

ФІЛОСОФІЯ XIX СТОЛІТТЯ

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“LEARN FROM ARTISTS” – FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE ON THE ART OF LIVING

Friedrich Nietzsche became acquainted with many different genres of art during the course of his life. As a child, he was taught the piano and played Haydn’s sonatas for four hands with his mother. Nietzsche was enthusiastic about visiting theater, concert and opera. He absorbed artistic performances of his time; in his writings he reflected upon music, literature, acting, painting and architecture. However, he was never only an academic spectator. Instead, Nietzsche was an artist himself as a piano-loving musician, a self-taught composer, an amateur actor at school and a choral singer while still a student. Last but not least, he devoted himself to art as a poet, deliberately adding playful intermezzi to his philosophical writings in the form of rhymed poems. From this wealth of experience, aesthetic observations and judgements, reflections on art and artists, emerge key concepts in his philosophy, such as the perspectival appreciation of appearance¹.

When we approach Nietzsche’s philosophical reflections on art and theater, the first work that should be considered is the *Birth of Tragedy* from 1872. Here Nietzsche develops the central idea of two artistic faculties, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which are understood as interactions. It is well-known that Nietzsche later distances himself from the basic tendency of this text, which he characterizes as an unreflected adoption of Schopenhauer’s pessimism and of his metaphysics of music. He also rejects the hope expressed in this writing for a rebirth of tragedy in the form of Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* operas. In contrast, Nietzsche’s thinking changes in one very decisive point. While the *Birth of Tragedy* states pathetically: “for only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world eternally *justified*” [Nietzsche 1999: 33], this sentence is corrected eleven years later in the *Gay Science* at a decisive point: “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* to us”. [Nietzsche 2001: 104] Nietzsche thus turns away from the idea that art could have a redeeming function. Human existence needs no justification. Even more: existence and the world cannot be justified at all. For, as Nietzsche will later explain, in order to justify life, i.e. to assess its absolute value, one would have to know life strictly speaking in its entirety which only a standpoint outside of life would enable. Naturally, however, we cannot take this position. “Judgements, value judgements on life, for or against, can ultimately never be

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¹ In [Gödde, Loukidelis & Zirfas 2016] provided a detailed overview of various aspects of ‘Lebenskunst’ in Nietzsche. See also [Brock, Gödde & Zirfas 2022; Zwierlein 2020; Came 2014; Ridley 2007; Schmid 1992]. However, the concrete impact of art techniques on life is rarely addressed.

true: they have value only as symptoms, [...] – in themselves, judgements like these are stupidities.” [Nietzsche 2005: 162] Art therefore cannot redeem life. Nevertheless: through art one can take on life, it can beautify it, transform it, elevate it. This re-evaluation that Nietzsche makes of his youthful thoughts marks the starting point of my reflections. We will see that he is not so much interested in the effect of artworks, but in the techniques and insights conveyed by art. Whereas Kant described artistic beauty as ‘disinterested pleasure’ and thus assigned art a place far removed from life and enthusiasm, Nietzsche reintegrates art into a cultural structure and makes it a kind of accomplice of life.² Nietzsche’s methodological approach does not enquire into the way things are, but into their historicity, their multiple origins and changes. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for example, discusses the development of moral concepts, whereas prehistoric or evolutionary-biological arguments on the emergence of language and our inner mental world can also be found in other texts. What something is should be inferred from how it has become. Thus, the once timeless is temporalized. And so it is not surprising to find an aphorism which offers a concise, speculative history of the origins of actors and artists.

I. Actor Genealogy in *The Gay Science*

It begins like this: “*On the problem of the actor*. – The problem of the actor has troubled me for a very long time; I was unsure (and still sometimes am) whether it is only from this angle that one can approach the dangerous concept of ‘artist’ – a concept that has heretofore been treated with unpardonable generosity.” [Nietzsche 2001: 225] Understanding the actor as a problem means conceptually detaching him from the usual semantics and the theatrical context, generalizing what is specific about him and seeing in him the reference point of the arts as such. Just as the actor transcends his context to become the locus of artistic creation, in return, the artist becomes a ‘dangerous concept’, which indicates the scope of the reinterpretation. Nietzsche then formulates two main ideas: firstly, he presents a description of acting skills from a moral and psychological perspective, which can be regarded as character prerequisites for actors: “Falseness with a good conscience; the delight in pretense erupting as a power that pushes aside, floods, and at times extinguishes one’s so-called ‘character’; the inner longing for a role and mask, for an *appearance*; an excess of capacities for all kinds of adaptation, that can no longer be satisfied in the service of the nearest, most narrowly construed utility: perhaps all of this is distinctive not *only* of the actor?” [ibid.: 225-226]

