

*In music the passions enjoy themselves.*  
Friedrich Nietzsche

In early 1872, the same year *The Birth of Tragedy* was published, Nietzsche delivered a series of lectures entitled “An Investigation into Rhythm and Meter.” (The lecture which interests me, “Toward a Theory of Quantified Rhythm,” appears to still be untranslated!)

Music is at the heart of Nietzsche’s effort. In a very important sense, without a musical ear, his work cannot be understood. Music is his framework. Not only that he writes in arpeggios, but that his thought is arpeggiated; to make sense or value from his work, we must hear it performed; that is, we must realize through ourselves all the properly musical moments of discord and accord in his thought, all the contradictions and harmonies which resonate not only through his critique but also through his concepts.

The moment of accord between morality and genealogy (or discord between truth and science) must be felt; they cannot be simply understood. His account of the origin of morality, for example, only seems not to be completely rational for the reason that it is perfectly and even sublimely rational; it is in fact a mathematical argument! Just as the infinite overflows reason, Nietzsche’s style, his thoughts and ideas, must be heard and felt, not only read but performed. His voice must become as a pulsation or rhythm seizing us; or else it remains, merely a contradiction, merely a static critique.

So what does it mean to say that the movement of Nietzsche’s writing is essentially or spontaneously rhythmic? I mean that he strategically opposes meter at every turn, by a free and resonant new rhythm, which affords new modes of expression. By rhythm (as opposed here to meter) I mean a pulsation which decomposes structured space, even as it generates the possibilities for whole new kinds of organizations (meters). [On this point, free rhythm is almost liberation; it lacks only an active form, a metric space to liberate. All the universe needs is to be activated; all the potentials are there, tomorrow can be grasped today through a thousand signals.]

The question of discursive movement is about the sign-signal matrix we move through, the medium of distribution between co-present signals, in short: how to allow the proper signals through, how to achieve the perfect balance of speed and slowness. Prejudice thinks in metre, and even rhyme; but sense and value speak in rhythm, in sparks and bursts of intensity, in swirling vortexes of affectivity, taking the meter apart in order to open up new (human and non-human) expressivities.

Nietzsche tactically transforms metric spaces into rhythmic spaces. Critics often tends to linger a little too long at precisely this point: whether (in whatever particular case) we are dealing with a metric space (where pulses are regularized, achieving identity through sub-division, i.e., by external modulation) or a rhythmic space (where differences are distributed through spontaneous self-organization)? But this dichotomy is confused: all spaces are metric, are spaces are rhythmic. There is only interplay between: rhythms create new meters, meters provoke new rhythmic expressivities.

The coalescence of all forms of being into a single pulse, a single urge: this is an idea of the creative, form-generating power of pure energy — the captivating power of vibration. Resonance is a signal caught in a feedforward loop, engaged in various transductions through differently-structured spaces; power is realizing this energy (these spaces) can be organized in a new way so as to allow the feedforward loops to fold back in upon themselves. Then the resonant signal can become amplified, and new feedforward mechanisms are needed to contain the flow of intensities.

An inter-related system of transducers of this kind is a composition, or an aggregate; it forms the common basis of music and mathematics, a sort of blank template. The actual composition is always a modulation of the virtual one; the virtual being the mold; the thing has virtue because it has been molded. The shaping or modulation of subjectivity is already a question of a much different order, but we recognize that the spaces are homologous: we are confronted with a mixture of metric and rhythmic spaces of potential expression and transformation.

Nietzsche's text is engaged in a long and difficult creative process of becoming music. It would be the end of philosophy as we know it; and we know he struggled to bring the day closer, to capture the future and bring us towards it. To overcome music is to become music, it is precisely not to be overcome by it, enraptured in its pleasurable aspects; it is to so thoroughly deconstruct the experience that not one shred of prejudice remains, so that the profoundest resonances and deepest sensitivities of which we are capable are exposed to light, re-activated.

The interesting twist is that we have already done this before — we have all experienced profound deaths and rebirths. We have experienced it, if nowhere else, in love. We can yet reawaken to life and light, to sound and color; daybreak is never far off. Yes, it is easier to forget, and over time it becomes harder to reactivate lost sensitivity, lost expressivity. But despair is ugly, and weakening; the eternal return is not to console us, it is to terrify us. That nothing is lost or ever can be is not necessarily a spiritually comforting idea. This is why hope and pity are really weaknesses; they are not full or powerful expressions, they still react. They are not enough, and they deceive us into thinking they are enough. Illusions begone, let's transform the world. Let our thought find new rhythms; life is waiting, a brief time of postponement between new and old songs. In this tiny intermission, let us not take pause, but unflinchingly experiment upon the future, and strategically compose our becomings without hesitation. Let us allow space and time for our ideas and words and bodies to become intense, to become molecular... to become music.