1886 preface that it dared for the first time "*to look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life.*" In the passage quoted above from section eight, not only the vision but also the frame becomes visible; this is the architectural sense of "frame" that Nietzsche employed earlier in saying that "the form of the Greek theater recalls a lonely valley in the mountains" (*KSA* 1: 60; *BT*, 63). There the comparison is between "the architecture of the scene" and Dionysus appearing in a cloud formation as the Bacchants look down from a height. To read this passage we need to recall that the *skene* is elevated somewhat over the circular orchestra, while the spectators look down on both from the semicircular *theatron*. So the spectators can both look down at the scene, the tragic vision, from their place in the *theatron*, identifying with Bacchants on a mountainside, while, insofar as they identify with the theatrical chorus, they can be virtually looking up, from *orchestra* to *skene*. In tragedy the frame is transfiguring; setting off the actors in their costumes and masks from the surrounding space, it makes "the eye insensitive and blind to the impression of 'reality'" (ibid.). Blindness again is the condition of tragic vision. Of course more than architecture is involved here; the frame in the more comprehensive sense includes the festival of Dionsysus at which the tragedy is performed and the separation from the mundane that is implicit in attending the theater.

In thinking of the framing effect of tragedy and the work of the poet, we must understand the audience or spectators as also being

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constituted by the frame. What is transfigured is the viewing subject, the *Zuschauer,* as well as the visions that are presented. This is precisely how Greeks of the tragic age become what they are; and when tragedy declines they become something different because the tragic frame is replaced by a series of others: the Euripidean dichotomy of reason and emotion, Socratic inquiry, Platonic dialogue, New Comedy, or the new drama of Christianity. These setups or frames (and their more recent successors, the modern theater and opera) can be understood in terms of their contrasts with the tragic structure that is detailed in the *Birth.* Lyotard, in pages that reveal his own debt to Nietzsche, writes of the *dispositif* that simultaneously establishes space, subject, and objects of attention:

> in the set-up [*dispositif*] of the *politeia,* you have first of all the enclosure of a space . . . the city closes itself off as though into a circle . . . in the middle there is an empty space . . . "de-reality" . . . movement to the inside will be filtered exactly as spectators are filtered at the entry to a play. They will be filtered according to a certain number of codes, the set of which defines what is known as citizenship.[9]

Lyotard is writing about the *dispositif* of painting, and illustrates it by these analogies drawn from the theater and politics. Nietzsche writes of the frame of theater and compares it to the work of the painter and to the way in which a certain community (of Dionysian man) is constituted. First, there is the question of what a character is. For the poet,

> A character is not something he has composed out of particular traits, picked up here and there, but an obtrusively alive person [*Person*] before his very eyes, distinguished from the otherwise identical vision of a painter only by the fact that it continually goes on living and acting. (*KSA* 1: 60; *BT,* 63)

The person may be obtrusively alive, but a *Person* may also be a persona, a mask.

> The Dionysian excitement is capable of communicating this artistic gift to a multitude, so they can see themselves surrounded by such a host of spirits while knowing themselves to be essentially one with them. This process of the tragic chorus is the *dramatic* protophenomenon: to see oneself transformed before one's own eyes and to begin to act as if one had actually entered into another body, another character. (*KSA* 1: 61; *BT,* 64)

With respect to the role of the mask and transformation Nietzsche takes a position sharply opposed to Hegel's. In the chapter on "Art-religion" (*Kunstreligion*) in *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel regards

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the separation between the actor and the character he plays, and between the audience and both, as carrying with it a dimension of the unintelligible, of a failure of reciprocity. Comedy, on the contrary, becomes for him a model of his own philosophical comedy of ultimate recognition and self-knowledge, insofar as the actor literally or metaphorically drops the mask and reveals that he, the audience, and the character portrayed are all on the same level, all intelligible to one another.[10]

Transformation through vision, through having visions, is one of the chief concerns of the *Birth.* Another of Nietzsche's observations concerning the architectural frame of such transformations is suggestive:

> A public of spectators as we know it was unknown to the Greeks: in their theaters the elevated, terraced structure of concentric arcs of the spectators' space (*Zuschauerraumes*) made it possible for everybody actually to *see beyond* [*übersehen*] the whole world of culture around him and to imagine, in absorbed contemplation, that he himself was a chorist. (*KSA* 1: 59; *BT*, 62–63)

