

# Tragic Rhythms: Nietzsche and Agamben on Rhythm and Art

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**Abstract :** This paper explores the question of the relationship between art, rhythm, and life through a mobilisation of Giorgio Agamben's discussion, first, of Nietzsche and the active nihilist's relationship to art, and second, on his diagnosis of rhythm as pertaining to the "original structure" of the work of art in *The Man Without Content*. Agamben's notion of the "rhythmic" and "poietic" encounter is one which situates the experience of rhythm as the experience of the originary dimension of temporality and of the human's relationship to the world. Turning to Nietzsche, this paper seeks to complicate Agamben's picture by discussing Nietzsche's under-discussed explorations of rhythm and its connection to art (focusing primarily on his early works). Three distinct rhythms will be identified: Apollonian, Dionysian, and the tragic or joyful rhythms of the Apollo-Dionysus relation (discussed through Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus and of Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's Heraclitus). Reading Agamben through Nietzsche, it will be discussed how Agamben's notion of rhythm (1) blends Apollonian and Dionysian elements; (2) does not through this blending however offer a *tragic* or *joyful* notion of rhythm, which, for Nietzsche, follows from their double affirmative rhythmisation. Instead of a rhythmic-poietic encounter opening an originary and authentic experience of temporality and dwelling, Nietzsche offers an account of tragic and joyful rhythms which continually create *new* worlds.

The Apollonian and the Dionysian. The competition

– as Rhythm – Glory, Individual. The rhythm.

Nietzsche (quoted in Michon 2018b: 242)

# 1. Agamben and the Rhythmic-Poietic Encounter

In *The Man Without Content*, Giorgio Agamben raises the questions of the origins, functions, and ends of art, defining art as the process through which a «shared space» in which all «come together in a living unity» (Agamben 1999: 36) is produced. This shared space is a shared *dwelling*, each renewed production of which is a repetition of the opening of the human's «natural origin» (Agamben 1999: 83), that is, to the opening of truth, history, and the human's relations with and «belonging to the world» (Agamben 1999: 101). The originary experience of art is also the originary experience of time and being-together. Agamben, in *The Man Without Content*, insists on the importance of the division between *praxis*, considered as a «manifestation of a will that produces a concrete effect» (Agamben 1999: 68); and *poiesis*, a production of presence and mode of unveiling through which that which is produced passes from nonbeing to being. *Praxis* is concerned with productivity and practicality whereas *poiesis* with the space of free duration, action, and certitude in one's being (Agamben 1999: 69) in a contrast between will-expression and poietic-alethic *opening*. This split is evidenced most starkly in traditions in Western aesthetics which conceive the artist as engaged in a mode of *praxis*, tied to a metaphysics of intentionality and willing (creative genius), and the spectator as engaged in *aesthetic judgment* (Eikelboom 2015: 214), rather than with poietic opening of art as the space of dwelling and truth.

There are two components to Agamben's discussion in *The Man Without Content* which we will focus on. First, his reading of Nietzsche (which comes immediately prior to his conceptualisation of rhythm). In this (metaphysical) reading, Agamben attempts to synthesise four elements in Nietzsche's writing: the place and status of art, the will to power, the eternal return, and *amor fati*. Agamben claims that modern Western aesthetics has yet to confront how Nietzsche conceived of the place and status of art insofar as it remains tied to notions of artistry as *praxis* and of the split between the artist and spectator mentioned above. Nietzsche, for Agamben, «never thought of art starting from αἴσθησις, from the spectator's sensuous apprehension» (Agamben 1999: 85)

Agamben's metaphysical (and Heidegger-inspired) reading of Nietzsche here is primarily founded on the famous closing lines of Nietzsche's original preface to *The Birth of Tragedy* in which Nietzsche claims a conviction to position that art is the «highest task and the true metaphysical activity of this life» (Nietzsche 1999: 14). For Agamben, this claim cannot be understood outside of Nietzsche's distinction between *active* and *passive* nihilism, and in relationship to art specifically, whether, in the former case, art «is born of a superabundance of life» (such types want a «Dionysian art as well as a tragic outlook and insight into life» [Nietzsche 2001: 234]) or in the latter, whether it «is born of the wish to take revenge on life» (Agamben 1999: 86) (such types «seek quiet, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves through art and insight, or else intoxication, paroxysm, numbness, madness» [Nietzsche 2001: 234]). This is the distinction Nietzsche draws in §370 of *The Gay Science*. *Active* nihilism, as Richard Beardsworth indicates, is in Nietzsche also concerned with the destruction of the metaphysical «schematisation and valuation» of the Western metaphysical tradition, and a prelude to a «transvaluation of values» (Beardsworth 2000: 37). *Active* nihilism on Nietzsche's typology importantly concerns the distinction between the transcendent and the empirical, a distinction which in practice is life-denying (*ibid.*: 38), inverting it towards life affirmation. In this aphorism in particular, Nietzsche's focus is how art and philosophy relate to life and suffering, and these two types of nihilism relate to what forces (superabundance and fullness of life or hunger and resentment of life) become creative. It is important to note here that Nietzsche also considers this distinction as related to whether the force that becomes creative is bound to a desire for fixing and immortalising (the desire for *being*) or to a desire for destruction, change, and the future (the desire for *becoming*). Both configurations of desire can be read through this

active/passive typology: the desire for becoming to a Dionysian energy for life and the future *or* to the resentful who seeks destruction for destruction's sake out of resentment for all that exists; and the desire for being to a gratitude and love for all that is *or* through a suffering that seeks to take revenge on all that is through the immortalisation of their own personal and singular suffering (Nietzsche 2001: 235 -236). Both the desire for being and the desire for becoming are rendered ambiguous in-themselves, with the passive/active distinction being preferable to Nietzsche insofar as it enables us to diagnose the sense and value of this or that desire or creative force.

