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Nuanced excesses.

Fullness of life and illness in Nietzsche's aesthetics

Abstract

The aim of our paper is to question the problem of artistic creation as a transfiguration of suffering. We will point out that health is always a state to be looked at with the eyes of a convalescent, and how in particular there can be no artistic creation that is not accompanied by a condition of suffering. Our interpretive key will be the faculty of perceiving nuances, a topic that often appears in Nietzsche's later writings, and the relationship between the nuance and the affirmative power of art. Finally, we will consider whether the taste for nuance is not itself a sign of a profoundly suffering nature, aristocratically devoted to detachment from all that is grossly general.

Keywords

Nietzsche, Philosophy of art, Nuance

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Among the prolific Nietzschean conceptual forge, the polarity health/illness stands out in terms of continuity and prominence, along with the masks behind which it usually hides: from the problem of *décadence* to the full affirmation of *amor fati* (and on to the depiction of beauty: *NL*¹ 1870: 7[27]), Nietzsche brings reality under the critical scrutiny of the force it is capable to express, and of the effect it has on life itself. The shift in emphasis from the nature of force (as essence) to its manifestation according to different degrees of health is evidence of the primarily aesthetic aspect of Nietzschean philosophy. The same critique Nietzsche makes of classical metaphysics has, moreover, one of its deepest motivations here: to observe how a force manifests itself, whether what it expresses is flourishing or waning, means to realise that the truth of philosophy and religion cannot be a mere object of contemplation, but is at best an aggregate of distinct forces and instincts – if not a fiction.

This issue in Nietzsche's thought has been seen as a product of the positivist historical context of his time, and has led several commentators to misinterpret Nietzschean philosophy as a peculiar form of biologism (Richardson 2004; Álvarez González 2012). In his essay on the topic, Gregory Moore accurately exposes Nietzsche's rather free and sometimes histrionic use of biological metaphors, not least to refute that line of interpretation that, especially between the two World Wars, has slavishly attached a rigidly biologicistic view to Nietzsche's thought (Moore 2002). Such a trend was all the more common in the days when Heidegger gave his famous lectures on Nietzsche and that provoked his justified peeve (cf. Nietzsche's "alleged biologism" in Heidegger 1994); nevertheless, we believe like Moore that at least the reference to the world of living organisms – at times even *contra* Heidegger – should be taken seriously, and that the logical-argumentative soundness of the problem of artistic creativity in Nietzsche should be verified in relation to the degree of health and illness expressed. To do so, we will focus on a fundamental perspective through which this polarity is articulated: a perspective the concept of nuance provides us with. This will lead us to address in one case the health/disease polarity in an aesthetic key as a polarity between finesse and generalness (*NL* 1886: 7[7]), and in the other between levity and subtlety, which in Nietzsche's intention should

¹ Nietzsche's works are indicated with the abbreviations used by "Nietzsche-Studien" (<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/nietzstu-2018-0026/html>).

correspond to that capacity to be superficial – out of profundity (FW: Intr., § 4).

In both cases, the impossibility to conceive these two aspects as separate is nonetheless reaffirmed, to the extent that it is precisely in art that their connection is given as inextricably co-implicated; artistic creation as a matter of fact could happen to coincide with that point where the utmost of suffering is transfigured into the utmost of vital abundance, meaning that art is strictly speaking a form of suffering: through superabundance or impoverishment of life (FW: § 370).

In a recent work, Paul Valadier documents the appearances of the theme of nuance in Nietzsche, underscoring its affinity with the methodological exercise of distinction and in-depth excavation (cf. Valadier 2022). Focusing mainly on the *Genealogy of morality*, he also emphasises its connection to the aristocratic nature, albeit leaving its profoundly aesthetic character unexplored. Although Valadier deserves credit for having been the first to highlight this fundamental aspect of Nietzsche's thought, we note that his choice to focus on one text in particular (Valadier 2022: 139) may have hindered a thorough appreciation of the theoretical scope of this concept. This does not imply that Valadier was unaware of it, since his argument is clearly pointing in a more fundamental direction: for instance, when he states quite sharply that nobility is not to be understood as a historical category, because of its bond to will to power, and as such it "is characterised by the *Pathos der Distanz*, the sense of distance, distinction and singularity; it does not seek to blend in, to align itself, to become banal" (Valadier 2022: 144). Nevertheless, an assessment of this realisation through an in-depth discussion of Nietzsche's thought is left hanging. Let us therefore try to fill this gap.

1. *The perception of nuances as related to the problem of suffering*

"Nietzsche was probably the first thinker to take the distinction between health and disease as definitive of what is at stake in the artistic enterprise" (Scruton 2014: 240). We believe that to better understand the scope of this connection, it is necessary to investigate just as systematically the close correlation of the polarity between health and disease with the ability to perceive the nuances. There are several occurrences of this expression in Nietzsche's oeuvre, the majority of which, as we shall see, come with aesthetic or artistic considerations. But what does it mean to

be able to perceive nuances? On a fundamental level, to perceive nuances, or undertones, amounts to having the ability to perceive the subtleties of a condition, an event, an action, a work, i.e. the details and facets that are usually overlooked but that are nevertheless aesthetically necessary (*JGB*: § 31; *NL* 1880: 6[193]; *NL* 1885: 2[79]; *NL* 1886: 7[7]; *EH: Fall*, § 4). The perception of nuances belongs to the spectrum of refinement and suspicion; it “constitutes the best profit in life” insofar as it opposes the taste for the absolute and is an antidote against any extreme attitude of veneration or radical contempt (*JGB*: § 31).

