

Friedrich Nietzsche and Alphonso Lingis

Dionysius rules over the world of music carrying with it a spirit of intoxication. As Bachelard believed the poetic image bursts forth from the underworld of our psyche, Nietzsche believes that a “certain musical emotional state comes first, and from this, the poetic idea then follows”. Hence it is from the Dionysian spirit that creativity manifests. Is one to abstract from this that through intoxication, of the soberest kind, I am sure, the artist leaps forward into the world of “ecstatic rapture” in which the “subjective fades into complete forgetfulness of self.” As he states, the self is abolished to redeem himself through a mystical feeling of collective unity. It is here that humans, freeing themselves of subjectivity, losing themselves to wine and nature, become one with their fellows, and again one with nature. The chalice of creativity from which they drink is indeed the bottomless ocean of inspiration and obliteration of the self.

On the other hand, Apollo rules over the world of dreams and prophesy and in this way correspondingly is the god of light and rules over the plastic arts. And as Nietzsche states, “the beautiful appearance of the world of dreams, in whose creation man is a complete artist, is the precondition of all plastic arts”. And as if predetermining the attitude of the functionalists years later, he goes on to say, “we enjoy the form with an immediate understanding; every shape speaks to us; nothing is indifferent and unnecessary.” Perhaps it is on the surface of these forms that he concludes that under the reality that we live lies a second hidden reality and the former is just an illusion. And so, thusly the artist behaves in relation to the reality of his dreams and fashions his interpretation of reality based on these dreams.

Nietzsche goes on to describe the finality of the artist as both an artist of intoxication and of dreams whose unified world reveals itself to him in a “metaphorical dream picture”. I have thought about this metaphorical dream picture before, a state of unrest, of constantly evolving images that appeal to reality but have the power to morph spontaneously into a reality that is not fixed to a particular set of laws. The power of the metaphor to transform an image into a concept for elaboration is exactly what Lingis does in *Excesses*, in chapter *The Rapture of the Deep*. Dreams, too, are here for the sake of themselves, just as the spots and photoluminescence of bottom dwelling sea creatures whose markings are not needed to warn off predators with no eyes that can not see and prey on their food using other, perhaps unknown, devices. He states “the symmetry of patterns and the colors have to receive a specific explanation on the level of the phenomenal and not of the operational”, and again like the functionalists, he states “there is a logic of ostentation over and beyond camouflage and semantic functions. Perhaps this is the same logic that Nietzsche refers to when he calls out the study of aesthetics, not merely as a logical understanding, but also as an irrepressible apprehension of the fact that art is bound to this relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian states.

There is a third metaphoric level that reveals itself in the writings of Lingis. When he speaks of depth, he not only is elucidating the unnecessary marking of the bottomless sea creatures, he is referring to the mind and the soul itself. He states “the spectacle is for the spectator, the screen of phenomenal effects produced in reality are for a sphere of lucidity, an eye, a mind”. As he goes on to state, it is the invisible that one seeks with his caressing eye when one descends into the deep. It is this invisible that we seek in others, this look of the alien, of the other. He states that the look flees into exteriority into the eye of the other, for the look of the artist and not at the art itself, and ultimately when one finds one’s eyes “steeped in the frenzy of the lover’s gaze.”