Übersehen is a complex verb; it can mean to overlook, in the sense either of scanning and surveying or of neglecting, failing to see, and forgetting. Given Nietzsche's penchant for emphasizing the active and transformative sense given by *über-* in words like *überwinden* and *Übermensch,* his *übersehen* may actually combine several of these meanings. The spectators, in their specially arranged and framed space look beyond the ordinary world of their culture to imagine themselves one with the chorus, whose spectacle they see, and to have the visions had by the chorus as if they were their own. This would not be a mere neglect or failure to see their surroundings (their neighbors, the landscape, or whatever of the city might be visible from their seats); it would rather be akin to the "active forgetfulness" which Nietzsche celebrates in *On the Genealogy of Morals.*[11] Seeing beyond may entail not only having a vision but also being able to behold a vision within a vision. At the close of section eight, Nietzsche takes the vision of Euripides' Admetus within the play *Alcestis* to be parallel to the vision had by the spectator in the tragic theater. He sees a veiled figure before him; filled with foreboding, he begins to anticipate something uncanny. And the figure is revealed to be Alcestis, brought back from the dead. This, Nietzsche says, is analogous to the spectator's seeing Dionysus appear on the stage after having already identified with his sufferings:

> the world of the day becomes veiled, and a new world, clearer, more understandable, more moving than the everyday world and yet more shadowy, presents itself to our eyes in continual rebirths. (*KSA* 1: 64; *BT*, 66)

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The framing of tragedy enables a seeing beyond; the birth of tragedy is the condition of a continual rebirth of the visionary.

Given Nietzsche's use of Euripides at this crucial point in the argument of the *Birth*, and his reliance on the *Bacchae* for his portrayal of Dionysus, in which that play is seen as a retraction of the main thrust of Euripides' work, it might be surprising that the playwright is identified with the death of tragedy. Without reiterating here everything that Nietzsche says about the fatal collusion of Euripides and Socrates in that death or assassination, let us attend to Nietzsche's fundamental criticism of Euripides: he "brought the *spectator* onto the stage" (*KSA* 1: 76; *BT*, 77). Clearly, part of what Nietzsche has in mind here is that Euripides' characters are no longer the noble tragic figures of Aeschylus and Sophocles, but are more like the ordinary Athenian. Yet just because of that fact, because the spectator sees someone more like his everyday self on the stage, he will not go through the complex process of identifying with the chorus and then vicariously sharing its visions. The theatrical setup, the framing, has been disrupted or deconstructed. Euripides has reframed the theater.

Just a few paragraphs later, however, we learn that the first formulation of Euripides' assassination of tragedy was only provisional. Now it is said that he never respected the spectator in general, but only two, himself and Socrates. What happens when Socrates looks at tragedy?

> Let us now imagine the one great Cyclops eye of Socrates fixed on tragedy, an eye in which the fair frenzy of artistic enthusiasm has never glowed. To this eye was denied the pleasure of gazing into the Dionysian abysses. (*KSA*, 1: 92; *BT*, 89)

The Cyclops eye of Socrates is not capable of the complex vision required by the tragic frame, a vision that involves *übersehen* and that identifies with the chorus so as to behold their visions through them. Just as he cannot gaze into the abyss, so he cannot dwell with the shining figures that are projected out of that abyss. He is blind to everything but the tragic plot, which he finds confused. Socrates' maxims—that virtue is knowledge, that no one does wrong knowingly, that the virtuous man is the happy man—all of these establish the frame of a new setup, which could be called the theater of dialectic and virtue. This is precisely what Socrates plays out in his own life, turning himself into a theatrical figure in the Athenian *agora*; he constitutes a "new Socratic-optimistic stage world" (*KSA* 1: 95; *BT*, 92). Socrates' own theater was in place well before Aristophanes recognized it in *The Clouds*. The trial and death are only the final, most memorable act of the drama:

> the image of the *dying Socrates*, as the human being whom knowledge and reason have liberated from the fear of death, is the emblematic

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shield [*Wappenschild*] that, above the entry gate of science, reminds us all of its mission. . . . (*KSA* 1: 99; *BT*, 96)

Like other dramaturgs, Socrates needs to leave behind an image; if the shield of Achilles was the intense, visual condensation of the epic world, the Socratic *Wappenschild* is a vivid series of images, "the last days of Socrates."