This ability is the result of an experience, not a biological inheritance or an a priori faculty. Specifically, it is the effect of a profound impoverishment of the vital condition, and is therefore a symptom of *décadence*. There is indeed an element of “psychological morbidity” in the rejection of whatever is still unpolished and coarse, in the enjoyment of every facet of the form (*EH: klug*, § 5); however, rather than manifesting the state of illness, this morbidity that accompanies the perception of nuances is the sign of the incipient healing process, and is thus profoundly linked to the artistic nature (cf. Cherlonneix 2002), as is moreover suggested by the same examples Nietzsche provides in his illustration thereof, from Wagner to Baudelaire. In addition, morbidity enjoys a special status that could place it beyond the polarity health/illness, as we will argue in a later paragraph. Being able to grasp the nuances is in a certain sense a legacy, the very mark in one’s experience that a distinct maturity of feeling has been attained due to a far-reaching state of suffering. The origin of this faculty therefore lies in the period of convalescence from illness and is like an indelible scar that brands the impossibility of returning to a prior condition.

“Painlessness, or pleasure, does not prove health – and *pain is not evidence* against health (but only a strong stimulus)” (*NL* 1881: 11[116]), sounds an eloquent posthumous fragment; and if it is the case, as Christopher Janaway suggests, that suffering in Nietzsche has no normative function in itself and therefore cannot be understood as a disvalue (Janaway 2017: 164-5), illness bequeaths us a trained receptivity that, in reminding us of its origin, casts already a bridge that leads us beyond this state. Knowing how to perceive nuances becomes all the more crucial to turn suffering into something meaningful according to its place in one’s life (Janaway 2017: 165). As a result, being able to discern the nuances might well be a first step towards the transfiguration of suffering, and stands as a touchstone for the “aesthetic justification of existence” (a claim that Nietzsche never really forsook: Came 2006: 41).

Nietzsche's emphasis on the issue of convalescence, and the meaning of staring down from the perspective of the sick to healthier concepts and values (*EH: weise*, § 1), when observed through the notion of nuance, finds in our opinion further clarification. Those who have experienced grief and have trained their eye through torment have acquired a sharpened insight into life that refracts on everything around them. This empowers them to sense in advance the lies of those preachers of morality who, in their promises of healing and redemption, only further incite their resentment towards the world, to the point of sanctifying the very causes of the disease by preventing mankind from embarking on the path through which alone healing could pass (Huddleston 2017: 160; cf. Faustino 2017). Marta Faustino also sensed that "healing mankind, in a Nietzschean sense, equates to ridding it of the need for therapy" (Faustino 2017: 101), since moralising suffering – and consequently healing – prevents us from fully grasping the transformative potential embedded in pain (also cf. Ridley 2007: 78). Hence, one should not seek to eliminate suffering or soften its effects by encouraging compassion (*FW: § 338*), because only then can taste achieve that degree of refinement and subtlety which also makes the revaluation of values possible (cf. Reginster 2008: 148-201). The perception of nuances likewise becomes the best virtue of the "moral psychologist": here it would offer the key to acquiring a different kind of understanding, to eventually "feel differently" (*M: § 103*; cf. Janaway 2008: 127), in the vein of the French moralists so much admired by Nietzsche especially for this reason (cf. Kruse 2003: 255-62). It is precisely with this subtle perceptive ability that one is able to spot the deception of all that claims to stand as an absolute, from great morals to systems of thought, which are now met with the shadow of suspicion.

In short, we might say that the faculty of perceiving nuances is like a sieve: the coarseness of existence is sifted out thanks to the receptivity one has acquired following an experience of illness, just as gold only emerges from the earth after passing through the firm grid of the sieve. We understand as a consequence how rare are the individuals who have mastered this faculty, and who have thus been able to fortify themselves in virtue of what others would have probably been killed by (*GD: Sprüche*, § 8); so much so that it would be surprising to see the display of such a refined gaze in a multitude, as it happened to Nietzsche at a concert in Turin: "Pubblico *sceltissimo*, truthfully: I have never had the feeling that nuances were understood to such an extent" (letter to Heinrich Köselitz, 02/12/1888).