The distinction between being and becoming, and the creative-artistic force's relationship to these, is a point where Agamben identifies this "metaphysical task" as principally operative in Nietzsche. Agamben seeks to locate in Nietzsche a metaphysical reading of art and, more specifically, the active nihilist's relationship to art; a relationship in which, for Agamben, the will to power, *amor fati*, and eternal recurrence (of the same) combine in a Zarathustrean dance, where the living being «tunes his being to the universal becoming in the circle of eternal recurrence» (Agamben 1999: 91) in a resonant cycle of becoming. Through the art of active nihilism (or Dionysian pessimism), the will to power and eternal recurrence intersect, insofar as this will involves the will to power's identification with *amor fati*, making possible a «becoming nature of art that is at the same time the becoming art of nature» (Agamben 1999: 93). Agamben thus finds through this reading of Nietzsche the complete dissolution of the type of artistic subjectivity and creative genius identified in the Western aesthetic tradition and that he is resisting more generally in *The Man Without Content*, insofar while it is the "will" that is identified as a principle of art in Nietzsche, it is nonetheless a will that identifies and wills the eternal joy of becoming and its attendant annihilation. Art is here the process constitutive of the will to power's eternal cyclic generation and destruction. Art, will to power, and eternal recurrence thus triangulate in Agamben's metaphysical Nietzsche through which the force of art becomes metaphysical and is expressive of nature's becoming. This willing of eternal recurrence, for Agamben, enables the ultimate surpassing of nihilism (Doussan 2016: 116) in the affirmation of Dionysian eternal creation and destruction. Art, conceived of through this triangulation, is as such detached from aesthetic categories of artist and spectator, and is instead the «fundamental trait of a universal becoming» (Agamben 1999: 93).

Immediately after the closing of this discussion of Nietzsche, and now moving onto the second component of *The Man Without Content* which we will focus on, Agamben pivots his focus to a consideration of (as the chapter title, itself another nod to Heidegger, indicates) the "original structure of the work of art." The discussion that follows constitutes Agamben's contribution to rhythmanalysis, through which he identifies rhythm with «οὐσία, the principle of presence that opens and maintains the work of art in its original space» and as that which «causes the work of art to be what it is, [and] is also Measure and *logos* (*ratio*) in the Greek sense of that which gives everything its proper station in presence» (Agamben 1999: 98). Agamben suggests that we can designate rhythm as having this status due to the *opening* effectuated in the rhythmic experience. It is worth quoting this important passage from *The Man Without Content* at length, where Agamben describes the experience of rhythm:

Yet rhythm – as we commonly understand it [namely, as related to a *uninterrupted temporal flow*] – appears to introduce into this eternal flow a split and a stop. Thus in a musical piece, although it is somehow in time, we perceive rhythm as something that escapes the incessant flight of instants and appears almost as the presence of an atemporal dimension in time. In the same way, when we are before a work of art or a landscape bathed in the light of its own presence, we perceive a stop

in time, as though we were suddenly thrown into a more original time. There is a stop, an interruption in the incessant flow of instants that, coming from the future, sinks into the past, and this interruption, this stop, is precisely what gives and reveals the particular status, the mode of presence proper to the work of art or the landscape we have before our eyes. We are as though held, arrested before something, but this being arrested is also a being-outside, an *ek-stasis* in a more original dimension. (Agamben 1999: 99, our addition)

Rhythm is thus situated by Agamben as the opening or caesura experienced when confronted with phenomena which arrests our attention and transforms our experience of time in such a way that we can describe Agamben's notion of rhythm as the encounter with time itself or with its atemporal dimension, enabling the «ecstatic dwelling in a more original dimension and the fall into the flight of measurable time» (Agamben 1999: 100). While this caesura disrupts the ordinary experience of ceaseless instants, and this caesura is itself rhythm, Agamben «includes both the flow of time and the suspension of this temporal flow under the category of rhythm» (Eikelboom 2014). This interruption occurs immanently within the ceaseless flow of linear time. Rhythm, for Agamben, denotes (1) an interruptive or caesuric experience; which is (2) an encounter not simply in but *with* time; through which (3) we are opened into a more "originary" and "authentic" dimension where the «*continuum* of linear time is broken» (Agamben 1999: 102); by extension, (4) this "originary" dimension of time is also that, for Agamben, is the very dimension which *enables* measure, rationation, calculation (i.e., the "fall" into numbered and measurable linear time). Rhythm is ecstatic and *epochal*, which for Agamben refers to the way in which it functions as both *gift* and *reserve*: it *gifts* the opening and space of dwelling (the poietic opening), only due to which is praxis and linear time possible, and this latter factor conceals the very poietic opening which made it possible (Agamben 1999: 100). Rhythm in Agamben is thus «a double-movement of revealing and concealing, or of giving and suspending» (Eikelboom 2018: 93). Neither calculable nor rational, rhythm is nonetheless situated by Agamben as that ecstatic opening in human experience which is the condition of measure, number, *logos*, and, of course, is the original experience of art. The sense of rhythm as pertaining to a temporal flow is conditioned upon the interruptive experience of rhythm which effectuates the opening of experience to this flow and its suspension. The work of art is not to be reduced to *structure* or to *style*, insofar as «both the structural and stylistic analysis remain within the aesthetic conception of the work of art as the (scientifically recognizable) object of αἴσθησις» (Agamben 1999: 100), but instead is to be associated with rhythm, the epochal opening of the rhythmic encounter, and the poietic unveiling of authentic temporality. It is thus rhythm which is poietic or the poietic opening which is rhythmic. The rhythmic encounter of art is that which enables the surpassing of the "creative genius" and "aesthetic enjoyment" towards «artists and spectators [recovering] their essential solidarity and their common ground» (Agamben 1999: 102, our alteration).

