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DIONYSIAN INSPIRATION

Transformation beyond Identification

To say that we are fascinated with the idea of the inspired writer might be an understatement. It haunts our students, our classrooms, and the stories we've inherited about many of the most influential writers of the Western world. These stories are not limited to writers who lived in more romantic times. For example, Laurie Halse Anderson, author of the popular young adult novel *Speak* (1999), admits in an interview that she first met and felt compelled to write the story of her main character, Melinda, when she woke from a nightmare in which she could hear Melinda sobbing (199). As a rhetorician, my favorite example is the story of Socrates's secondhand encounter with the Oracle at Delphi. According to legend (as it is given to us in Plato's *Apology*), Socrates heard that the Oracle had pronounced that he was the wisest of all mortals, which prompted him to search for a wiser man. His search enabled the conditions that would shape his philosophy and lead him to conclude that he was, indeed, the wisest because he knew the limits of his knowledge. Such stories of inspired speakers and writers are a part of the very fabric of Western literary and rhetorical histories.

The Romantic poets are perhaps the most famously branded "inspired writers." Inspiration is one of the primary topics the poet must treat in order to join their ranks. For example, at the end of "The Eolian Harp," Samuel Taylor Coleridge democratizes the possibility of inspiration, asking, "And what if all

of animated nature / Be but organic Harps diversely framed, / That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps / Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, / At once the Soul of each, and God of All?" Thought is inspired in the living being, and indeed, any living being can manifest in its thought some aspect of the "God of All." However, one doesn't have to wait for the source that inspires thought to pass over; it can be called upon to guide thought, as Percy Bysshe Shelley demonstrates in "Ode to the West Wind." In the poem, Shelley makes a plea to the source to which Coleridge attributes all life: "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: / What if my leaves are falling like its own! / The tumult of thy mighty harmonies / Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone, / Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!" Both of these examples seem to suggest that inspiration comes from an external force that joins with the poet and enables both thought and feeling inside of him.

It's worth noting, however, that despite Coleridge's fantasizing that "all of animated nature be but organic harps," the writer typically is believed to be an already exceptional person—exceptional for their soul's capacity for genius, as the Romantic poets would say, or for the writer's innate talent, as today's professional and student writers might say. As such, not all writers who have experienced inspiration are held up as examples of inspired writers; not all possess the requisite exceptionality. I've had many students who have confessed to me over the years that their best works "just came to [them]," but none of those students has been embraced as the next Shakespeare or Toni Morrison. This seems, perhaps, an obvious point, but I make it to demonstrate that, in this model of inspiration, there may be degrees of genius, as there are degrees (in terms of value) of the work produced in the frenzied moment. It is not enough to be inspired. Rather, one must be already exceptional, then inspired.

Of course, the thought that one might be able to receive, channel, and express a great truth due to one's exceptional capacity is a self-aggrandizing idea, and more importantly, it hinges on the concept of an essential self. In this framework, the creative writer's experience of inspiration is proof of their inherent exceptionality because something of the writer's self seems to be maintained in each experience of inspiration and reproduced in the product(s) of that experience (e.g., in the written work). In short, their exceptionality explains both the writer's receptivity to the experience of inspiration and their relatively consistent production of brilliant works. However, if inspiration is a truly transformative experience, then this framework begs the question: What, if anything, actually transforms in the writer in the experience of inspiration?

One possible answer can be found in Kenneth Burke's concepts of identification and consubstantiality. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke offers a number of examples in which transformation is represented as a process that occurs through death and the act of killing. In the works of Milton and Matthew Arnold, Burke demonstrates how the writers kill off characters in their work in order to conquer opponents (Milton) and to free the self (Arnold). In order for transformation-via-death to be possible, though, the writer must participate in *identification*. Milton, for example, identifies with Samson, who embodies his own rage toward the outside world and toward himself, but who can use that rage to conquer a heathen world. Arnold identifies with Empedocles, who is killed by his father and who, thus, represents Arnold's "self-abnegatory attitude" (Burke, *A Rhetoric* 8), which stems from an overwhelming respect for authority. The death of each character allows each writer to transform in the act of killing, but only because each writer has come to see himself in his respective character.

Burke offers another, more familiar, though not necessarily less violent, example of transformation via identification in the adolescent. This adolescent "is trained by our motion pictures to meditate much on the imagery of brutality and murder," and he "grows up" by "participat[ing] in' all this imagery, 'empathically reenact[ing] it'" (*A Rhetoric* 17–18)—which might call to mind the examples of McCandless, Harris, and Klebold from the introduction to this book. In each case, transformation, embodied in a coming-of-age narrative, is enabled through the self's sustained identification with a particular interpretation of images and texts.

Burke defines identification in *Dramatism and Development* as the kind of persuasion that "we spontaneously, intuitively, and often unconsciously, act upon ourselves" (27–28). These are the persuasive moments in which we align with certain beliefs without necessarily choosing them in thoughtful ways. That alignment, though, is partial. As Burke explains in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, identification is a form of "consubstantiality" in which an individual is both joined to or with and separate from another. He states, "In being identified with B, A is 'substantially one' with a person other than himself. At the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another" (21). This symbiotic state of togetherness-and-separateness is, for Burke, essential to rhetoric. There would be no need to persuade without separateness and no possibility of persuasion without togetherness.