Admittedly, there is a risk: this might lead to believe that the faculty of perceiving nuances conceals some kind of esoteric doctrine of taste, and it is hard to say with any certainty whether Nietzsche would avert similar doubts. Due to its threshold character, its transfiguration of reality, and the rarity of those exceptional beings who share its secret, a kind of esotericism of nuance seems to occur, and suffering would be the *kykeon* for the initiation into this Eleusinian mystery. It goes without saying that such a worldview would immediately be reflected in the ideal order that society should take. According to Keith Ansell-Pearson, in Nietzsche we may read about the figure of an “artist-tyrant”, resembling the Machiavellian prince, capable of shaping humanity according to his own taste (cf. Ansell-Pearson 1996: 200-24), while Thomas Hurka explicitly claims that “Nietzsche is famously antiegalitarian, favouring an aristocratic society and a strict ‘order of rank’ among individuals [...] the value in a society depends [...] on the excellence of its few most perfect members” (Hurka 2007: 17-8); and although approaching the topic from another angle, even the cautious Bernard Reginster would seem to share this attitude (cf. Reginster 2008: 263-6). However, we cannot espouse such a rigidly elitist view because Nietzsche’s elitism would lack the necessary condition of any cult: the doctrine that bestows an access to a higher truth. Even if we admit that Nietzsche’s theory of art is marked by the exaltation of the exceptional and thereby of those very few who have a special perceptiveness, this does not imply that we can establish a hierarchy between those who succeed in transforming their suffering into a sharp temperament and those who instead indulge in bamboozlement with the masses. To have – and to cultivate – a particular “aesthetic conscience”² is, if anything, the sign of an unremitting involvement with art, which is not precluded in principle to anyone, provided they are able to recognise in it the display of a will to power as pure affirmation. To this end, we are in tune with Matthew Rampley when he claims that “the significance of works of art lies less in the effect they have on the spectator, reader or listener *qua* static, finished totalities, than in their shaping of human affectivity as dynamic creations or achievements of the artist”, inasmuch as in Nietzsche we can detect a change of paradigm from the traditional aesthetics (Kantian and Schopenhauerian above all) that leads “from the notion of art as a collection of objects, ready-made and completed [...] towards a conception of art as an event or ‘occurrence’” (Rampley 1993: 277). Art is first and foremost a stimulant

² Exquisite Nietzschean expression (*MA*: II, *VM* § 133; letter to Rohde, 14/06/1874).

for the will, and by its very nature is universally experienceable, as it appeals primarily to desire and the sphere of instinctual forces; it is only a question of having the strength to surrender to the inebriation caused by this stimulant, which is sometimes a vehicle for painful passions. A faculty tempered by suffering, such as the faculty of perceiving nuances, allows in this sense a greater affinity to the world of art and facilitates the subject's "attunement" (cf. Denham 2014) with the aesthetic object.

Yet, it is problematic to establish a hierarchy between individuals based on aesthetic grounds for a logically compelling reason as well. Neither a first principle of a higher nature that would assign a place to entities according to their degree of participation, nor a *fundamentum veritatis* that would justify the primacy of substances can be found in Nietzsche; if anything, it is only the will to power that acts as the epicentre of Nietzsche's "metaphysics", a metaphysics which an unconventional but meticulous reader of Nietzsche such as Deleuze advocates it should be deprived of its essentialist character (cf. Deleuze 1983). Assuming that "nihilism [is] the presupposition of all metaphysics, and not the expression of a metaphysics in particular" (Deleuze 1983: 40), if Nietzsche were to assign a transcendent value to beings, then he would fall into the very same nihilism of metaphysics he sought to deconstruct. The question of hierarchy in Nietzsche should thus be addressed by seeing it as the differential of the quantity of the forces in a relation. It is certainly possible to infer a hierarchical vision of the world from Nietzsche, but on balance the conditions necessary to unreservedly attribute such a vision to Nietzsche himself appear to be lacking: due to the presence of statements in outright contradiction with one another, the absence of a metaphysical foundation of analogical nature and the overall lack of a theoretical project aligned accordingly (apart from the brief mention of a desire to establish a hierarchy: *NL* 1887: 7[6]).

As far as our point of discussion is concerned, it is fair to say that those who are able to grasp the nuances of reality distinguish themselves from those who are not by a different way of relating to the object of art. Hence, the difference is one of degree, rather than of nature; and only in this respect is perceiving the nuances for the few, in the same way that the "another kind of art" prefigured by Nietzsche in the preface to the second edition of the *Gay science* ought to be.

The need for a new art specifically conceived to glorify *amor fati* even in its most terrible manifestations, which qualifies what is necessary to be seen as beautiful (*FW*: § 276), is inextricably tied to the fate of those very few who can bear the burden, being already sharpened by suffering.

One comes out of such abysses, from such severe illness, even from the illness of heavy suspicion, *new-born*, new-skinned, more ticklish, more malicious, with a finer taste for joy, with a more delicate tongue for all good things, with merrier senses, with a second more dangerous innocence in joy, more childlike as well and a hundred times more refined than one had ever been before. (FW: Intr., § 4)

It is the convalescent who speaks. The refinement in taste typical of those who savour illness and health at the same time defines the canons by which the work of art of the future shall unfold. The ascent from the abyss is itself evidence of the need for a different form of art: “If we convalescents still need an art, it is *another kind* of art – a mocking, light, fleeting, divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art, which flares like a bright flame into a cloudless sky! And above all: an art for artists, only for artists!” (FW: Intr., § 4) When it comes to such a new art, we must turn once again to the Greeks for a fundamental reason: for they were the true worshippers of forms, bequeathing us a heritage of tragic wisdom to draw upon (cf. GT: *Selbstkritik*; also cf. Woodruff 2020). “Are we not precisely in this – Greeks? Worshippers of forms, sounds, words? And therefore – artists?” (FW: Intr., § 4). For only those who love form, sound and word *per se* can call themselves artists – a delight, indeed, that they share solely with those obsessed with the nuances of these three worlds.