Given these two components of Agamben's discussion in *The Man Without Content*, namely, his approach to Nietzsche and his approach to rhythm, it is important to consider how Nietzsche himself thought of the relationship between *rhythm* and *art*, a component which Agamben, surprisingly, does not consider, despite these two discussions coming sequentially in *The Man Without Content*, and also insofar as the latter chapter in *The Man Without Content* is premised upon a discussion of Hölderlin, who Nietzsche designated as his favourite poet at the age of seventeen (Tambling 2014: 2) [1]. Developing on these two discussions in *The Man Without Content*, this paper will now pivot its focus to Nietzsche's own discussions on the same questions of art and rhythm. Read through Nietzsche, it will be discussed how Agamben's notion of rhythm (1) blends Apollonian and Dionysian elements; (2) does not through this blending offer a *tragic* or *joyful* notion of rhythm, which, for Nietzsche, follows from their double affirmative rhythmisation.

At the closing of the chapter on rhythm, Agamben opens the space for the discussion of potentially tragic concept of rhythm. Claiming that the work of art is to be associated with the rhythmic-poietic encounter, he associates this with Aristotle's discussion of starting-points in the *Metaphysics*. Agamben affirmatively associates the poietic-rhythmic opening of art with *architectonics* in the Aristotelian sense as pertaining to "beginnings" and with the «gift of the original space» (Agamben 1999: 101) of human dwelling. Associating architectonics with the production of origins or the association with the originary dimension of human experience, Agamben makes an interesting connection between architectonics and social rhythmicity, highlighting how it is through the rhythmic encounter, interrupting «*the homogeneity of profane time*», that the opening to the original dimension of «mythic time» (Agamben 1999: 101- 102) is made possible. Such an altered experience is one Agamben connects with the authentic experience of temporality, of human dwelling, and of the recovery of the present. In this particular section of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle's note here is that one particular type of starting-point is one «in accord with whose deliberate choice what is moved is moved and what is changed is changed – for example, the rulers in cities, dynasties, and kingships are said to be *archai*, as are crafts, especially architectonic ones» (Aristotle 2016: 69). Crafts are starting-points involving the passing from nonbeing to being of those things of which the «form is in the soul» (Aristotle 2016: 113)(e.g. the architectural process). Aristotle distinguishes the architectonic start-pointing as one in which deliberation and choice is a necessary component and as a type of craft or *tékhnē* (as opposed to a natural or contingent becoming). Agamben etymologically derives architectonics from *τίκτω* and *ἀρχή*, to the begetting or bringing-forth of the beginning or origin (Agamben 1999: 101).

As will be discussed further, Agamben's blending of Apollonian and Dionysian elements in his notion of rhythm is related to how (1) his conception of the rhythmic-poietic encounter bears striking similarities to Nietzsche's own depiction of the Dionysian experience, and (2) how the invocation of *architectonics* as an exemplar of the "gift" of art in the rhythmic-poietic encounter can itself be read as an Apollonian gesture. In order to clarify these claims, however, it is important for us to turn to Nietzsche's own famous depictions of the Apollonian and Dionysian with particular focus on the notion of rhythm. As Babette E. Babich notes, the role of music in *The Birth of Tragedy* «fundamentally presupposes the question of the relation Nietzsche had uncovered between "music and words" in his theory of meter and rhythm in ancient Greek» (Babich 2005: 48). In various notebooks, numerous gestures are made by Nietzsche towards a «Philosophy of rhythm», «New theory of rhythmic» and «New aesthetic» (Nietzsche, quoted in Michon 2018b: 289) that he speculatively considered as a related project to *The Birth of Tragedy*, but did not complete, and which we will only focus on select elements of. In a note in 1870-1871, Nietzsche defines the work of art in terms remarkably close to Agamben's linking of the birth of art with the birth of human dwelling, pointing us in the direction of rhythm through the image of the "wave" which he often uses in relation to rhythm: «The *work of art* and the *individual* is a *repetition* of the *primal process* in which the world came into being, so to speak, a ripple within the wave» (2009: 36). How, then, does Nietzsche approach the notion of rhythm in relation to the art forces of Apollo and Dionysus?