Once Socratic and Alexandrian culture is constituted, according to Nietzsche's narrative, it produces its own artistic and theatrical forms. The paradigm of these is "*the culture of the opera*," which could give its name to the entire era (*KSA* 1: 120; *BT*, 114). While Nietzsche takes the defining characteristic of opera, that is, of its frame or setup, to be the fact that speech dominates its music, a key symptom of the degeneracy of the operatic genre is its inability to generate visions, which requires the substitution of laboriously manufactured images in their place. (In reading these analyses, we need to keep in mind the German sense of *Vision*, as opposed to *Bild*, for example, which always suggests something visionary, something beyond the everyday power of sight.) "Because [the creator of the opera] is unable to behold a vision, he forces the machinist and the decorative artist into his service" (*KSA* 1: 123; *BT*, 117). On the other hand, in "a true musical tragedy" (like Wagner's) things become "sensuously visible, as it were, like a multitude of vividly moving lines and figures" (*KSA* 1: 140; *BT*, 130). Tragic culture, Nietzsche has already proclaimed, depends not only upon a rebirth of music *simpliciter*, but on a music that accepts its destiny of producing visions and images. "[M]usic at its highest stage must seek to attain also to its highest objectification in images [*Verbildlichung*]. . . ." (*KSA* 1: 108; *BT*, 103).

While one line of thought in *The Birth of Tragedy* would draw a sharp distinction between the Apollinian and the Dionysian, and would appeal to the authority of Schopenhauer to establish the absolute independence of music from the visual and phenomenal world, another tendency (also sometimes appealing to Schopenhauer) insists on the complicity of music and image, as here. Part of the complexity of Nietzsche's argument, which is essential for understanding his conception of the frame of tragedy as well as its alternatives and successors (Euripides, Socrates, the opera), has to do with the separability of two elements or dimensions of the Apollinian. Apollo is said at various times to be the god of images and visions and also of the *principium individuationis*. But in the actual "strife" and "reconciliation" of Apollo and Dionysus that is tragedy (to recall again its first line), images and visions function precisely in order to contest any presumed autonomy and independence of the individual:

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> In several successive discharges [*Entladungen*] the primal ground of tragedy radiates this vision of the drama which is by all means a dream apparition [*Traumerscheinung*] and to that extent epic in nature; but on the other hand, being the objectification of a Dionysian state, it represents not Apollinian redemption in shining or appearance but, on the contrary, the shattering of the individual and his fusion with primal being. (*KSA* 1: 62; *BT*, 65)

Perhaps the most general contrast between tragedy and the other forms of theater or framings has to do with the status of the individual. The question to which tragedy is the answer goes something like this: how can images and visions be deployed, apparently contrary to their original tendency, in order to subvert the status of individuality? If we were to look for a theatrical analysis of the opposition between Dionysus and the Crucified that Nietzsche poses so frequently, it would hinge on the way in which Christ retains his individuality, an individuality reinforced by his solitary presence on the cross and his resurrection. It is a process that Nietzsche explores again in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where a contrast is drawn between the ancient theater, as an emblem of a certain culture, and the civilized human being who turns against her- or himself. All antiquity was oriented to the spectator, to an "essentially public, visible world which cannot imagine happiness apart from spectacles and festivals."[12] But in civilization men and women become enemies to themselves; for the external festival, each one substitutes an internal theater of cruelty or "torture chamber," where self-laceration reaches such heights that "divine spectators were needed to do justice to the spectacle."[13] The philosophical versions of this internal theater range from Stoic imperatives to examine our conduct and emotions to Augustine's explicit repudiation of pagan theater in favor of the internal theater of reflection, repentance, and confession, to the "metaphor" of the mind as a dark chamber or *camera obscura* in empiricist philosophy, where each of us examines the contents of what passes before us on our own stage. As Schopenhauer formulates it, things are no more outside us than objects in the theater are outside the theater.[14] The process of theatrical subjectification began with Euripides and continues in what Nietzsche, after the enthusiasm for Wagner had died, calls "theatrocracy," a condition in which theater, elevated over the other arts, panders to the lowest common denominator of the audience; here theater becomes a "revolt of the masses."[15]

These last remarks are meant to suggest that the structure of the theater which Nietzsche articulates in *The Birth of Tragedy* can be seen as the first of a series of analyses of art, culture, religion, and philosophy that revolve around the concepts of the frame and the setup. Each