2. *Refinement and morbidity: a postcard from Paris*

Two individuals have been explicitly acknowledged by Nietzsche as living under the influence of a profound taste for nuance (if we leave aside a remark to his friend Franz Overbeck³ that is rather a display of common sensitivity): himself – enough to bemoan it: “Alas, I am a nuance” (EH: *Fall*, § 4) – and the greatest passion of his life (cf. Mann in Borchmeyer 2008), Richard Wagner. Two natures belonging to the same artistic and philosophical constellation, whose affinity reaches as far as a mutual feeling on the need to give new spiritual coordinates to their time, regardless of the fact that Wagner famously took another path to get there. A refined perceptiveness had to be part of this celestial accord, though mediated by a third factor: the city of Paris. Indeed, it appears that there is an elective affinity between the dimension of nuance and the French spirit,

³ “You interweave your thoughts so artfully, I would almost say cunningly, as the person of nuances that you are” (letter to Franz Overbeck, 25/03/1886).

or better still, the spirit of 19th century Paris, which Nietzsche could almost breathe in, as a seasoned connoisseur of the French literature — and music — of the time. Furthermore, as a number of sentences reveal, the one between Wagner and Paris was for Nietzsche an almost effortless combination (*Fall*: § 5; *GD: Deutschen*, § 4; *NL* 1885: 37[15], 38[5]; *NL* 1888: 15[6]). It is intriguing to observe how in the aforementioned letter to Köselitz from Turin, an indispensable source for any discussion of the theme of nuance in Nietzsche, there is perhaps the clearest equation between Paris and the taste for subtlety, as if in Nietzsche's mind the evocation of the former through the suggestions of the latter was automatic. In *Beyond good and evil* Nietzsche insists on the diffusion of Wagnerism in France as an emblematic case of the aesthetic tendency of modernity (*JGB*: §§ 254-6), while in *Ecce Homo* we even read that Wagner's actual spiritual homeland is Paris: "An *artist* has no other home in Europe but Paris. The *délicatesse* in all five artistic senses, that Wagner's art presupposes, the fingers for nuances, the psychological morbidity, can only be found in Paris" (*EH: klug*, § 5) — an excerpt that Nietzsche would later copy with a significant addendum: "Wagner [belongs to] the *sick* Paris" (letter to Ferdinand Avenarius, 10/12/1888). Nietzsche is somewhat disgruntled by this Parisian "morbidity"⁴, a term we have already encountered, and which to our eyes encapsulates perfectly the sense of the oscillation between health and illness in art, Paris being the epiphenomenon of it. As though pointing to being overwhelmed by your own overexcitability, like constantly having your nerves on edge.

Nietzsche is adamant when ascribing the morbid to a sort of borderline condition of illness, meaning that morbidity is a state that marks the point of no return. The morbid is like an incurable patient; consequently, morbidity is beyond the scope of disease. "A typically morbid being cannot become healthy, and even less can it heal itself; for a typically healthy person, on the contrary, being ill can even be an energetic *stimulant* to life, to more life" (*EH: weise*, § 2). We do not know whether Nietzsche suffered from his own sentence when he fell definitively into the labyrinth of his illness, to echo the title of a landmark work by Pia Daniela Volz; we can nonetheless allege that Wagner's sensitivity thrives in Paris because the Parisians' sensitivity reveals itself above all in their morbidity, which turns them into "fanatic[s] of expression" (*JGB*: § 256).

⁴ On Nietzsche's use of this notion, which he derived from Paul Bourget, cf. Campioni 2009: 93-5.

And Wagner composes as a matter of fact in a morbid manner, inasmuch as he commits to attributing an image to each note, in leaving nothing undone in the organisation of the details of the melody, in the search for the most accomplished representation that will render the psychological complexity of his characters. Basically, Wagner works on the infinitely small, and in this, according to Nietzsche, he is an unsurpassed master (cf. *CW: bewundere*). Those who are sensitive to nuances should by definition be able to savour precisely the infinitely small, which usually escapes the unrefined senses; but what happens if the infinitely small, as supposedly happens with Wagner in the eyes of Nietzsche, becomes the exclusive element of aesthetic enjoyment? Then we become *décadents* (*Fall*: § 5; *EH: klug*, § 5). Only in this sense can we perhaps understand Nietzsche's insistence on the alleged Parisian-Wagnerian morbidity. So that the morbid would be the one who has developed his faculty of perceiving nuances to excess, pushing it to the limit of incurability.