Consubstantiality and identification offers an explanation for how the writer and the source of inspiration might encounter each other in such a way that the

former is both changed by and stays the same through that encounter: for example, the Romantic poet unites with Nature to shape their expression of Nature's essence, but the poet is not equal to Nature; they are still the (exceptional) individual poet. The writer can write about and believe in an idea that aligns with another writer, sharing a belief with that writer, but she is still her own woman, for example.

As Krista Ratcliffe goes to great lengths to explain in *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, Burke's concept of consubstantiality happens when subjects discover shared beliefs or common ground (55). This privileging of common ground—in both consubstantiality and identification—erases not difference itself but an attentiveness to difference and often in predictably problematic ways within relations of power. One of the more terrible side effects of the erasure of any attentiveness to difference is what Ratcliffe calls “a blindness to one's own blindness,” where the possibilities for “identifying and negotiating across troubled identifications, especially those that haunt cross-cultural communications,” become markedly limited (59–60). As she succinctly states, “In Burke's theory, differences do not ‘accede to power,’ they learn to submit” (60). And, of course, history has shown the terrible consequences of that erasure and submission. As Diana Fuss suggests in *Identification Papers*, identification risks “annihilating the other *as other*” (4), and that annihilation can play out in the very real destruction of the lives of others.

Identification and consubstantiality, according to Burke's descriptions of them, are undeniably present in public (and private) discourses today. They make possible not only some of the worst versions of “argument,” but most versions of argument. These concepts are, to be fair to Burke, simply descriptors for a persistent and pervasive practice, a familiar way of being in discourse. And, if used to explain the experience that is inspiration, then inspiration would seem to be an ordinary, even daily occurrence, certainly not the exceptional, transforming event that it is touted to be. In fact, if inspiration is explained through consubstantiality and identification, then it is not only an experience of transformation but simultaneously an experience of self-calcification.

Given pervasive, modern-day assumptions about a self that remains fundamentally consistent throughout the course of its life (due, in part, to common conceptions of socially constructed but still essentialized categories, like ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.—see chapter 2 of my book *Beyond Argument*), this explanation makes sense and might be appealing to the modern-day reader. Yet, I would suggest that Burke's concepts of identification and consubstantiality explain a kind of change that simply is not transformative enough. Identification

and consubstantiality are far more likely to function as modes of buttressing the self—confirming the self’s existing genius or moral goodness, for example, and at the expense of others. As Sonja Foss, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp explain in their chapter on Burke in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, individuals “share substance with whatever or whomever they associate and simultaneously define themselves against or separate themselves from others with whom they choose not to identify” (192). Though Burke may see this separateness as “the basic motive for rhetoric” because “people communicate in an attempt to eliminate division” (Foss et. al., *Contemporary Perspectives* 193), it also seems to support one of the most dangerous and commonplace attitudes that can be perpetuated by rhetoric: “us against them.”

The problem, as I see it, is in discovering an alternative to identification and consubstantiality and an alternative to “us against them.” In this book, I want to get beyond conceptions of the sustaining self to the moments when the self is unmade so that a different self emerges. Thus, I seek to explore a different kind of encounter—one that necessarily risks the self but that enables, in that risk, transformation. Why might we value and pursue this possibility for transformation? For a number of reasons, not the least of which is because the imperative to maintain a stable, even implacable, identity against all external “threats” has, to my mind, led to the terrible failing of this American experiment in democracy. Perhaps the most important reason, though, is that if we seek to move forward in this moment, which we might characterize not only according to the failure of democracy but according to the looming Sixth Extinction—when disease spreads among plants, animals, and among the global human population at exponential rates, when species disappear, when the climate becomes increasingly unstable, etc., etc.—then we need to be thinking more in terms of connection and change, instead of division and self-preservation.

Turning to the inspired writer as a model for what this connection and change might look like, we need not look too far. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, there are many who have been recognized as “inspired.” However, our task is to think about what change might look like in different terms and through different processes. Instead of the exceptional writer who receives a grand Truth from some external source, I’d suggest that inspired writers are those who dwell, who live, in a strange and risky process. In an interview in which he is asked about the dramatic shifts in his work “from one level of inquiry to another,” Foucault states, “I write a book only because I still don’t exactly know what to think about this thing I want so much to think about, so that the book

transforms me and transforms what I think. . . . I'm an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before" (Trombadori 239–240). When Foucault writes, a self emerges—newly, differently—in the “experiment” that is writing, that is, in the persistent and rigorous encounter with the materials (concepts, values, etc.) that are at stake in a particular writing exercise.²

Via a different approach to writing, like that which Foucault describes above, transformation is, if not inevitable, then at least made possible. It is, to put this simply, one of the possible effects of approaching the experience that is “to think about [a] thing.” Imagine a rhetoric that is not about changing others (though it may accomplish that) but is, instead, about resonating, rippling change across encounters and connections. Imagine a rhetoric that doesn't function in an “us against them” relation but accounts for the immense complexity and expansive potentialities of particular connections.

To begin (again), then, in this chapter, I look to the paragon of inspiration that is the Oracle at Delphi to explore what inspiration-as-transformation might look like and how it works through intuition and rationality in unmaking and remaking the self. I explain the twin concepts of intuition and rationality as analogous to Nietzsche's concepts of the Dionysian and the Apollinian³—two kinds of experiences that he explores in his earliest works, *The Birth of Tragedy* and “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”⁴—in order to introduce the processes of unmaking and remaking. For the purposes of this chapter, I maintain the binary relation between the Dionysian and the Apollinian, as Nietzsche does in his early works, so that readers can see more clearly how the intuitive is conceived, as it is thrown into relief against its (provisional) opposite. However, in later chapters, mimicking the development of Nietzsche's work, I will finesse that relation in order to intensify a connection with the intuitive and, even, to embody it in the writing itself.