## 2. Apollonian Rhythms

In his conceptualisation of the Dionysian and Apollonian – variously discussed as deities, forces, art-worlds, artistic powers, and both corresponded and analogised to the physiological states of intoxication and dream respectively – Nietzsche makes an important early distinction between the two, associating the Apollonian with *image* making (or sculpting), and the Dionysian with *imagelessness* (of which music is the central example) (Nietzsche 1999: 14-15). Music too is, of course, an Apolline art in its own sense, which Nietzsche describes in terms already discussed, namely, in terms of a «wave-like

rhythm with an image-making power» (Nietzsche 1999: 21) which operates as a representational architectonics. As Babich highlights, it is importantly to preliminarily highlight that Nietzsche's focus on what he calls in the subtitle of *The Birth of Tragedy* the *spirit of music* must be related to the fact that music, in this ancient Greek sense, relates to any art over which the Muses presided – dance, music, lyric poetry, et cetera. *Musikē*, further, is not to be distinguished sharply from the everyday, starting, not least of all, from the musicality of speech and its relation to education (Babich 2005: 55-56). Babich quotes Giovanni Comotti with the following, highlighting the musicality of Greek culture itself:

The unity of poetry, melody, and gesture in archaic and classical culture made the rhythmic-melodic expression contingent on the demands of the verbal text. The simultaneous presence of music, dance, and word in almost all forms of communication suggests also the existence of a widespread musical culture among the Greek peoples from the remotest times. (Comotti 1977: 5)

One of the elements to highlight here is, therefore, that to speak through Nietzsche of the question of art and indeed of music is to speak of the question of *life* and the relationship to life. However, to return now more closely to Apollo, what is the relationship between this god and architectonics and Nietzsche conceived it, and further, to rhythm?

This representational-architectonic process associated with Apolline art has two important dimensions. First, it is related that Apollonian valuing of measure, balance, and form (Apollonian beauty and formalism). It harnesses the forces of nature into an equilibrated arrangement in its production of illusory forms; its wave-like rhythm is a numbered series of measures and their periodic return. This is rhythm in the sense of form, of «a form of regularity imposed on disorder» (Eikelboom 2018: 5), which we can later transversally associate with form and rhythm in the Pythagorean and Platonic senses. As Pascal Michon notes, for Nietzsche, Pythagoras was the first to associate «number» and «measure», and he related Pythagoras with rhythm, measure, and number in a series of notes between 1871 and 1873 (Michon 2018b: 266-267). Furthermore, it is noteworthy in this context to highlight Pythagoras's own Apollonian links, related not only to the Pythagorean concern for the divine as expressed in the relationship between mathematics and music, in the interlocking of the harmonies of the soul, cosmos, and number, but also insofar as he was said to be regarded by his followers as a reincarnation of the (Hyperborean) Apollo, or in later Roman stories that Pythagoras was the son of Apollo (Graf 2009: 49; Ferguson 2010: 10). Important in Pythagoras, further, were the questions of healing, therapeutics, or medicine, but also incantation, magic, and ritual (Kingsley 1995: 342). Apollo was the god of healing – for Nietzsche the «true god of healing and expiation» (Nietzsche 1999: 131) – and among Pythagoreans, music bore therapeutic qualities (Graf 2009: 85).

Jacques Darriulat, discussing Book III of Plato's *Republic*, highlights how Plato praises the Apollonian seven-stringed cithara and condemns the double-reeded flute (or aulos) of Marsyas in a contrast between «*Musique apollinienne* de la mesure et de l'harmonie contre *musique dionysiaque* du rythme et de l'ivresse» (Darriulat 2015). Plato is here reacting against musical trends such as that of Timotheus, who played dithyrambs – hymns to Dionysus – with a lyre with more than seven strings (Graf 2009: 39). The privileging of the cithara or the lyre over the flute is an aspect of the privileging of the Apollonian over the Dionysian, of balanced architectonic form in musical expression over intoxication and frenzy, in a rhythmic hierarchy of musical instruments that assumes educational and political importance for Plato. Marsyas was a satyr and producer of ecstasy

(Porter, 2000b: 116), his flute invented and subsequently discarded by Athena, and is associated with Dionysus. Marsyas's challenging of Apollo to a musical contest famously resulted in his resounding loss and subsequently being flayed alive, symbolising amongst other things the Apollo-Dionysus tension and the developing rigidity of the lyre-flute hierarchy in fifth-century BCE Greece (Graf 2009: 38). As Fritz Graf notes, the distinction between these wind and string instruments is important to note also insofar as the manner of musical performance which they demand indicates an element of a partial explanation of this hierarchy; a «citharedic performer sang a text that he accompanied by his lyre: the music was subordinated to the words» (Graf 2009: 38), whereas the flute could not (by the same person) be accompanied with words, and «the instrument alone has to tell the story» (Graf 2009: 38). But it was also the (Dionysian) flute that excited madness (Otto 1965: 94), unlike the (Apollonian) restraint and distance made possible by the lyre. However, it is important here not to *reduce* the Apollonian to the word and the Dionysian to the instrumental (Babich 2005: 60-61).