2.1. *A physiological take on the artistic form*

We have underlined the recurrence of the quote from *Ecce Homo* in the letter to Avenarius for the additional element Nietzsche adds to it: *kranken*, to denote the Paris to which Wagner would belong. This suggests that for Nietzsche there is a Paris that is far from sick. Paragraph 254 of *Beyond good and evil* is the most forthright witness to this, although the breadth of this acknowledgement is much more detailed (cf. Campioni 2009). If France comes to represent both the country of refinement and its ever-possible descent into a morbid condition, it is because it embodies the synthesis of north and south (*JGB*: § 254). North and south, in Nietzsche's spiritual cartography, symbolize the two geographical extremes wherein taste finds his coordinates: heaviness and sophistication against lightness and clarity. Nietzsche's France displays the right balance of instincts, and no other place in Europe would appear to be as receptive to art. That is also why Nietzsche is so fond of the music of Bizet, inasmuch as Bizet's music stands as the emblematic taste of good Europeans: "[P]eople, who love the South in the North and the North in the South, people who have integrated the best of both worlds and succeeded in creating a synthesis of it" (Prange 2013: 209). This receptivity, however, entails the danger of looking too long into the abyss, so much so that one eventually ends up engulfed by it with no chance of recovery. There is undoubtedly, as we have seen, a certain element of

morbidity in those who have refined their taste to such a degree that now they are able to appreciate the nuances, but the rationale resides in the particular status enjoyed by this peculiar condition: entangled in illness to the point of being its supreme degree, and by extension already beyond it. And so “morbid” can even qualify the isolation one must undergo in order to heal, proving the singularity of this Nietzschean conceptual device (MA: I, Intr., § 4; Faustino 2017: 101).

In conformity with the aesthetic orientation of his later writings, Nietzsche unravels the *ubi consistam* of the affinity between the dimension of nuances and Paris through the lens of physiology. Before we move on with our discussion, be it said that, however legitimate it may be to approach the concept of nuance from a non-aesthetic perspective, we hold that its most poignant connotation lies in that vast unfinished fresco on the “physiology of art” whose only fragments remain, but the *raison d’être* of which transcends the chronological aspects of its writing. It is also noteworthy with regard to the analysis of aesthetic experience (cf. Rampley 1993: 275-9). If, according to the Nietzsche of the *Birth of tragedy*, art is the sovereign form of creating metaphors, which science itself takes as a model to imitate when creating its own, then art should be the spring where the water of life impulse still flows pure. We are now a long way from these intentions, but when Nietzsche icastically sums up the peculiarity of artistic creation as “animal vigour” (NL 1887: 9[102]) he still reveals a consistency that reflects a clear overarching stance. Moreover, only by following this cue we do understand to what extent Nietzsche considers the faculty of perceiving nuances to be fundamental, so much so that it almost becomes a *shibboleth* for aristocratic morality and free spirits (JGB: §§ 28, 262-3; NL 1887: 9[139]).

Nietzsche therefore measures the cultural exceptionalism of Paris with the yardstick of physiology. For Nietzsche, Parisian morbidity is indicative of an impatience with everything that is plain, canonical, universal; and this is precisely the distinctive feature of modernity. And which city represents modernity better than Paris, the “capital of the 19th century”? The main discrepancy between the taste of our modern age and that of antiquity lies in the different approach to the aesthetic object, and this difference is dictated by physiological reasons of intolerance and disgust with life that make us live constantly on the ridge of illness – to the point of becoming morbid, if the vortex of suffering gains the upper hand. Whereas the Greeks transfigured suffering in joy, we prefer to indulge in it.

So why allow the taste for nuances, a transient phenomenon like the era it belongs to, into the “new art”? Is it not a revaluation of all values that does not dispose of what carries within its bosom the stigma of *décadence* a chimera? What is the point of a “critique of modernity” (*GD: Streifzüge*, § 39) and of the affliction it has brought upon our instincts, if we preserve its most dangerous legacy, which harbours the seeds of degeneration into the pathological?

We believe two answers are possible. First, we should always bear in mind that “health and disease are not essentially different”, meaning that it is unreasonable to infer from them two categories by means of which we can provide a classification of the phenomena, including aesthetic ones. “There are only differences of degree between these two modes of existence: the exaggeration, the disproportion, the inharmony of the normal phenomena constitute the pathological state” (*NL* 1888: 14[65]). And we should always bear it in mind especially when we read what Nietzsche tells us about Wagner, all the more so since Nietzsche himself apparently ignores it. The peremptory manner in which Wagner is depicted as the representative *par excellence* of all that is poisonous and unhealthy in modernity, as, for example, we see in paragraph 5 of *The case of Wagner*, seems to dovetail with an unappealable condemnation of all the characteristics of this age of illness. We can either dismiss such idiosyncrasies as the contradictions of a fragmentary and deliberately unstructured thought such as Nietzsche’s, or we can take these definitions as what they are, namely aesthetic concepts. In other words, we must keep our focus on the transfiguration of reality that only art can perform, and which is reflected through these concepts. In this way, we can also have an insight into the fundamental characteristics of the works of the time and, instead of borrowing from Nietzsche’s judgements fodder for our own partisan-ships, capture in modernity the attributes expressed in its features (which were well spotted by Nietzsche). In other words, we should be less interested in the condemnation or acquittal of an era, and more in what lies in modernity behind its peculiar traits. And if one really wishes to engage in an exegesis of Nietzsche’s stance, be at least warned of the affinities between his aesthetics and modernity, which only on the surface is decried (cf. Borchmeyer 2008). Sure enough, trying to untangle these theoretical junctures in Nietzsche’s philosophy, we might almost agree with Roberto Calasso when he says that Nietzsche somehow appeared to be lacking a certain Parisian unscrupulousness (Calasso 2010: 339).