Many of the most celebrated writers of the ancient world were fascinated by and wrote about the Oracle at Delphi because of the seer's intimate knowledge of and relationship to the experience of inspiration.⁵ For example, the writer of *On the Sublime* famously uses the Oracle as a metaphor for how one might discover the sublime through emulation of other brilliant writers. He states, “For many authors catch fire from the inspiration of others—just as we are told that the Pythian priestess, when she approaches the tripod standing by a cleft in the ground from which, they say, there is breathed out a divine vapour, is impregnated thence

with the heavenly power, and by virtue of this afflatus is at once inspired to speak oracles.” He goes on to explain that “certain emanations are conveyed” from the genius to the writer who seeks to emulate that genius. The writer, consequently, is “impregnated” by the genius’s “grandeur” (119; ch. 13).⁶ This understanding of inspiration hinges on the generative practice of emulation, and as such, it may seem to align with Burke’s descriptions of identification and consubstantiality. However, the two have different conceptions of persuasion, for while Burke tries to capture in his term “identification” the persuasive acts that influence us with and without our consent, the author of *On the Sublime* sees persuasion as always working within the realm of rationality.

As the author of *On the Sublime* explains in the first chapter, titled “First Thoughts on Sublimity,” his project is not interested in how we are persuaded because persuasion, he says, “is usually under our control” (because it centers in rationality). Rather, his project is after language that “entrances,” that “transports us with wonder,” that “exert[s] an irresistible force and mastery, and get[s] the upper hand with every hearer,” that “scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt” (100). Far from control, such metaphors suggest the erasure of agency, perhaps even the creation of chaos. We, as writers, might begin in control, in choice, in agency, as we select the texts we want to imitate and as we begin to practice emulating them; however, the author of *On the Sublime* is trying to identify and explain an experience that may happen in that practice but that is also somehow beyond the usual results of said practice. It is more than, it escapes, rational experience.

Plato’s descriptions of inspiration emphasize (and celebrate) the lack of control in “beyond rational” experience, too. In *Phaedrus*, he refers to the seer’s prophesizing as one form of “heaven-sent madness.” In what seems a surprising categorization, given common conceptions of the ancient Greeks (and Plato, in particular) as rationality-privileging people, he explains that because it is “a gift of the gods,” it is “superior to sanity,” which is “of human origin” (148).⁷ Even with Plato’s explanations (which are much more extensive in his dialogues, some of which will be discussed across this book), some confusion persists about what constitutes inspiration both in the ancient world and as we might understand it today, creating what might be perceived as quite a bit of tentativeness in any such discussions in scholarship in rhetoric today. Part of the tentativeness may be due to the fact that in hard-lining this particular kind of inspiration, the process works by undoing and remaking the self.

Historical accounts seem to affirm this process. For example, in his definitive

and influential work, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, Erwin Rohde explains that “in *ekstasis* [the God-given madness to which Plato refers] the soul is liberated from the cramping prison of the body; it communes with the god and develops powers of which, in the ordinary life of everyday, thwarted by the body, it knew nothing” (260; ch. VIII, sec. 2). This communion with a god results not only in the priestess’s gift of prophecy, but in it, she has “a share in the life of the god himself” (258; ch. VIII, sec. 2). It is difficult to say what “a share in the life of the god” might mean, what it might entail. Though she still has her “soul” (which, in the ancient Greek world, did not mean “essence,” as I’ll explain in the conclusion of this book), the seer has somehow exceeded human experience. More precisely, she has exceeded experience that can be explained by human rationality, and at the same time, she has become part of something much more powerful, something “other than” her self.

In fact, *ekstasis* is so wild and transformative that the Greeks’ valuing of it marked a transformation not only in the individual women who communed with gods to speak oracles, but according to Rohde, it marked a transformation in Greek character, where the “extravagance of emotion was combined with a fast-bound and regulated equilibrium of temper and behavior” (255; ch. VIII, sec. 2). In other words, as the Greeks began to deeply value this God-given madness as much as (or more than) they valued rationality, their culture changed.

Clearly, despite commonplace conceptions of the ancients’ privileging of the rational over the intuitive, that simply wasn’t so. In fact, as Plato explains in *Phaedrus*, “Prophecy (*mantike*) is superior to augury [the interpretation of omens]” (47; sec. 244). Ultimately, the two types of prophecy, together, were important, if different, for the ancient Greeks. According to Rev. T. Dempsey in *The Delphic Oracle: Its Early History, Influence, and Fall*, the intuitive method “consisted in a certain divine madness or ecstasy, in which the human soul is possessed by the divinity.” Alternatively, the inductive method was “a sane and rational procedure, derived from the observation of certain signs” (49; ch. II, sec. B). In short, the inductive method was about rational interpretation; the intuitive method was about transformative connection with a god.