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has its own way of positioning the spectator, focussing the vision, producing images, appearances, or *Schein*, excluding or including various materials, and perhaps most importantly, of constituting the subject appropriate to the framing. A fuller account of Nietzsche's archaeology of the theater, going beyond his engagement with the Greeks, would have to ask whether the visual retains a position of importance analogous to that which it has in tragedy, and it would have to address the question whether Nietzsche's late claims to be antitheatrical are directed at more than their obvious target, the theater of the nineteenth century. At stake in taking our distance from the Greeks is the task of coming to terms with our own frame of vision.[16]

NOTES

1. References in the text are *KSA* = Friedrich Nietzsche, *Samtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe,* ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag/de Gruyter, 1980), cited by volume and page number; *BT* = Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), cited by page number. English translations have been modified in some instances.
2. See my essay "In the Shadows of Philosophy: Nietzsche and the Question of Vision," in *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision,* ed. David Michael Levin (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 124–42.
3. John Sallis, *Crossings: Nietzsche and the Space of Tragedy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 25. Sallis' chapter "Apollo—Shining Phantasy" (pp. 9–41) is illuminating on Apollinian vision.
4. In translating *Bildnergott* as "sculptor god," we should be aware that *Bildner* is a rather rare term, which can be equivalent to *Bildhauer* (sculptor) or to the more general *Former* (former or molder); it is also an old synonym for *Erzieher* (educator), which seems especially appropriate insofar as it would suggest, for Nietzsche, a teaching through images.
5. For a classical account of *ekphrasis* see Paul Friedlander, *Johannes von Gaza und Paulus Silentarius* (Leipzig: E. G. Teubner, 1912); more recent studies, with ample references to ancient and modern literature are James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ekphrasis and the Other," in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). In addition to Homer's account of the shield of Achilles, and Virgil's of Aeneas, one should consult Philostratus' *Imagines,* trans. Arthur Fairbanks (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931); see for example *Imagines* I.9 (pp. 35–41) for the theme of the play between the seen and the unseen; a very suggestive recent study of Philostratus is Norman Bryson's essay "Philostratus and the Imaginary Museum," in *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture,* ed. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
6. One should compare Nietzsche's rhetoric of mere appearance, phantasm, vapor,

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and floating image (*Schein, Wahnbild, Duft, Schweben*) with the analysis of the simulacrum in Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 253–79 and especially with the use to which that analysis is deployed, with specifically Nietzschean references, in Michel Foucault's *This is not a Pipe* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). As Deleuze's explication of Plato, Lucretius and the Stoics makes clear, Nietzsche may very well be drawing on similar classical sources.

7. In a recent handbook by Erika Simon, *The Ancient Theatre*, trans. C. E. Vafopoulou-Richardson (New York: Methuen, 1982), the author writes about this aspect of Greek theater: "The modern Greek performances have revived this oldest element of ancient drama in a remarkable way. The reason is that modern Greek choruses understand how to pray, dance, entreat and, above all, lament in the ancient manner, as hardly any other modern dramatic chorus can" (8).
8. For scholarly accounts of Greek tragic performance and theater see Simon, *The Ancient Theatre*; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production* (London: Methuen, 1956); and "The Origins of Tragedy" and "Tragedy in Performance," both in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 258–81.
9. Jean-François Lyotard, *Les dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1974), 268–69; I have used the translation in Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 12–13.
10. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 450–53. See my article "Hegel's Dialectic of Artistic Meaning," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 35 (fall 1976): 23–35.
11. *KSA* 5: 291–92; F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 58.
12. *KSA* 5: 305; *Genealogy*, 69.
13. *KSA* 5: 323; *Genealogy*, 85.
14. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Books, 1966), 2: 22.
15. *KSA* 6: 42; *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, "Postscript," 183.
16. See, for example, F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), #111: "I am essentially anti-theatrical" and "in the theater one is honest only in the mass; as an individual one lies, one lies to oneself." But this should be read in its context in which Wagner is identified as "essentially a man of the theater." For a reading of *Zarathustra*, especially Part Four, as an anti-Wagnerian libretto, see "Parasites and their Noise" in my book *Alcyone: Nietzsche on Gifts, Noise, and Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 53–107.

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