Concomitant to this, and turning to the second dimension of the representational-architectonic process associated with Apolline art: the Apollonian image is that of measure and *limitation* (measured balance is not excessive), and is the divine image of the «*principium individuationis*» (Nietzsche 1999: 17). This limitation is also a limitation which establishes a distance between self and world, a self in engagement with images, semblances, or appearance. «Measured limitation» (Nietzsche 1999: 120) in Apolline art is in this sense for Nietzsche representative of the limitation and measure of the individual's relationship to the world characteristic of «Apolline states» (Nietzsche 1999: 21): contemplation, moderation, restraint, limited pleasure, redemption, and beautiful semblance (Cox 2006: 500). Insofar as Apollo is the god of light, shining, and the power of image-making, it is this light which is the harbinger of Apollonian eyes: with eyes gazing into the dream-world the Apollonian artist makes an image in the world of appearance (of semblance), an image which acts as a *mediator* for the viewer's eyes of the artist's dreamlike and imagistic vision, which is no less true of sculpting than of epic poetry and of the zigzag rhythmic and architectonics of such music: «the art of the image-maker (in the wider sense) is a *playing with dream*» (Nietzsche 1999: 119). The image as mediator thus becomes crucial insofar as it is through this mediated process that distance, measure, and balance can be maintained, «kept at a distance from all profane involvement» (Nietzsche 1999: 129), in Nietzsche's reading. Through keeping such distance, redemption through semblance is made possible (Nietzsche 1999: 76); Apollo is the «god of individuation and the boundaries of justice» (Nietzsche 1999: 51). In short, for Nietzsche, representational architectonics – as with measured periodic rhythm – is at once associated with Apollonian art and the *principium individuationis*, and thus Apollonian music appears far from the sort of ecstatic states that Agamben associates with the poietic and rhythmic encounter, despite this invocation of architectonics. Nietzsche describes Apolline music as a «Doric architectonics in sound» (Nietzsche 1999: 21). Indeed, it is precisely insofar as Apolline music is such an architectonics of sound, creating illusory and beautiful forms, that it is able to keep the Dionysian breakdown of individuality at a distance: Nietzsche diagnoses Apolline architectonic music as *maintaining* the precise individuality and aestheticism which Agamben argues against. This is the premise upon which to read the following comment by Nietzsche:

Rhythm is an attempt at individuation. For rhythm to exist, there must be multiplicity and becoming. Here the quest for beauty reveals itself as the motive for individuation. Rhythm is the form of becoming, and in general the form of the world of appearance. (Nietzsche, quoted in Small 2010: 50)

Robin Small indicates that the invocation of “form” here should be read precisely as related to



Apollonian modes of creation and, relatedly, as one which fashions *time* out of a prior *becoming*. This is another manner in which Agamben's notion of rhythm harkens to Nietzsche's Apollo – insofar as, recall, the *fall* into linear time is made possible by the atemporal rhythmic encounter.

It is at this juncture important to mention one of Nietzsche's most important contributions in the conceptualisation of rhythm, namely, his philological work concerning the vast differences between "ancient" and "modern" approaches to rhythm. His central argument is that ancient Greek music and speech lacked the "ictus" (i.e. the "stress-accent" or "dynamic accentuation" through which «measures are marked by "prominence" or volume of sound and [are] frequently correlated with stress or emphasis in meaning» (Porter 2000a: 135), and that the research he is criticising into Greek metre and rhythm effectuates a projection of modern sensibility by equating modern rhythm and dynamic accentuation with ancient Greek rhythm. Nietzsche's charge is that modern musical sensibilities are different in kind from ancient musical sensibilities – a point we gestured towards above when touching on ancient Greek *musikē* – to the extreme point where our access to ancient Greek music is «a priori unintelligible» (Porter 2000b: 151). Nietzsche's rejects, therefore, the possibility of «rhythm *an sich*» (Nietzsche, quoted in Porter 2000a: 134, 335). [2]

Ancient rhythm – instead of being founded on the *ictus*, dynamic accentuation, sound, and force (e.g. syllabic strength) – is purely quantitative and proportional, through which rhythm was generated and measured through arsis (upbeat) and thesis (downbeat) according to particular ratios. Taking the example of dance as such a visible rhythm: arsis is the upward movement, and thesis the downward movement, which together form an interval (Halporn 1967: 236-237) organised around a «rhythmic alternation of times» rather than the more modern «rhythmic alternation of *strengths*» (Nietzsche, quoted in Porter 2000a: 145). When Nietzsche discusses Apollonian music and the *architectonics* in sound discussed above, these direct us towards this classical and quantitative rhythm (Porter 2000a: 162; Porter 2000b: 152). This can also be termed "time-rhythmic" in which rhythm is *harnessed* and *measured*, and is to be associated with *ethos* (Miller 1999: 2), a point Babich underlines when noting that the musicality of ancient Greek «resides in the tonic interval of fixed time», which compels «active or ethical engagement» (Babich 2005: 56), and which we can associate with Apollonian ethical measure. Rhythmical structure in this sense was linguistically determined, without the possibility of extending or shortening syllabic measure through the sort of dynamic accentuation to which our ears and mouths are attuned (Babich 2005: 56-57; also see Georgiades 1974: 4-5). As Michon notes, for example, we see Plato's *Laws* connecting the educational cultivation of ethical balance and order precisely with rhythm, mentioning primarily Apollo and the Muses (but also adding a third – Dionysus) (Michon 2018a: 29 -30), and in the *Republic* an entire rhythmic pedagogy designed to promote the eurhythmic balance of the soul, its dispositions, and actions (*ibid.*: 48-50). When Agamben notes, as we met above, that architectonics are to be associated with the rhythmic-poietic encounter and the opening of the space of art, and notes further that rhythm «causes the work of art to be what it is, [and] is also Measure and *logos* (*ratio*) in the Greek sense of that which gives every thing its proper station in presence» (Agamben 1999: 98), it is difficult to avoid the Apollonian linkages to these aspects of this depiction, therefore. However, as we indicated above and will go on to note further, Agamben's notion of rhythm is also importantly Dionysian.