We can now see the contours of the ‘problem’ of the actor: the good conscience that justifies all actions and the “delight” that motivates them are on the side of “falseness” and “pretense”. A rigid self-image is undermined by the assumed power of the desire to pretend and the idea of the individual as an unchanging ‘character’ is dissolved. Even here, this is only a so-called ‘character’ and is also questioned by inverted commas. What takes its place are the forms of appearance, “role and mask”. [ibid.: 225]

Nietzsche then ventures a genealogical derivation of acting skills from a time before they were used in art. In his hypothetical reconstruction, they were the instincts of threat-

² In *Kritik der Urteilskraft* Kant summarizes: “Geschmack ist das Beurteilungsvermögen eines Gegenstandes oder einer Vorstellungsart durch ein Wohlgefallen oder Mißfallen *ohne alles Interesse*. Der Gegenstand eines solchen Wohlgefallens heißt *schön*.” [Kant 1993: 48]. Hödl (2005) also sees Nietzsche’s aesthetic approach in opposition to Kant.

ened people who often had to fear for their lives or property: "Such an instinct will have developed most easily in lower-class families who had to survive under fluctuating pressures and coercions, in deep dependency; who had nimbly to cut their coats according to their cloth, always readapting to new circumstances, always having to act and pose differently until they slowly learned to turn their coats with *every* wind and thus almost turned into coats themselves, [...] that art of perpetually playing at self-concealment which in animals we call mimicry – until finally this capacity, accumulated from generation to generation becomes domineering, unreasonable, intractable, an instinct that learns to command other instincts and produces the actor, the 'artist'." [ibid.: 226]

With the explanatory terms from the language of biology (instinct, mimicry, adaptive capacities) the socio-cultural dimension of the genealogical narrative is simultaneously conceptualized in terms of evolutionary biology. While certain animal species are in danger of falling victim to other animals' need for food, Nietzsche places the dependency of these humans on other humans at this point. The parallel lies in the fact that the existential pressure exerted on living beings forces them to generate techniques for dealing with it: adaptation here could mean disguising oneself, not letting one's fear be seen, putting one's needs aside in self-control, being able to lie in case of doubt, always becoming someone else. Nietzsche concentrates this in the metaphor of the coat (which at first is only a covering, but then becomes more and more of an identity). It is at the point where these skills of pretense are no longer merely vital that acting emergence as an art form. It is the 'surplus' that makes the actor. The actor's art of disguise and metamorphosis therefore did not arise in situations of leisure and security. For, as Nietzsche's thought seems to suggest, the 'good conscience' associated with acting grew at a time when it helped to ensure survival. What's more, the actor has to a certain extent become the prototype of the artist. The abilities attributed to him – the pleasure in appearances, in diverse transformations and, above all, the 'good conscience' for falsity – are considered exemplary for artistic creation as a whole. This does not imply a hierarchy within the arts, but rather indicates a problem that Nietzsche applies to cognition, as will be shown later. Nietzsche sees artistic activity as a transformation and transgression of reality. It articulates a perspective of the achieved effect, which is by definition orthogonal to the truth. Artists are not satisfied with the world as it is, they want to depict it, reshape it, transform it and in doing so create an illusory world, a counter-world of narratives and images. The fact that this delight in pretense is seen as potentially dangerous for the truth had already prompted Plato to exclude the arts from his ideal state because, in his view, they were only capable of creating images of images.

