

Visualization and Embodiment of Nietzsche's Duality

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Keywords: Nietzsche's duality, Apollo, Dionysus, mind-body connection, visualization, somatization, embodiment.

Abstract: In Nietzsche's early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, published in 1872, he articulated two conflicting energies: the rational Apollonian and the emotional Dionysian. My focus of this paper lies on the critical inquiry of Nietzschean philosophy through the creative process involving somatic when sensing and embodying Nietzsche's duality. This process involves three stages of understanding and expressing a philosophical idea, they are visualization, somatization and embodiment. My aim is to share the exploration that was undertaken to address the role that the three stages play in understanding a given philosophical framework, relating comprehension on mind-body connection and using sensorial awareness to engage in a philosophical inquiry.

1. Introduction

Nietzsche's work *The Birth of Tragedy: From the Spirit of Music* was first published in 1872. In the book's third edition, reissued in 1886, he renamed it *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this version, he articulated two energies: the creedal Apollo and the intoxicating Dionysus. As both a literary researcher and a movement practitioner myself, I was inspired by Nietzsche's aesthetics and by the correlated symbolic representations of two Greek gods as dual conflicting energies in Greek tragedies. These ideas first helped me to understand, in detail, how the two energies exist in descriptive written text. My own senses then drove me beyond literature to dance through my imaginative visualization. Through my engagement in relating Nietzsche's philosophy to attuning with my body, I noted that as modern dance theorist, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen suggested in her text "Sensing, feeling, and action," the process of embodiment is a cyclical process of visualization, somatization, and embodiment. This three-stage engagement form up to a whole mind-body inquiry process.

2. Methodology

This qualitative research utilizes a phenomenological approach following analytical criticism of Nietzsche's aesthetics. The exploration includes the embodiment of Apollonian and Dionysian energies. My attempt is to reimagine the traces Nietzsche left in terms of duality in practice, literature, and dance. During this process, I match Nietzsche's duality concept to correlated descriptions of Greek plays and then embrace the ancient images and meanings from the text to my understanding,

senses, and bodily movement. The embodiment process requires employing the lenses of Rudolf Laban's movement analysis and somatic concepts in order to describe and explore the relationship between Nietzsche's two defined creative energies and movement. The research includes written journals on each of my movement session as data.

3. Nietzsche's Duality Reinterpretation

At the beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche proposes that the deep mystery of the Greek artistic conception is not a one-fold image. Rather, it shows dual energies based on the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus [1]. Apollo is the son of Zeus in ancient Greek mythology, and is the representation of masculinity. He is magnificent and solemn, and embodies purity, youth, and restraint. The polar opposite of Apollo is Dionysus, who—as the unkempt god of wine—represents illegitimacy, reproduction, and carnival. Nietzsche believes that there is an opposition, in terms of origin and purpose, between Apollo's plastic and static arts, which highlight form, and Dionysus' abstract, non-stylistic musical art. They are two distinct driving forces:

They are the vivid and concrete representations of two worlds of art, utterly different in their deepest essence and their highest aims that I see as the transfiguring genius of the principium individuationis, the sole path to true redemption through illusion. While in the mystical triumphal cry of Dionysus, the spell of individuation is broken and the path is opened to the Mothers of Being, to the innermost core of things [2].

According to Nietzsche, the Apollonian idea is represented as “the deity of all plastic force” [3] and demonstrated as “solemnity” [4]. He is the shiny needle splitting open Schopenhauer's “veil of Maya” and is closely related to the Buddhist concept of illusion[5]. Nietzsche states that “His eye must be sun-like, as befits his origin; even should it rage and show displeasure, it still bears the solemnity of the beautiful illusion. And thus we might say of Apollo what Schopenhauer said of man caught up in the veil of Maya [6]” . Apollonian art symbolizes a sense of awakening, enlightenment, order, and structure. German philosopher Schopenhauer believes that we live in Maya—where the physical world functions as a mere facade, or even as a deception—and only through art can we transcend our epistemology to metaphysical truth. However, Nietzsche argues that there are two types of art forms and that—like the Daoist concepts of *Yin* and *Yang*—they are equal sources of meaningfulness. Through the marriage of the two energies, “art derives its continuous development from the duality of the Apolline and Dionysiac; just as the reproduction of species depends on the duality of the sexes, with its constant conflicts and only periodically intervening reconciliations” [7]. Nietzsche brings down to earth Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the art-Apollonian function as a religion and guide for human life. Meanwhile, Nietzsche raises up the status of one's joy and suffering—the Dionysian representation—to the same level as pure reasoning, to form a life of duality from the entry point of literature and art.