The second answer we want to give is more of a corollary of the first one. By assuming the Nietzschean polarity between health and illness as

a conceptual polarity that is predominantly aesthetic at its core, we realise why the new art could not disregard any of the traits of modern art. For a start, because a new art must embrace them in order to surpass them, according to an intrinsic formal principle of artistic creation that is the contest with the predecessors – an issue also addressed by Nietzsche in a poignant early writing, *Homer's contest*. And secondly, because of the necessity by which artistic forms sometimes cannot but manifest themselves. It is likely that Nietzsche was influenced by a widespread tendency to compare the world of artistic forms to that of biological species (cf. Moore 2002: 85-111), although the reasons for such similarities go far beyond the claustrophobic realm of biology; nonetheless, in a sentence that almost winks at the Hegelian spirit's journey towards the end of classical art, Nietzsche illustrates how some symptomatic signs of illness cannot help but occur when a style is mature: "If one follows the history of an art [...] one realises that the bow must break and that the so-called inorganic composition, draped and masked with the most wonderful means of expression [...] was once a necessity and almost a *blessing*" (MA: II, VM § 131).

In any case, it would be misleading to narrowly understand Nietzschean interpretative categories as value judgements, as Roger Scruton is sometimes fond of doing by turning the tables in Wagner's favour (cf. Scruton 2014). On the same note, the fact that the audience at the Turin concert we mentioned was able to appreciate the nuances of the musical performance should not be understood as a sign of *décadence*, but rather as the indelible sign that the illness of modernity already transfigured itself into an aesthetic faculty.

2.2. *Nuance or großer Stil?*

A posthumous fragment sounds:

Our condition: prosperity makes sensitivity grow; one is afflicted by the slightest ailments; our body is better protected, our soul more ill. [...] The sensitivity and the pleasure in the nuance (the actual modernity), in that which is not general, opposes the instinct whose pleasure and strength lies in the comprehension of the typical: like the Greek taste of the best times. [...] The general case, the law, is revered and exalted; the exception [Ausnahme] is conversely set aside, the nuance swept away. (NL 1886: 7[7])

It is not by coincidence that Nietzsche often subsumes the meaning of nuance into that of *Ausnahme*, which translates the exception as opposed to the natural norm, the general, and which also stresses the exceptionality of the individual. And it is no coincidence that exceptionalism, like morbidity, is another dominant theme of the late 19th century Parisian mood. As Giuliano Campioni already pointed out, this Nietzschean conceptual web is woven by a thorough study of the works of Paul Bourget, a French writer and essayist who personally experienced the paradigm shift at the turn of the century (cf. Campioni 2009: 300-31; also cf. Calasso 2010: 333-7); via Bourget's terminology, Nietzsche brings certain literary features of Romanticism to their extreme consequences, presenting them as the physiological metaphors of an era. The most characteristic trait of modernity, which Nietzsche locates at its zenith in Wagnerian music, is thus after all a tendency towards neurosis and hysteria (Ridley 2007: 150-1) or, as we read in another blazing posthumous fragment, chaos (*NL* 1887: 9[179])⁵; the opposite of love for the clarity of the form and the rule admired in classical taste.

The polarity between health and illness resurfaces behind the mask of the physiology of art via the relationship between the organising principle of form and the destructive principle linked to chaos, hence counterposing classical taste and style to those of modernity. It would be an idle exercise to emphasise that here we are confronted with issues that the young Nietzsche concealed behind the Apollonian and the Dionysian (and from these we could go back to Hölderlin's dialectic between the organic and the aorgic); what is instead, in our opinion, of extreme interest, is Nietzsche's observation that there is an art that has completely jettisoned all universally valid organisational ideals, going so far as to fade into the extreme subtleties of the details right up to numbness. Granted, according to Nietzsche, this art that disrupts form affects the instincts like a narcotic that weakens the body, leading it to decay and, if taken in excessive doses, to exhaustion; but how can one overlook the greatest acquisition of the aesthetic conscience since the end of the grand style, namely the faculty of perceiving nuances? The collapse of every stylistic benchmark helped the aesthetic conscience to refine itself so far that it was forced to

⁵ "In a certain sense, the 19th century also aspired to *everything that Goethe achieved for himself*: a universality of understanding, of approving, of being accepted; a bold realism, a reverence for the facts — how is it that the overall result is not Goethe, but a chaos, a nihilism, an unsuccessfulness, which continually brings us back to the 18th century?"

find new parameters within itself, as it was not possible to find them outside of its own capacity for observation, i.e. outside the solitary relationship between the self and the aesthetic object. “There is indeed something to be said in favour of the exception [*Ausnahme*], assuming that it never wants to become the rule” (FW: § 76; cf. also NL 1887: 11[306]).