Another element is inherent in the art-genealogical narrative: the forces that are decisive for the arts arise in social situations and are common to many people. And indeed, Nietzsche argues in favor of a view of artistic creation that places less emphasis on inspiration and even sees the idea of the genius as a "superstitious belief". [Nietzsche 1996: 87] Instead, art is repeatedly thematized as a patient exercise, one that consists above all in devoting time to a craft. The artist's activity consists in refining techniques, in constant repetition, and in honing over many years an artistic judgment, which gradually learns to distinguish good ideas from mediocre ones [see ibid.: 83]. "Genius too does nothing except learn first how to lay bricks then how to build, except continually seek for material and continually moulding it." [ibid.: 86]

II. Learning from Artists for Life

As shown, Nietzsche makes arts emerge from a life-world dimension. While disguise was initially an advantage for survival, the millennia of civilization have turned it not only into art in the theater, but also into culture in society. The concept of art is thus initially applied very generally to all “beautifying, concealing and reinterpreting powers” [Nietzsche 1996: 255]. Nietzsche cites examples such as the existence of social manners or the convention of politeness, which is still so important today. The politeness we expect in our dealings with one another is not honesty or authenticity, but deception and deceit. It seems that the human desire for form and beauty is expressed in all kinds of subtle self-control, manners, all our effort to make ourselves pleasant (clothing, perfume, make-up, hair-dyeing etc.). In contrast, according to Nietzsche, “what is usually termed art, *that of the work of art*, is merely an *appendage*. A man who feels within himself an excess of such beautifying, concealing and reinterpreting powers will in the end seek to discharge this excess in works of art as well.” [ibid.: 255] In this way, the boundaries drawn between life, culture and art are made permeable. Art is not just for artists. Or the other way round: by making use of the aforementioned powers, people participate in what only culminates in the artist. This can sometimes go so far that the artistic endeavors become internalized in a way that they are no longer conscious as such. Particularly in the face of identification with a profession, Nietzsche explores the idea of ‘art’ turning into ‘nature’, when the ‘role’ becomes ‘character’ [Nietzsche 2001: 215-217]. The movement indicated in the art genealogy – from life to art – can therefore change direction again: Impulses for life can also be taken from artworks, whereby this is now a conscious process, a decision in favor of the reinterpreting powers.³ Aphorism 107 from the *Gay Science* explains why one must therefore show “gratitude” to art. It emphasizes the “cult of the untrue” and the “good will to appearance” in art [ibid.: 104]. Art – as one could interpret this – does not care about truth; it wants to win people over with its sensual impressions and illusions. As such, it initially stands in opposition to all cognition that strives for truth.

But without the arts, Nietzsche continues, cognition would be downright unbearable, namely: “the insight into delusion and error as a condition of cognitive and sensate existence” [ibid.: 104]. Here we can think of Immanuel Kant, who argues in *Critique of Pure Reason* that we can never recognize reality in itself, but that it is only ever given through the human forms and abilities of cognition. In fact, Nietzsche initially seems to radicalize Kant’s critique of knowledge with his intensification. The condition of our cognition and perception is ‘delusion and error’, because we believe that we have grasped the essence of things when we perceive them with our senses. But Nietzsche goes even further in his skepticism. Such erroneous beliefs, which are still effective today, are listed as follows: “that there are enduring things, that there are identical things, [...] that a thing is what it appears to be, that our will is free, that what is good for me is also good in and for itself.” [ibid.: 110] The concepts of the identical, of being and substance, of the unconditional, cause and effect, religious explanations of the world are then dismantled one after the other. Starting from this insight into knowledge that is necessarily based on illusions and false conclusions, Nietzsche makes clear what the “gratitude” owed to art consists of: “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still *bearable* to us, and art furnishes us with the eye

³ Pieper emphasizes the aestheticization of reality through the work of art, but refers only to the gaze and seeing [Pieper 2022].

and hand and above all the good conscience to be *able* to make such a phenomenon of ourselves. At times we need to have a rest from ourselves by looking at and down at ourselves and, from an artistic distance, laughing *at* ourselves or crying *at* ourselves; we have to discover the *hero* no less than the *fool* in our passion for knowledge." [ibid.: 104] To see existence as an aesthetic phenomenon and to understand oneself as such an existent means to make it available for molding again. The result is a gain in distance that enables us to adopt different perspectives towards ourselves. Self-irony and compassion (laughing or crying about oneself), feeling like heroes and fools, are perspectives only justified through art. The quest for knowledge in philosophy and the natural sciences is more committed to the search for truth and has no such 'good conscience' towards the untrue, the illusory. Art thus becomes a legitimate "counterforce" and the corrective of an activity of reason that knows how to maintain its "*freedom over things*" through these artifices [ibid.: 104].