3.1. Duality's Literal Reinterpretation

The quotes are directly from Nietzsche, the literary interpretations beneath each quote are what I made to translate Nietzsche's words to modern concepts.

Table 1: Duality Comparison according to Nietzsche.

| Apollo | Dionysus |
|---|---|
| “Authority” Male | “Illegitimate son of Zeus,” “Barbarian” Female |
| “principled individual” Individual | “Belonging to a higher community” Communal |
| “Sublime,” “Sun god” Heaven | “Falling to the ground,” “wine god” Earth |
| “No excess” Constructing a form, building boundaries | “Self-abandon” Breaking the boundary, being open to expressive changes |
| “metaphysical” Aiming for a product | “physical” Embodying the present |
| “Principle of sufficient reason” Logical | “Drunken,” “intoxication” Sensorial |

3.2. Apollonian Function

In the world of Apollo, independence and consciousness become the primary rule, just as “the boatman sits in his little boat, trusting to his fragile craft in stormy sea which, boundless in every direction, rises and falls in howling” [8]. In this view, one must control oneself with conscious will and dream of a bright and beautiful world suitable only for oneself. The function of the Apollonian idea is redemption, which leads one to find meaning in his or her own existence in the sea of endless wandering. However, this principle of individualization also has its own limitation: that is, Apollonian followers must obey and maintain absolute observance of the Apollonian boundary. One must be moderate, self-aware, and restrained.

Apollo is the glorious divine image of *principium individuationis* [9]—the light, beauty, joy, and wisdom of the dream world people live in, to escape the reality of nihilism and to find meaning in being alive. This form of existence requires maintaining boundaries and moderation. Otherwise, it is conceivable that the leaf-like, tumbledown canoe could be overturned in the eternal pessimistic sea. In this metaphor, the roaring sea represents human beings’ unbearable and uncontrollable lives. The boat, in the Apollonian concept, offers humans meaning and relief in a beautiful fantasy. Yet it must also be aware of its sinister situation, as a lonely boat on the raging sea. If humans do not act with moderation, this lonely boat will be overturned.

3.3. Dionysus’ Unconsciousness Expression

In the Dionysian system, any formatted existence and individual boundaries are eliminated. Graceful temperance, consciousness, and individualized principles are destroyed. Individual existences are merged into the torrent of life, transforming them into a primal oneness. Instead of believing in the surface phenomenon and dreaming of the future, people use their unconscious instincts to feel pain and joy as the essence of life. Through unconscious dialogue, a non-verbal communication is created

within the group, thus forming a community based on invisible energy. Nietzsche refers to the Dionysian state as being under the power of intoxication. This is shown in Euripides' *Bacchae*, in the primitive dances of the ecstatic crowd, and is described by Nietzsche: "In the powerful approach of spring, joyfully penetrating the whole or nature, those Dionysiac urges are awakened, and as they grow more intense, subjectivity becomes a complete forgetting of the self" [10]. Nietzsche took Schopenhauer's abstract, inner-built, and acoustic interpretation of Dionysus a step further—describing a visible, sensible, tangible, and three-dimensional form; that is, bodily movement or, in laymen's term, dance.

4. Apollo's Embodiment

When I explored Apollo's energy, it was first hard to dance out the vocabularies from table 1, once I visualized the powerful, masculinity, and construction, I realized that it was necessary to first set up a symbolism, character, and theme in choreography. I played music from a particular culture frame (it can be any classical form) while danced along with the music in a specific format, and then repeated patterns that signified that certain culture. For example, in Chinese dance, I highlighted the upper body movements, opened the chest, kept the spine upright. Practice hard to follow Chinese classical technique, if danced wrong, the movement became form-less or simply "wrong". The dancing process was basically mind-derived, the body was more like a follower. "In Apollo practice, when the mind dominates, there is a sense of a resistance to follow the body's intuition (Journal, 8/14/17)."