In the grand style (the classical style) “the exception is cast aside, the nuance obliterated”: but Heidegger is misguided when, understanding the grand style as expressive of the apex of the artistic form, he believes that grand style only can thus oppose nihilism (Heidegger 1994: 130-2), falling in our opinion into the same biologicistic trap he himself accurately exposed. Conversely, a more accurate investigation of the topic is the one conducted by Julian Young. Young argues that when Nietzsche compares the art of the grand style to modern art according to the opposing principles of form and chaos, he actually overlaps different layers of his conception of Romanticism, confusing a formal-stylistic interpretation of the period with a purely psychological one (cf. Young 1992: 141-7). Because of this, we may find in Nietzsche scornful judgements on modern art conducted according to the criteria of the physiology of art (as we have seen), and concurrently some praises for artists of the Baroque period, which is on the other hand historically attacked for having introduced certain stylistic features, that nowadays we find in modern art even too much (cf. MA: II, VM § 144). In a nutshell, even assuming only one layer of interpretation, e.g. the layer of the physiology of art, the interpretation of Nietzsche looks like a simple matter of personal taste, and therefore “a baseless preference for one form” (Young 1992: 147) over another. Still, perhaps Young is too eager to burden Nietzsche with a drastically dismissive judgement of Christian art just because it would be coherently “life-denying” (Young 1992: 143); after all, Young himself admits that “[t]here is [...] a psychological condition that is uniquely identifiable as ‘the aesthetic state’, a state that is common to the creator of art and the ‘genuine’ spectator” (Young 1992: 120), since “Nietzsche [...] is concerned, centrally, not with the causes but rather the *effects* of art. His whole conception of the good and bad in art is focused on the question of effects: the good is conceived as that which *stimulates*, acts as a *tonic*” (Young 1992: 145). But how could anyone reasonably claim that the *Vespro della Beata Vergine* by Monteverdi saps the senses and weakens the instinct? Why could a Titian *Annunciation* not “act as a tonic” as well and stimulate the aesthetic state in both the “creator of art” and the “genuine spectator”?

Effect is in Nietzsche's artistic conception the instrument that measures the seismic waves of stimulation of the aesthetic state, but this effect cannot simply be the "elementary effect" caused by a work of art. As a matter of fact, elementary effects are not considered in any account that wishes to pose as crucial to art, considering that they rather pertain to "inartistic natures": "The true zealots of an artistic faction are those completely inartistic natures who have not even delved into the elements of art theory and art skill, but who are gripped most powerfully by all the *elementary* effects of an art. For them there is no aesthetic conscience – and therefore nothing that could restrain them from fanaticism" (*MA*: II, *VM* § 133). Let us remember the Nietzschean caveat: "An art for artists, only for artists!" (*FW*: Intr., § 4); in light of what we have seen so far, it is clear that Nietzsche did not believe that art should be judged on the basis of its effect on the masses. What is deplorable then is not modern art, but the tendency of much modern art to exclusively seek the effect on the masses at all costs, i.e. the elementary effect – thus foreshadowing the darkness of the next century, in which the masses were to become the protagonists. We understand in this fashion, in line with what we have previously said, the difference between those who are able to perceive nuances and those who are not.

We therefore suggest extending this conception of effects in Nietzsche also to that exquisitely modern and namely "romantic" legacy that is the object of our discussion, the faculty of perceiving nuances. It is indeed a romantic legacy, insofar as it is a faculty that could not have arisen if aesthetic judgement had been limited to grand style. In this sense, the Romantic form is the subtlest artistic form, so that it is deeply intertwined with the faculty of perceiving nuances. It is an art brimming with nuances in itself, as we have seen; but the faculty of perceiving nuances, instead of being ascribed to a moment of degeneration of instincts imputable to modernity, becomes a sort of catalyst that allows us to participate with our aesthetic conscience in the transfiguration of reality brought about by art, with all the characters it presents to us, even the most subtle ones. Better still, only the faculty of perceiving nuances can make us sufficiently shrewd to reject the coarseness of elementary effects, to which we would otherwise be enslaved; so that the path to the understanding of that "art only for artists" that is based on the worship of form, sound and word *per se* can finally be pursued. The worship of form, sound and word *per se* implies that the true aesthetic experience consists perhaps in enjoying the rendering of a hand in van Dyck or a legato in Chopin, rather than the "message" or the context of the artwork.

If the same motif is not treated a hundred times by different masters, the public will not experience more than the fascination for the content; but in the end it will grasp and enjoy even the nuances, the delicate, new inventions in the treatment of this motif, if it has long known the motif from numerous adaptations and no longer feels any attraction of novelty, of excitement. (*MA I*: § 167)

In other words, in enjoying what masks suffering behind the effort of creation. Superficial – out of profundity.

Mindful that artists are obviously not only the actual creators, but also those who participate in creation: “It is impossible for the Dionysian man not to grasp any suggestion, he overlooks no sign of affect, he has the highest degree of understanding and guessing instinct, just as he possesses the highest degree of art of communication. He blends into every skin, into every affect: he is constantly transformed” (*GD: Streifzüge*, § 10). Rather than turning human nature morbid, art should be a stimulant to create new art; for there could be no art if one were annihilated by the pain of existence. Hence, art must counter excess with what *prima facie* looks like an opposite excess: it must induce inebriation (*Rausch*). But what kind of inebriation?