To be fair, the relationship between the priestess and her god has always been more difficult to understand and to explain than the priest’s interpretation of signs, though a number of pagan and Christian intellectuals have tried.⁸ At face value, it seems easy enough to leap to the conclusion that the maiden merging with Apollo was a symbolic, but also highly recognizable, way of explaining the union between female human and male god. After all, there are too many stories

to count of Greek gods who engaged in sexual intercourse with women. However, according to the more common belief among the ancients about the oracle's relation to Apollo, this "merging" was not simply symbolic; it was elemental, intimate, profound. In that merging, the priestess became something other than woman; she became the oracle, the mouthpiece of the god.⁹

Such a transformation is significant. The woman's "constitution and capacity" changed in the experience of inspiration. She is, to use David Allison's description of the Dionysian experience in his incisive book, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, "dispossessed—removed—of [her] own individuality, of all that renders the individual a singular and distinctive creature in the first place—the specific constitution of [her] character, personality, tastes, fears, expectations, reflections, and values" (40). How do we make sense of such a profound transformation? How do we understand a process in which an individual is, in one moment, one self, and in the next moment, not?

The Apollinian and the Dionysian

Seeming to accord with [Plato's descriptions of] Socrates's wisdom with regard to the nature of human knowledge, Nietzsche begins *On the Genealogy of Morals* with this: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge. . . ." A few lines later, he continues:

Present experience has, I am afraid, always found us 'absent-minded': we cannot give our hearts to it—not even our ears! Rather, as one divinely preoccupied and immersed in himself into whose ear the bell has just boomed with all its strength the twelve beats of noon suddenly starts up and asks himself: 'what really was that which just struck?' so we sometimes rub our ears *afterward* and ask, utterly surprised and disconcerted, 'what really was that which we have just experienced?' and moreover: 'who *are* we really?' and, afterward as aforesaid, count the twelve trembling bell-strokes of our experience, our life, our *being*—and alas! miscount them.—So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves. . . .—We are not 'men of knowledge' with respect to ourselves. (15; preface, sec. 1)

Nietzsche suggests in this passage that we, humans, do not know ourselves for at least a couple of reasons, the most obvious of which (given his project in *On the Genealogy of Morals*) is because we misinterpret our history—particularly the formations (and disruptions) of our values. The other reason for our not knowing

ourselves, though, is because we do not give ourselves to present experience, as he states in the first line of the previous passage. We are so caught up in rationally analyzing ourselves according to values that carry us across what has happened and what will happen that we cannot fully experience anything beyond the rationalizable. Apart from the present, we live apart from such possibilities and, consequently, apart from the fullness of ourselves.

Though he does not always reference them specifically in their historical contexts, Nietzsche engages with the gods and belief systems germane to the Oracle at Delphi throughout his career, beginning in his early works on the Apollinian and Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* and on the rational man and intuitive man in “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.”¹⁰ If the long quote included above is any indication, he seems to take his cue, like Socrates in *Phaedrus*, from the inscription found in the pronaos of the temple at Delphi: “Know Thyself.” In some way in all of his works, Nietzsche calls attention to, explores, and argues for the importance of the Dionysian, the intuitive, to the process of knowing the self—a value that was salient at the Delphic temple, where the priestess’s union with Apollo and any resulting “Dionysiac prophecy” were made possible through *ekstasis*.

Rohde explains: “Enthusiasm and ecstasy are invariably the means of the Dionysiac prophecy just as they were the means of all Dionysiac religious experience. When we find Apollo in Delphi itself—the place where he most closely allied himself with Dionysos [*sic*]—deserting his old omen-interpretation and turning to the prophecy of *ekstasis*, we cannot have much doubt as to whence Apollo got this new thing” (290; ch. IX, sec. 3). In fact, Rohde argues that Dionysus and Apollo became so intermingled, their associated religious practices (*ekstasis* and prophecy) becoming so deeply connected to each other, that “in the end the distinction between [the two gods] seems to disappear entirely” (288; ch. IX, sec. 2). He states, “With the mantic *ekstasis*, Apollo received a Dionysiac element into his own religion. Henceforward, he, the cold, aloof, sober deity of former times, can be addressed by titles that imply Bacchic excitement and self-abandonment. He is now the ‘enthusiastic,’ the Bacchic god: Aeschylus strikingly calls him ‘ivy-crowned Apollo, the Bacchic-frenzied prophet’” (290–291; ch. IX, sec. 3). In short, Apollo, himself, is transformed in his encounter with Dionysus, as the two merge.

However, Nietzsche argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* and in “On Truth and Lies” that in the modern world the two experiences that he defines in relation to each god maintain their distinction, so much so that they become not a mutually

enabling but a polarized opposition: the Apollinian/rational against the Dionysian/intuitive. As I'll explain below, eventually, within Western value systems, the former trumps the latter so thoroughly that we, (post)modern Westerners, are intimately (perhaps exclusively) familiar with the making-of-self, the experience of being, that Nietzsche models in the figure of the rational man in "On Truth and Lies." What we have forgotten, according to Nietzsche, is the unmaking, the becoming, that happens in the intuitive or Dionysian experience. It should be no surprise, then, that throughout the course of his career, Nietzsche intensifies his focus on the Dionysian, working to reclaim the intuitive part of human experience that has been diminished in the emphasis on the rational since the decline of Greek tragedy.