But it is not only the philosopher who benefits from such a distancing and transformation of his own self-image. The 'heroes' are actually hidden in all of us, "hidden in each of these everyday characters" [ibid.: 79], and it is thanks to the theater that we can identify with the heroines and heroes played and find their noble, courageous and rare qualities in ourselves. "Only thus can we get over certain lowly details in ourselves! Without this art we would be nothing but foreground, and would live entirely under the spell of that perspective which makes the nearest and most vulgar appear tremendously big and as reality itself." [ibid.: 79] Playing with the terms 'foreground' and 'perspective' makes it clear that our self-image is always taken from a certain angle and is therefore arbitrary. Where there is a foreground, there is also a background on which one can bring into focus, to use metaphors from photography. The perspective of the heroine, which we also are, is sometimes allowed to come to the fore in order to mask the 'everyday character' and counter the appearance that everything banal and petty is the only reality. The aesthetic principles merge into an ethical attitude that anyone and everyone can adopt.⁴ In one of my favorite aphorisms, *Gay Science* 299, Nietzsche adds further techniques to the art techniques of distancing and omission that we are already familiar with: "*What one should learn from artists.* – What means do we have for making things beautiful, attractive, and desirable when they are not? And in themselves I think they never are!" [ibid.: 169] This expresses Nietzsche's conviction that things are not already given to us in themselves as things that are meaningful to us, but that we first make them so. Just as, in Kant's words, our sensory organs construct the framework of reality, humans are constantly creating the world that is relevant to them, setting priorities, interpreting things, making their values the yardstick. So how does something become meaningful to us, become beautiful, how does life become desirable? "Here we have something to learn from physicians, when for example they dilute something bitter or add wine and sugar to the mixing bowl; but even more from artists, who are really constantly out to invent new artistic *tours de force* of this kind. To distance oneself from things until there is much in them that one no longer sees and much that the eye must add *in order to see them all*, or to see things around a corner and as if they were cut out and extracted from their context, or to place them so that each partially distorts the view one has of the others and allows only perspectival glimpses, or to look at them through coloured glass or in the light of the sunset, or to give them a surface and skin that is not

⁴ Ridley sees this as an "art of self-stylization" and links it to the new demands of life after the death of God [Ridley 2007: 87].

fully transparent: all this we should learn from artists while otherwise being wiser than they. For usually in their case this delicate power stops where art ends and life begins; we, however, want to be poets of our lives, starting with the smallest and most commonplace details.” [ibid.: 169-170]⁵ You can see which tricks are added: Perspectives and cut-outs, the chosen arrangement, discoloration, delicate masking. In short: the conscious will to appearance. Now it becomes more clear what Nietzsche is getting at. If we are always subtly constructing reality anyway and forget that we are doing so, we can also actively and offensively use such fictions. If we cannot escape the illusion because it permeates language, consciousness and cognition, then we can reinforce the mechanisms of deception and playfully deal with them.

III. Cognition as Plurality of Perspectives

For Nietzsche, the realm of the artificial, the transformative – in life, culture, and art – has taken the place of the true, the enduring, the essential. When he summarizes: “for all life rests on semblance, art, deception, prismatic effects, the necessity of perspectivism and error” [Nietzsche 1999: 9], this also affects intellectual life. The problem of semblance therefore remains for science and philosophy. Until now, truth was hidden in the essence of things. Over time, this idea has cracked. Charles Darwin’s discoveries already meant the liquefaction of the Aristotelian concept of species, whereby species now develop over long periods of time and, although they can be determined in snapshots, they can no longer be traced back to an unchanging essence. In a similar sense, Nietzsche carries out the dissolution of the concept of substance as a historicization of cognition. In the moment in which such a constant substance is completely renounced, there is only semblance and “levels of appearance” [Nietzsche 2002: 35], as Nietzsche says in *Beyond Good and Evil*. The ontological difference between being (Sein) and appearance (Schein) is thus undermined. Nietzsche’s concept of appearance also breaks out of the old logic of the connection between signifier and signified. What remains are the signifiers that refer to each other as forms of the appearance of our once given attributions. However, the artist has always exhibited being as appearance in his practice. Think, for example, of how a painter depicts spatial foreshortening, how he recreates the effect of space by means of central perspective, or how a white dot as a reflection of light makes a painted eye appear alive.