3. Conclusion. *The nuances of excess*

“The ‘masses’ have never had any taste in art for three good things: for nobility, for logic and for beauty – *pulchrum est paucorum hominum*” (*NL* 1885: 41[2], 6). So, can the masses be completely incapable of both the taste for nuance and the taste for the attributes that, according to Nietzsche, are most emblematic of the age of grand style? Or perhaps, we are again faced with a flawed dilemma, meaning that these are not two contradictory theses, because what is always at stake in Nietzsche is rather how we experience the aesthetic object. To conclude our work, it only remains for us to see to what extent the perception of nuances is inextricably linked to the matter of inebriation. Even in the aforementioned work by Valadier, the fact that whoever perceives the nuances of an artwork grows in power goes unnoticed; yet, it is an issue of utmost importance, for It awakens an inner feeling of fullness that is the same as that experienced by the artist when creating.

– : the effect of works of art is the *stimulation of the art-creating state*, the inebriation....

– : the essence of art remains its *fulfilment* of existence, its achievement of perfection and abundance.

Art is essentially *affirmation, blessing, deification of existence*...

– : what does a *pessimistic art* mean?... Is this not a *contradictio*? — Yes.

Schopenhauer is wrong when he places certain works of art in the service of pessimism. Tragedy does *not* teach “resignation”....

– : to depict terrible and problematic things is itself an instinct of power and glory in the artist: he does not fear them.... (NL 1888: 14[47])

Is a pessimistic art, a pessimism in art possible, Nietzsche asks? No, since art would, if anything, be its transfiguration. Art is pure affirmation; at a fundamental level, art is an expression of the artist’s will to power, which pours its own will to affirmation into the work (Deleuze 1983: 117). But both the artist, in order to assert himself in the work, and the spectator, in order to be able to perceive the same experience, ought to savour profundity and grasp all degrees of distinction. Also, they must be able to distance themselves from their selves, or they would succumb to their own overabundance (cf. Menke 2010: 37-8). In other words, they must be able to perceive all the nuances: “All distinct things, all nuances, insofar as they recall the extreme increases in force that inebriation produces, awaken retroactively this feeling of inebriation” (NL 1888: 14[47]; cf. also GD: *Streifzüge*, § 8; NL 1887: 9[102]).

It is as if the artist awakens an arcane power every time he manages to impose a form on the material, and this power magnifies the viewer as he delves into the details of the form and experiences them. The feeling of inebriation (for the different meanings of inebriation, cf. Young 1992: 125-39; Menke 2010: 34-9) sparks excess and fullness of life, otherwise referred to as perfection by Nietzsche: “Perfection [*Vollkommenheit*, which literally translates fullness]: that is the exceptional expansion of the feeling of power [*Machtgefühl*], the abundance, the inevitable exuberance beyond all bounds” that the artist is able to inspire not on the basis of the significance the work is supposed to convey, but through the treatment of materials and the rendering of details, even the potentially repellent ones: “In what sense can even the ugly have this strength? When it communicates something of the triumphant energy of the artist who has become master of this ugliness and dreadfulness; or when it silently inspires the desire for cruelty in us” (NL 1887: 9[102]). For the record, this last fragment nips in the bud any discourse about Nietzsche’s alleged condemnation of Christian art – as well as being valid in a certain sense against Nietzsche himself, when he pretends to forget this fundamental law of artistic formativity by overlapping the layers of his interpretation.

So, at stake is the potential of the artwork to awaken in those who experience it those same sensations of inebriation that the artist feels when creating it. However, Heidegger is not wrong to point out that such a position could lead to confusion about the nature of the work created, meaning that it might not even be a work of art but, for example, a hand-craft production tool. Consequently, it would not be difficult to argue that the reception of the work does not affect in the least the problem of its creation (Heidegger 1994: 124). This is indeed an aporia of the aesthetic state of inebriation. Again, we agree with Heidegger when he contends that its resolution would lie in moving from an enquiry into the essence of creation to an enquiry into the essence of the artwork, a question that is certainly diriment for the philosophy of art (notably that of Heidegger), but clearly not for Nietzsche. This is to a certain extent recognised, though somewhat polemically, by Heidegger (Heidegger 1994: 124), but one can hardly fail to notice his repeated attempts to make the transition from the essence of creation to the essence of the artwork anyway, when he examines inebriation via an argument about the problem of form (though he assesses correctly that for Nietzsche artistic inebriation has nothing to do with chaos or ecstasy, but rather with form and structure: Heidegger 1994: 124-6). It is more accurate, in our opinion, to conclude that Nietzsche himself does not incur in this aporia, because the key of the perception of nuances that he provides us with is perfectly capable of dissolving it, insofar as it eliminates the need for a posteriori distinction of the works, the distinction itself being the requisite for the work to succeed. Hence, distinction comes even before the form analysed thoroughly by Heidegger, since form would not even be conceivable by the artist without that same faculty.

This shows how the aesthetic faculty of perceiving nuances can serve the condition of the aesthetic state of inebriation. A state of profound suffering, exactly like the torment endured by the person who begins to feel the great nausea. But the sickness of the *artist* Zarathustra erupts as we know in the radical affirmation of existence, that “yes to life” in all its manifestations which is also the bedrock of every artist’s work. It is then necessary to understand the meaning of suffering and illness as “the way to a blessed existence” (*NL* 1888: 14[89]); only in this way can the faculty of perceiving nuances avoid sinking into the morbid. So that the suffering that has sharpened us can act aesthetically in favour of life, and not cave in to its negation.

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