Despite its title, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche is not only concerned with the birth of tragedy in the ancient world; he is also, and perhaps more, concerned with its disappearance. According to Nietzsche, the binary of rational/intuitive becomes so polarized and top-heavy that the Apollinian threatens to overwhelm the Dionysian entirely—a process that will not only affect the power of tragedy and its very existence through history but will affect the human being's drive for truth. Because of the total separation and privileging of the Apollinian, Nietzsche will accuse the human race in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" (which he wrote just a year after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*) of a pride that deceives us so extremely, so entirely, that "there is almost nothing which is less comprehensible than how an honest and pure drive for truth could have arisen among [us]" (1172; sec. 1). To put this another way, the emphasis on the Apollinian is so totalizing in its effects that it has cut us off from the possibility of the "liberated intellect" ("Truth and Lies" 1178; sec. 2) borne by intuitive experience—and the great happiness and sorrow, the full range of experience and truth, that come with it.

Of course, there is good reason for the privileging of the Apollinian: it is a way to ward off pain and misfortune (or so we believe). To allow the Dionysian to take its rightful place beside (and not under) the Apollinian would be to invite not only immense happiness but immense pain—madness, grief, despair—into our lives. However, it is in what we might call madness that readers discover the riddle to the problem posed by Nietzsche in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" about how to free ourselves from within the imprisoning arrogance and deception of human reason. Of course, I will not argue here for a life lived in Dionysian experience—rather that, as Nietzsche has argued, the devaluing of Dionysian experience in the modern world has deprived us of possibilities for

inspiration, for profound transformation. We might, then, want to take another look; we might try to remember the Dionysian, if not so that we might better understand the ancient world from which rhetoric is born, but more importantly, so that we might invent other ways of be(com)ing, so that we might transform ourselves, in this one.

The Apollinian

The Apollinian, at its simplest level, is the experience of the rational. Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, often calls on Socrates as a representative of the Apollinian man, but of course, it is the god Apollo who serves as the primary model for his conception of the Apollinian. In our image of Apollo, Nietzsche advises: “We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god. His eye must be ‘sunlike,’ as befits his origin; even when it is angry and distempered it is still hallowed by beautiful illusion” (35; sec. 1). Thus, Apollo is about control and reason, but he is also bound by “beautiful illusion.” Nietzsche explains, quoting Schopenhauer, “Just as in a stormy sea that, unbounded in all directions, raises and drops mountainous waves, howling, a sailor sits in a boat and trusts his frail bark: so in the midst of a world of torments the individual human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*” (35–36; sec. 1). The Dionysian is the stormy sea; it is the unbounded experience of the world, as it crashes onto the shores of our consciousness. The Apollinian, on the other hand, is both a function of human intellect and of pride, which, together, drive us to assimilate our otherwise (or initially) “stormy” and “unbounded” experience of the world to ourselves, specifically to our rational selves, which can make sense of that experience. Whatever sense we make of experience is a “beautiful illusion,” a construct. It is an imposition of human rationality and knowledge on our otherwise unfathomable, chaotic experience of the world.

Nietzsche’s point here is not to suggest that we should not, then, rationally process experience—nor that we can stop doing so. Rather, his point is that our rational processing is not as infallible as we like to believe. In “On Truth and Lies,” he explains, “[Human intellect] is human, and only its possessor and getter takes it so solemnly—as though the world’s axis turn[s] within it” (1172; sec. 1). He explains this further by offering a comparison to the gnat’s vision of the world: “[the gnat] likewise flies through the air with the same solemnity[;] . . . he feels the flying center of the universe within himself” (1172; sec. 1). It

is our pride about our rational minds and capacity for reason that enables the assumption that it is this human viewpoint that sits at the center of the world and that explains the world truly. However, as Nietzsche goes on to explain, our ways of processing experience are flawed, for human intellect is both made possible and limited by perspective and by language.

Through language, we delineate the world; language designates: “This is this, and that is that.” Yet, if we accept Nietzsche’s theory of language, then language operates through a series of abstractions—from sensory experience to image to word to concept that must exist in relation to other concepts. It does not actually get us access to the thing-in-itself. Consequently, any truth we come to possess through our conceptions of the thing-in-itself is not the transcendent, unmediated truth of the thing-in-itself but “a movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms” (“Truth and Lies” 1174; sec. 1). In short, truth is an effect of language, the repetition of certain metaphors for reality that have been passed on, inherited, for too long for us to remember the original deception. As good postmodernists, this we already know, and knowing this has informed ongoing debates about correlationism—the idea, coined by Quentin Meillassoux and primarily blamed on Kant, that “we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (Meillassoux 36).

As C. J. Davies explains in “Nietzsche beyond Correlationism,” however, Nietzsche is not really interested in whether we can access being in itself. That is not his project. In fact, as Nietzsche points out, the thing-in-itself is “something not in the least worth striving for [because] this creator [of language] only designates the relations of things to men” (“Truth and Lies” 1173). As Nietzsche goes on to explain, “[The human being] strives to understand the world as something analogous to man, and at best he achieves by his struggles the feeling of assimilation” (“Truth and Lies” 1175; sec. 1). This assimilation is of the world to the individual. The individual designates the world through language, orders and conceives it through language, and always according to the self.

Yet, Nietzsche also points out that this assimilation of the world to the individual is performed in an effort to distinguish the individual from others (i.e., to dissimulate).¹¹ He states, “As a means for the preserving of the individual, the intellect unfolds its principle powers in dissimulation. . . . In so far as the individual wants to maintain himself against other individuals, he will under natural circumstances employ the intellect mainly for dissimulation” (“Truth and Lies” 1172; sec. 1). These twin processes of dissimulation and assimilation constitute

the *principium individuationis*, which is Nietzsche's articulation of what might be called a "proto-anthropocentrism."