### 3. Dionysian Rhythms

Nietzsche depicts no measured limitation in the Dionysian movement, the rhythm of which, compared to the Apollonian:



loosened its limbs for a Bacchanalian dance; *musical sound* rang out, no longer in ghost-like attenuation, but in the thousand-fold intensification of the mass and in the accompaniment of deep-voiced wind instruments [...] here harmony was born, which, its movement, makes the will of nature immediately intelligible. (Nietzsche 1999: 129)

In Walter Otto's characterisation, Dionysian rapture itself is linked to the «imminence of deity» (Otto 1965: 34), who disappears and appears incomprehensibly, but whose appearance is an urgent assault on the senses, potentially (or simultaneously) producing rapture as much as terror; «Dionysus was present in the mask because he was known as the god of confrontation» in the context of which «there is nothing but encounter, from which there is no withdrawal» (Otto 1965: 90). No balance, limitation, or distance: hence the impossibility of withdrawal. We can thus speak of the Dionysian, and there are here important parallels with Agamben's characterisation of rhythm generally, in part as a radical interruptive encounter and altered phenomenological state, in which the world of everyday life is ruptured in the Dionysiac experience (Nietzsche 1999: 129), as it was in the «orgiastic celebrations of Dionysus [that] people were driven outside themselves - ἔκστασις - to such an extent that they acted and felt like transformed and bewitched beings» (Nietzsche 2009: 10).

Intoxication and ecstasy are indicative of Dionysian states, in which intoxication itself is nature «playing with human beings» (Nietzsche 1999: 121) in the breakdown of the *principium individuationis*, through which the individual or the subject is dissolved from their measured distinction or distance to one another, to nature, and to death. Insofar as Dionysus is also associated with enigma, duality, and paradox, however, this must be attenuated with how Nietzsche notes that the Dionysiac *artist* is one who can *play* with intoxication in the same way that intoxication is nature's playing with human beings, in which there is a co-existence of «clear-mindedness and intoxication» (Nietzsche 1999: 121). Rather than redemption through limitation and images-semblances, the Dionysian functions for Nietzsche, through its excess, to expose the artificiality of such Apollonian redemption, opening the truth of excess (Nietzsche 1999: 128), and as a spiritual-magical transformation through which the individual's dissolution need not result in their weakness, but rather in the potentially active combination of clear-mindedness and intoxication mentioned above. Such a transformation is the process through which, as Nietzsche notes, «Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art; man himself now moves with the same ecstasy and sublimity with which, in dream, he once saw the gods walk» (Nietzsche 1999: 121) – the Dionysian artist does not fashion beautiful forms or engage in architectonic creations, rather, it is the transformed human being *itself* which is the artwork of Dionysus – spelling the breakdown of individuation and the «joyous hope that the spell of individuation can be broken» (Nietzsche 1999: 52-53).

The question of “Dionysian rhythms” is a more complex one than that of Apollonian rhythms. Eikelboom suggests that, in contrast to Apollonian metric rhythm, Dionysian rhythms can be associated with the «flux of difference upon which the predictable beat depends» (Eikelboom 2018: 69), and Nietzsche does write of the Dionysian as relating to a full embodied expressiveness of nature, and the «rhythmical movement of every limb» (Nietzsche 1999: 21). Whereas we connected Apollonian rhythm with quantitative metric, “time-rhythmic,” and the cultivation of eurhythmic ethos, Dionysian rhythm can be related to an “affect- rhythmic” which wildly *fluctuates*, lacks measure (lacking architectonic symmetry), and is to be associated with *pathos*, nature, trance-inducing effects (see Michon 2018a: 42-53; Eikelboom 2018: 69-70), and dissonance (Nietzsche 1999: 114). These distinct rhythmic modes therefore affect the soul in different manners, but in the Dionysian, Apollonian individuality and will is lacking.

As James Porter notes, in Nietzsche's notebooks the Apollonian and Dionysian are at one point distinguished through a difference in *tempo* in the perception of time and space, with the Apollonian associated with a slower tempo of the sensation of space and time, with the Dionysian a presumably accelerated experience (Porter 2000a: 127, 332). Or more directly, in correspondence, Nietzsche commented closely on the Apollo-Dionysus dyad precisely through the relationship to rhythm:

The Dionysian is the disharmonious ground which longs after rhythm, beauty etc. The rhythm of organic life – how much does it adapt itself to the form of the incoming stimulus? First of all, the contradiction may be sensed, up to the complete annihilation of sensation, and on the other hand the rhythm of organic life can completely give in to the incoming rhythm, and go over to it, at least for a time – all this is the Dionysian phenomenon. In contrast to that is the measured attitude to the incoming stimulus, holding fast to one's own rhythm, the mutual co-ordination of two rhythmic formations, finally the transference of one's own rhythm to the incoming rhythm (= beauty) the Apollonian phenomenon. (Nietzsche, quoted in Small 2010: 52)