5. Sensing Dionysus' Embodiment and Balancing the Two Energies

In this male-dominated industrial society, we habitually suppress our own feelings. Yet, if we set aside the artificial living patterns of Apollo, we will feel the power of our Dionysian senses. We can fully sense the inner desires of our body, as well as whether we are in harmony with the land, the air, and the ocean or the plants. We can likewise fully sense whether our relationship with others is harmonious or intense.

Unlike Apollo's training, when I consciously let the body express itself, I found that the flow in my body is soft and circulated. The Dionysian sense silently tells me the current status of my body. Unlike the masculine Apollonian power, Dionysus is gentle. I found my breath, capillaries, bones, and muscles moving in the direction they wanted to go. At this moment, I pay more attention to "how my body wants" rather than "what should I do next?"

My body drags me down when there are movements that my muscles lack strength to imitate. For example, rolling on the ground, using the weak part of the back muscle, especially around the waist area to support the rest of the body. When that moment occurs, the Dionysian type of idea (breaking the principle) seems near and magnified, whereas Apollonian—representing future goals—seems far, weak, and meaningless (Personal Journal, 6/1/2017).

To find a neutral way to combine the two energies—balancing my mental and physical existence—I started using dance to explore the two energies within my own body. This process involved four steps, which were previously mentioned as a way of integrating the dialogue between literature and images. The words and ideas of the energy were first explored through a form of movement improvisation, after brainstorming which words might best describe the Dionysian energy in movement. Next, I explored and played with the movements to develop concepts into a choreography, through various stages of movement delimitations and editing processes. The movement ideas shown

in Table 2 were explored, in an attempt to embody the energies. Figure 1 shows the processes of these three stages, including my personal findings.

Table 2: Duality Through the Lens of Laban Movement Analysis and Bartenieff Movement Fundamentals [11].

| Apollonian | Dionysian |
|--|---|
| Contained and rigid movement of limbs and body parts | Open and flowing movements highlighting the body's organizations |
| Detailed gestures | Detailed sensing |
| Techniques | Expressivity |
| Sharp and direct movements | Flowing, indirect movements |
| Jump leap bounce with intention | Weighted with a sense of width and openness |
| Focus on contained, structured, and linear usages of space | Focuses on exploring the depth and width of the space |
| Metric | Non-metric |
| Asking "What comes next?" when thinking about the movement | Sensing and feeling the movement: "Where is the sensation leading the movement to?" |

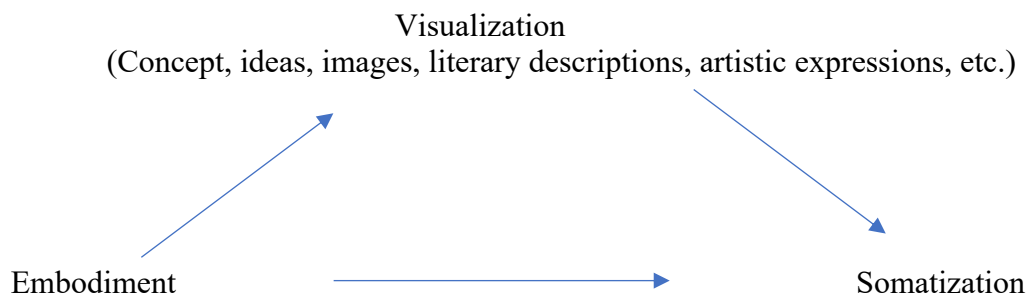


Figure 1: Somatization and the Embodiment of Duality [12].

6. Findings/Conclusions

Based on my sensing and feeling of the two energies, I found that the Dionysian concepts are more organic and natural to the body, leading to a better somatic exploration, although both types of concepts can be explored through the somatic lens. Dionysian art highlights the internal power of the bodily being, and exceeding the Apollonian-represented logical world. I realized that the core energy scattered around the body's periphery is no longer concentrated in the torso; it radiates from the chest and waves out to the limbs, the fingertips, and the surrounding environment. The energy initiated from the center of the chest has erupted, flowing into the air, merging into a broader harmonic energy,

to form the type of Dionysian energy that Nietzsche referred to earlier as “belonging to a higher community.”

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