This principle is not unlike Burke's identification; only, the primary motive may be different. For Burke, identification enables rhetoric; no doubt, Nietzsche would agree (or vice versa, given Burke's well-established relationship to Nietzsche's work).¹² However, according to Nietzsche, it is through this *principium* that the human being is able to not only know the self in relation to the world, but the self is also able to live in some comfort or "repose" without being ravaged by chaos and madness at every step/stumble. Nietzsche states, "In fact, we might say of Apollo that in him the unshaken faith in this *principium* and the calm repose of the man wrapped up in it receive their most sublime expression; and we might call Apollo himself the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*, through whose gestures and eyes all the joy and wisdom of 'illusion,' together with its beauty, speak to us" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 36; sec. 1). The "calm repose" of the man wrapped up in this *principium* comes from the repetition of that principle put into action.

To explain, I point to the image of the stoic man at the end of "Truth and Lies." Nietzsche describes him as such: "He wears no quivering and changeable human face, but, as it were, a mask with dignified, symmetrical features. He does not cry; he does not even alter his voice. When a real storm cloud thunders above him, he wraps himself in his cloak, and with slow steps he walks from beneath it" (1179; sec. 2). This is the ultimate payoff for the rational man, for the man who embodies the principle of the individual, who masterfully uses language to construct (thus, control) his world: he is able to ward off pain, the pain of chaos.

A more familiar example of this principle can be found in the first acts of God in Genesis, who calls form into being out of chaos: light from darkness, day from night, night from day. This is the originating principle, and yet, it would not be possible without the chaos from which it derives; the Apollinian would not be possible without the Dionysian—a point that Nietzsche takes up over and over again in his early work. Of course, this point is also represented in the Oracle at Delphi. With regard to prophecy, under the purview of the god of rationality, Apollo, the Ancient Greeks knew well the importance, the necessity, of intuition in order to prophesy.

More importantly to the project here, the Dionysian is a kind of experience that is somehow *beyond* the *principium individuationis*, beyond the processes of dissimulation and assimilation, beyond any process that looks like Burke's

identification. If we pursue it, then it might get us beyond the “us against them” approach to argument that has held rhetoric by the throat for too long.

The Dionysian

In order to access the Dionysian/intuitive, the oracle would engage in a number of ritual practices. Dempsey states, “[The priestess] began her preparation by fasting and bathing in the Castalian spring. If the omens were favourable, the Pythia first chewed the leaves of the sacred laurel, drank from the water of the spring Cassotis, and burned laurel leaves and barley meal (and perhaps myrrh) in ‘the never-dying fire’ on the altar of [Apollo]” (53–54; ch. II, sec. B). By ingesting the waters of the sacred spring and the sacred laurel leaf, by purifying her body in the sacred spring, by breathing the sacred air of the resting place of the python slain by Apollo, the oracle opened herself to an ecstatic state in order to be able to serve as the mouthpiece for the god. Essentially, the woman who serves as the oracle has to make herself capable of disappearing into Dionysian experience in order to access the will and voice of a god beyond her self.

Again, this no doubt seems a strange practice to modern readers. In fact, historians are notorious for dismissing the “magic” of the Oracle at Delphi as mere superstition—a superstition that would be blotted out by more rational minds and movements. Yet, as pointed to above, even Plato, supposed champion of the rational, respects the powerful madness of the Oracle. To be Greek, a good Greek, he must honor the Greek gods and the kinds of experiences that each god/goddess enables in humans, including madness, as is brought home in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

After Socrates realizes his mistake in being “impious” by arguing initially that Love was “evil” (147), he explains in *Phaedrus* that “the greatest of blessings comes to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods. For the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when they have been mad have conferred many splendid benefits upon Greece both in private and in public affairs” (148). In fact, he will remind Phaedrus “that those men of old who invented names thought that madness was neither shameful nor disgraceful; otherwise they would not have connected the very word mania with the noblest of arts, that which foretells the future, by calling it the manic art” (148). However, Socrates’s valuing of madness is qualified, and at great length, over the course of his second speech.

In the myth of the charioteer, Socrates does not value madness except as a

motivating condition that must be controlled. As Elizabeth Belfiore shows in “Dancing with the Gods: The Myth of the Chariot in Plato’s ‘Phaedrus,’” the charioteers may join with the gods (“become winged once more”) only when they have “succeed[ed] in the difficult task of controlling their ill-matched teams [of horses] while the soul is under the influence of erotic madness” (186). Put simply, the goal for the divine soul is control, and to achieve this control, the divine soul must find its way to a state of balance (which will be further explained in chapter 3). Point being, in *Phaedrus*, Plato suggests that madness is only productive insofar as it is part of the soul’s striving for an ideal—reined in by a state of balance that will allow the soul to rejoin the gods.

Reading *Phaedrus*, one can imagine Nietzsche’s response, his frustration: at the end of his first speech, Socrates stops himself, realizing his grievous error in arguing that love is inferior to friendship. He says to Phaedrus, “If Love is, as indeed he is, a god or something divine, he can be nothing evil” (147). He seeks to redeem himself in his second speech. As readers of Nietzsche, we might imagine him reading in anticipation that Socrates must realize, after recognizing his impious dismissal of the value of the madness of love, his twin error about the privileging of rationality—the process that brings madness to its heels, to that state of balance mentioned above. It is a privileging that happens at the expense of not simply madness and the “irrational” but of that which can be stated in positive terms—the intuitive, which like love, is also divine in the form of Dionysus. But, of course, that more profound, most-Greek critique of the privileging of rationality is never fully realized. In fact, Plato embraces reason for the control that it affords *over* madness.