To "give in" to the incoming rhythm constitutes the "Dionysian phenomenon." This Dionysian merging of art and life proceeds, to repeat, through music, rhythm, gesture, and dance: Nietzsche here speaks of Dionysian symbolism as a symbolism of the body, the patterns and movements of dances, the «rhythmical movement of every limb» resulting in the growth of the symbolic powers of «rhythm, dynamics, and harmony» which is first made possible by Dionysian «self-abandonment» (Nietzsche 1999: 21). The Apollonian artist presupposes the listener, whereas «not knowing any consideration for the listener belongs to the nature of Dionysian art» (Nietzsche 2009: 90). The «magic of music» (Nietzsche 1999: 136) transfigures the living being into a creature of nature whose movements and sounds are expressive of nature and its primordial unity, *without image*. Dionysus, as a paradoxical god, is both imminent and immediately present as well as unrepresentable and remote: too close to see (and it is Apollo who is the god of shining and the shining god, enabling a clarity of vision and the contemplative gaze). It is the potentiality of such imagelessness, for Nietzsche, which makes Dionysian art as unrepresentable – variously expressed as a «direct copy of the Will itself» (Nietzsche 1999: 77), as a «repetition of the world and a second copy of it» (Nietzsche 1999: 30), or what John Sallis describes as an art-state that «bursts forth from nature» (Sallis 1991: 21) – unlike imagistic architectonic Apollonian music, which is a «second reflection» (Nietzsche 1999: 30) or *refraction* of this primordial unity (though still nonetheless bursting forth from nature, but at a different frequency).

To repeat some elements we have gestured towards so far to bring this discussion of Dionysian rhythms in closer connection to Agamben's rhythmic-poietic encounter. We noted above the connection Agamben drew between architectonics and social rhythmicity, and the possibility of the rhythmic-poietic encounter through rituals and festivals which can bring the living being in contact with "original mythic time" and enter into a more authentic and originary temporality. While we can associate the architectonic creative force with Apollonian rhythms, the phenomenological transformation depicted here in the festival and rhythmic-poietic encounter appears precisely what Nietzsche is referring to when speaking of Dionysian festival and ritual. Nietzsche suggests that such festivals solicited the breakdown of individuality in part through Dionysian music, singing, and gesture, which elicited terror and horror, but also through which the «tearing-apart of the *principium individuationis* becomes an artistic phenomenon» (Nietzsche 1999: 21). This is a key crux of the ambiguity of Agamben's notion of rhythm here: the breakdown of "will" and "intentionality" is central to his notion of the rhythmic-poietic encounter and of authentic art generally, but the

invocation of architectonics is itself an expression of the Apollonian creative and individualised force. Dionysian music is *not* a controlled and measured architectonics in sound. It is at this juncture where we can say that Nietzsche saw the possibility of what we can call either *tragic* or *joyful* rhythms in the work and experience of art, in an active and affirmative combination of these Apollonian and Dionysian forces, as a partial and always precarious resolution of their perpetual rhythmic tension. Where Agamben remains silent on this Apollo-Dionysus tension in his conceptualisation of rhythm (his comments on active nihilism are not integrated into his theory of rhythm), Nietzsche saw the possibility tragic and joyful rhythms. Our comments on this will conclude this paper.

## **4. Concluding Comments: Tragic Rhythms, Joyful Rhythms**

Tragedy, as is well known, is positioned by Nietzsche as the «Apollonian clarification of the Dionysian» (Nietzsche 2009: 50) and functions also as a «healing power against the Dionysian» (Nietzsche 2009: 20) insofar as Dionysian ecstasy and rapture are impermanent. The return to everyday life after such states of bliss and horror is characterised by Nietzsche by a feeling of revulsion and will-negation (Nietzsche 1999: 40), confronted with the absurdity of everyday life, of individual identities, and generally the problem of nihilism. Tragedy specifically functions as the discharge of the Dionysian through the Apollonian (Nietzsche 1999: 44) in which an *affirmation* of the (necessary) destruction of individuality is made possible (Nietzsche 1999: 80-81), and is thus an early form of Nietzsche's active nihilism mentioned above. Apollonian art overcomes suffering through an affirmation of being and the eternity of appearances (Nietzsche 1999: 80), and as such is life-denying in a double sense: (i) insofar as it affirms the eternal being of appearances (denying becoming); and (ii) insofar as – as Gilles Deleuze notes – Apollo «obliterates pain» (Deleuze 2006: 11) rather than affirming it. Apollo resolves pain through mediation and displacement, and Dionysus «immediately in the reproduction, in the musical symbol of the will» (*ibid.*: 12). Tragic art is a Dionysian and affirmative absorption of suffering, in which «the sufferings of individuation [are] absorbed in the joy of original being» (*ibid.*: 12) successively discharged through Apollonian form and «in an Apollonian world» (*ibid.*: 12)

We can here identify, therefore, in addition to the difference of rhythm between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, a third rhythmic term: the rhythm of the Apollo-Dionysus *relation*. Tragedy is a succession of Dionysian “discharges” through Apollonian form and embodiment. This recalls the comparison made by Nietzsche, in the opening paragraph of *The Birth of Tragedy*, to the historical development of art to sexual reproduction and to co-existing «perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation» (Nietzsche 1999: 14), and which is later described differently, in terms of a «bond of brotherhood» (Nietzsche 1999: 104). Their temporary reconciliation, the Nietzschean task of art, being a precarious «dream-world of Dionysiac intoxication» (Nietzsche 1999: 70) In the conclusion of this text, Nietzsche interestingly claims that these two drives ought to unfold in a «reciprocal proportion, according to the law of eternal justice» (Nietzsche 1999: 116). This curious “law of eternal justice” appears initially to invoke Apollo (proportion, measure, justice). However, for us this must be placed in relation to another work Nietzsche was working on concomitantly and wanted to complement with *The Birth of Tragedy*, namely, the incomplete work now published as *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, through which we can note that this law of eternal justice is itself indissociable from Dionysian becoming. This was also indicated by Nietzsche when we quoted above his claim that rhythm is an attempt an individuation which *presupposes* a prior becoming.

When discussing Heraclitus in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, Nietzsche associates

Heraclitus with an (i) ontology of becoming moved by an eternal wavebeat and rhythm (itself lawful); (ii) the denial of the distinction between a physical and metaphysical world, and (iii) an attendant denial of being (Nietzsche 1962: 50-51). This Heraclitean affirmation of impermanence is described by Nietzsche as a difficult and potentially paralysing thought in the same manner as with the potentially nihilistic aftermath of the Dionysian experience of impermanence was noted above. For Nietzsche, Heraclitus resolves this towards «blessed astonishment [...] by means of regarding the actual process of all coming-to-be and passing away [...] under the form of a polarity, as being the diverging of a force into two qualitatively different opposed activities that seek to re-unite» (Nietzsche 1962: 54) in an eternal contest. Or, to put this differently, Nietzsche sees in Heraclitus the bringing together of proportion, measure, and justice, with disorder, chaos, chance, necessity, innocence and monstrosity, and this bringing-together is the *binding* constitutive of *tragic* or *joyful* rhythms: a double affirmative rhythmisation of Apollo and Dionysus.

The Apollo-Dionysus rhythm, read through Nietzsche's Heraclitus, is therefore lawful from the perspective of a generalised rhythmic becoming which is eternally *just* precisely insofar as it is *innocent* and insofar as this rhythmic becoming is constituted by the continuous generation and destruction of forms, in relation to which hubris and *ressentiment* have no place:

[A]s children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire. It constructs and destroys, all in innocence. Such is the game that the aeon plays with itself [...] From time to time it starts the game anew. An instant of satiety – and again it is seized by its need, as the artist is seized by his need to create. Not hybris but the ever self-renewing impulse to play calls new worlds into being [...] But when it does build, it combines and joins and forms its structures regularly, conforming to inner laws. (Nietzsche 1962: 62)

This is central to Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche: Heraclitus is, for Deleuze, «the tragic thinker» (Deleuze 2006: 23). The relationship between being and becoming is as such transformed into a game that life plays with itself through the god-heads of Dionysus and Apollo; and while it is true that Deleuze will often place extra emphasis on the centrality of Dionysus as the player, it is worth noting here that his depictions of this playing are at once a *double* affirmation of Dionysus and Apollo. The player, Deleuze notes, temporarily *abandons* itself to life (Dionysus) *and* «fixes his gaze upon it» (Deleuze 2006: 24) (Apollo); the artist is both absorbed in the process of creation but *also* places itself provisionally above it; the child plays *and* withdraws.

This play – which is also a dance – of double-affirmation of Dionysus and Apollo is thus positioned as a temporary reconciliation of tragedy and joy in which the suffering of life, the vagaries of chance and chaos, and the becoming (/impermanence) of being is trans-figured into a tragic-joyful relationship to life:

According to Nietzsche it has never been understood that the tragic = the joyful. We have not understood that the tragic is pure and multiple positivity, dynamic gaiety. Affirmation is tragic because it affirms chance and the necessity of chance; because it affirms multiplicity and the unity of multiplicity. The dice throw is tragic. (Deleuze 2006: 36)

As such, what we are here calling *tragic* or *joyful rhythms* are the rhythms of the Dionysus-Apollo relation, the *intermittent* playful discharging of Dionysian energies alongside Apollonian illusory forms. In *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, Nietzsche writes of tragedy's «mysterious eye» (Nietzsche 1997: 212) gazing upon us in the midst of the tragic art-work in which a «*sense of the tragic* » (Nietzsche 1997: 213) is cultivated as a «rapturous joy» (Nietzsche 1997: 213) in the *quiet* and *repose* of the art-work. Art exists, Nietzsche claims, «*so that the bow shall not break*» (Nietzsche 1997: 213), or in other words, that *we do not relinquish Apollo*, that both Dionysus and Apollo must be affirmed. The living being's incapacities to be happy, moral, and wise is transfigured into this tragic joy through the tragic-joyful rhythmic transfiguration:

How could we endure to live in the feeling of this threefold incapacity if we were un-able to recognize in our struggles, striving and failures something sublime and significant and did not learn from tragedy to take delight in the rhythm of grand passion and its victim. (Nietzsche 1997: 212)

The precarity of such tragic-joyful rhythms offers the possibility of an active relationship to life which neither *expiates* suffering (Apollo) nor becomes subsumed in it (Dionysus), and it is precisely this tragic possibility that Nietzsche senses.

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## Footnotes

[1] Also, for a discussion of the relationship between technics and rhythm in Heidegger mobilised through Rimbaud, see Hui (2017).

[2] As such, this forms part of Nietzsche's relationship to Kant. Kant's method, recall, is importantly *architectonic*, intended «to make every act of cognition convincing and objectively valid insofar as it is part of and extends an organized and systematic whole» (Willatt 2010: 9-10).