No doubt, this represents just one of many of the enormous errors of which Nietzsche will accuse Plato, for as Nietzsche states, “Indeed, [the ancient Greek] had to recognize even more than this: despite all its beauty and moderation, his entire existence rested on a hidden substratum of suffering and of knowledge, revealed to him by the Dionysian. And behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus! The ‘titanic’ and the ‘barbaric’ were in the last analysis as necessary as the Apollinian” (*The Birth of Tragedy* 46; sec. 4). More to my purposes here, this revelation is, perhaps, the key to the concept and experience of transformation in a theoretical register, and we can see it working even in the more specific and personal transformations in Nietzsche’s work.

I would suggest that the figure of Dionysus first presented itself to Nietzsche in his earliest book, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche wrote *The Birth of Tragedy* when he was twenty-eight years old. It’s an impressive piece, but also highly

problematic. Nietzsche himself admits to its shortcomings in the preface, notably titled “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” which he added to the new edition of the text, printed some fourteen years after the first printing. In that preface, he says of *The Birth of Tragedy*, “I consider it badly written, ponderous, embarrassing, image-mad and image-confused, sentimental, in places saccharine . . .” (19; sec. 3), and the critique goes on for several more lines. However, at the end of that critique, he states, “Still, the effect of the book proved and proves that it had a knack for seeking out fellow-rhapsodizers and for luring them on to new secret paths and dancing places. What found expression here was anyway . . . a *strange* voice, the disciple of a still ‘unknown God,’ one who concealed himself for the time being under the scholar’s hood, under the gravity and dialectical ill humor of the German, even under the bad manners of the Wagnerian” (19–20; sec. 3). What I find most interesting about this statement is that Nietzsche is describing the self-on-the-page as “other,” as unfamiliar, unrealized, in the process of becoming. It’s a self that he would meet head-on, again and again, in later works, and that self would become the Nietzsche we know today—the relentless, complicated, profound, and “bad mannered” text-self that changed and continues to change the ways in which Western thinkers think.

That self-on-the-page, however, is also somehow and deeply related to the god Dionysus. Nietzsche indicates as much when he refers to the self-on-the-page, the voice of that self, as “the disciple of a still ‘unknown God.’” Too, his descriptions of the god give the identity of that god away—for instance, the god’s followers were lured to “secret paths and dancing places” (an obvious reference to the Dionysian festivals, which I’ll talk about below). In addition, given the crescendo of attention to the figure of Dionysus over the course of Nietzsche’s career, it is clear that the god to whom he refers is one in the same. Only, Nietzsche must pursue him through a number of writings, suggesting again that the source of inspiration in Nietzsche’s case is not an external force that strikes, animates, and passes through its human vessel. Rather, here, inspiration is somehow entangled in Nietzsche’s career-long project; not unlike the seers of the ancient world, he must pursue it by attending to it. Or, more precisely, he must become it. The becoming is key.

The Dionysian is not “beyond” rationality or beyond the *principium individuationis* because it is somehow more essential, perhaps even equal to the thing-in-itself. In the Dionysian, Nietzsche is not trying to explain the essence or nature of things beyond our perceptions and language. Rather, the Dionysian is bound to the processes of becoming, as will be explained in the next few chapters. In

the meantime, it's worth noting that Nietzsche attempts many descriptions of the Dionysian—so that the concept, too, is caught in the processes of becoming—but which, at least initially, derive from a certain terror described in Schopenhauer's work. Nietzsche states, "Schopenhauer has depicted for us the tremendous *terror* which seizes man when he is suddenly dumfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principle of sufficient reason, in some one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the *Dionysian*, which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication" (*The Birth of Tragedy* 36; sec. 1). The Dionysian is the collapse of the rational and prideful making of the self in relation to the world and making the world in relation to the self. That collapse means the unmaking of self. If we look at the Dionysian festivals at Delphi, we might glimpse the experience of such a collapse.

According to historians, in the winter months, Apollo left his famously beautiful and politically influential temple at Delphi. Dionysus then "took control of Delphi, and his devotees joined him in orgiastic rites" (Broad 40). Historians have puzzled over the Dionysian rites at Delphi, as the frenzied and ecstatic states seem to fly in the face of Christian—or, more broadly, Western—morality (e.g., there are tales of participants eating raw animal flesh and having sex with many of their stranger-companions). Adding to the mystery, little has been recorded about the rites; however, William J. Broad vividly paints a picture based on what is known in *The Oracle: Ancient Delphi and the Science Behind Its Lost Secrets*:

In the chill night air, often under the stars, accompanied by torches and a beating drum, led by a double flute and a youth playing the role of Dionysus, the worshippers would dance their way up the cliffs behind the temple and climb seven miles to the Korykian cave, where their rites continued amid the large stalagmites that were easily seen in flickering light as divine phalli. . . . It appears that the orgy could include sexual liberties in which the women might swiftly embrace their male companions. . . . [Dionysus's] rapturous devotees were free to act, or not, amid the surrender of the human spirit to the will of the god. (41)

It's no surprise that Nietzsche describes the Dionysian experience with words like "terror" and "blissful ecstasy." In this experience, the principle of the individual dissolves: morality and social mores disappear, as do our allegiances to

and automatic valuing of them. Without our rational allegiance to and valuing of morality and social mores, the very “stuff” that constitutes us disappears.

Nietzsche states, “Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness” (*The Birth of Tragedy* 36; sec. 1), “forgetting the precepts of Apollo. Excess reveal[s] itself as truth” (*The Birth of Tragedy* 46; sec. 4). That excess is that which cannot be described adequately by and captured in rational discourse. It is produced, in part, by the erasure of boundaries, the erasure of the limits of human experience that are conditioned and maintained by social mores and by morality.¹³ When those boundaries are erased or blurred, emotions and instincts are allowed to manifest and expand into the painful, ecstatic experience. The truth that is revealed in this experience is what Nietzsche will call the “primordial unity” (*The Birth of Tragedy* 37; sec. 1), and through/in it, we might come to know that our individualities are but veils.

In “On Truth and Lies,” Nietzsche describes a number of payoffs if we are willing to attend to the possibility of this experience, the most obvious one being more profound experience of life. By not dismissing, by instead affirming, the intuitive experience, we allow ourselves to experience beyond-the-rational, a part of existence that can clue us in to other forms of knowledge and that enables other ways of becoming in and with the world. To put this another way, it enables the production of other insights, possibilities, ways of living, and selves, and it does so through a different approach—one not conceived in terms of “us against them” but in terms of deep connection.

Discovering and Cultivating Other Possibilities

In Nietzsche’s work, the intuitive man is described as wholly different from the rational man, at least in his experiences of happiness and pain, which are different, in part, because of the intuitive man’s very different use of metaphor. Nietzsche admits that “the drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive, which one cannot for a single instant dispense with in thought, for one would thereby dispense with man himself” (“Truth and Lies” 1177; sec. 2). So, there is no way to get around the formation of metaphors, the use of language to designate the world in categories/concepts; however, the intuitive man is able to function through what Nietzsche calls “the liberated intellect,”

an intellect that throws concepts into confusion, “pairing the most alien things and separating the closest” (“Truth and Lies” 1178; sec. 2). Instead of rendering concepts in their usual relations (e.g., in mutually exclusive and polarized oppositions), concepts might be brought together in new ways. It is in these “new ways” of bringing concepts into other relations that the liberated intellect is most generative and risky. For example, Nietzsche’s demonstration that “truth” comes not from the thing-in-itself but is produced through the forgetfulness and pride of the human intellect provides for the profuse response to that demonstration in the works of so many “poststructuralist” thinkers. And, the risk is carried further in the relentless dismantling of metaphysics.

In thinking about new ways of engaging with concepts and of enabling new relations among them, I am reminded of Foucault’s descriptions of his own work, as well as John Muckelbauer’s engagement with Foucault’s work. In “On Reading Differently: Through Foucault’s Resistance,” Muckelbauer explains: “But instead of forwarding truth claims in an effort to correctly represent Foucault’s positions, instead of reading him programmatically, I will attempt to demonstrate my sense of a type of criticism that I call ‘productive reading.’ In several interviews, Foucault spoke longingly of this ‘different’ type of criticism (see *Politics* 326), the criticism that, rather than judging his concepts or texts, forces them to ‘land in unexpected places and form shapes that [he] had never thought of’ (324)” (73). Using Foucault’s work “differently,” Muckelbauer argues for a different way of engaging with concepts and claims at work in the texts we read—a way that experiments with the relations among those concepts and claims and makes them differently productive.

In other words, according to Muckelbauer, Foucault does not seem to be interested in readers systematizing his work, putting all of his concepts and claims in order and, thus, getting his work right. He desires that his work be used to create new questions, new connections. After all, Foucault, like his philosophical forefather Nietzsche, is primarily invested in challenging perceived norms and values. How better to get at those norms and values, the products of our intellects, than by using concepts as “scaffolding and toy” (“Truth and Lies” 895; sec. 2), playing with them according to whatever conditions are created by and in this experience that Nietzsche calls “the intuitive”? Nietzsche states, “There exists no word for these intuitions; when man sees them he grows dumb, or else he speaks only in forbidden metaphors and in unheard-of combinations of concepts. He does this so that by shattering and mocking the old conceptual barriers he may at least correspond creatively to the impression of the powerful present intuition”

("Truth and Lies" 1178; sec. 2).¹⁴ What would it mean to respond in such a way to Nietzsche's work, especially given that his has become, with the exception of Aristotle's, arguably the most important to our [postmodern] understanding of rhetoric—to the contours of the field, to the concepts and the practices that constitute it, including modern argument?

In response to his call, in the coming chapters, I will move away from a strict or "correct" reading of Nietzsche's work and will throw a number of concepts and claims into what may seem to be strange, perhaps at times chaotic, connections. But, to get at inspiration through the intuitive, I will have to break with traditional forms, traditional readings, traditional moves (though all three will emerge in the work). I begin (again), then, by showing that, despite readings of Nietzsche as the creator of a philosophy and a rhetoric for the hyper-autonomous self, Nietzsche's work was deeply interested, invested, and constituted in connection, or what he calls "immersion"—not immersion in the self (which is the human, all-too-human tendency that he points to in the opening of *Genealogy*, quoted above) but immersion in reality. Thus, Nietzsche's work is not about the autonomy of the individual so much as it is about the erasure of the individual and what that erasure makes possible.