With the analogy of the artist, Nietzsche invites us to renounce the absolute in cognition and in morality. What has become in long periods of time will – presumably in similarly long periods of time – also change again. This has already happened with regard to the metaphysical authority of God, which has become untrustworthy for many people. What changes, what upheavals can we expect from this? As we have seen, Nietzsche draws the consequences of this quite radically in terms of cognition (multiplicity instead of unity, becoming instead of being). He opposes the old concept of truth with that of perspectives: “There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival ‘knowing’; the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’.” [Nietzsche 2007: 87]

⁵ See K. Ashbaugh, who interprets this passage as a call to pay more attention to the body and the senses [Ashbaugh 2008: 118].

Objectivity as a scientific ideal is only possible at the cost of making everything subjective, and with it the personality, as forgettable as possible. According to Nietzsche, however, philosophy is a profession that is characterized by a particular, specific approach to the world. In contrast, another ‘objectivity’, placed here in inverted commas, which Nietzsche strives for experimentally, would be composed of the plurality of many subjective positions and insights, as it were. Once again, Nietzsche sets against an established fiction (that of objectivity; an old and as such rarely reflected pseudo-assumption) another fiction: the offensive plurality of views as ‘objectivity’.⁶ And the form of this new cognitive project becomes Nietzsche’s art of aphorism, driven to stylistic mastery, which is constitutively oriented towards changing perspectives. As indicated, this is not a matter of arbitrariness or even incompetence, but rather a philosophical program that is reflected in the forms of representation and enables experimentation with perspectives. The strategic renunciation of the authority of an authorial position is expressed in the fact that statements are sometimes assigned to different speaker positions and text figures. It is an effect that always reflects one’s own point of view: every perspective has a horizon and with a change of perspective, the respective horizon and point of view also shifts. Therefore, it does not run the risk of becoming arbitrary; arbitrary is only that which no longer recognizes a position, a ‘foothold’.

However, the prerequisite for this is the artistic ability to look at things through ever new, ‘different eyes’, to put on different ‘coats’ and even to merge into them for a specific time, to slip into new perspective and world views. The theatrical ability to productively transform is activated here once again for a philosophical purpose. As a thinker, Nietzsche states in *Human, All too Human* one must indeed find oneself, but from time to time also know how to lose oneself again, because for “the thinker it is disadvantageous to be tied to one person all the time”. [Nietzsche 1996: 387]

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⁶ Brock correctly states that “the only access we have to the factual is the perspective in which we place it” (“Der einzige Zugriff, den wir auf das Faktische [...] haben, ist die Perspektive, in die wir es hineinstellen.” [Brock 2014: 202]. A specific form of this perspectivism used by Nietzsche, the speeches of textual figures, is examined by C. Schubert [Schubert 2018].

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„Learn from artists“ – Friedrich Nietzsche on the Art of Living

This paper examines the relationship between art and life in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. While Nietzsche's topos of the "art of living" has often been explored as an ethos of self-formation, the specific connection with various arts is often overlooked. Both the actor and the painter become role models whose techniques are suggested as useful strategies. Scholars often overlook that Nietzsche corrects his earlier metaphysical ideas according to which art has the role of justifying life and, on the contrary, places art in the middle of life and no longer beyond it. While usually the actor is seen as hypocritical figure, Nietzsche not only develops a specific evolutionary-biological genealogy of the artist, outlining the artist's origin in the need for dissimulation and acting, but also emphasizes the power of metamorphosis and transformation. Finally, Nietzsche assigns to art a new significance, which is more than just creating works of art. Inspired by the techniques of art and artists, people can use its power to beautify, elevate and reinterpret their life. The philosopher himself benefits from the techniques of transformation, insofar as perspectival cognition becomes his guide.

Коріна Шуберт

«Навчатися в митців» – Фрідріх Ніцше про мистецтво жити

У цій статті есе розглядається зв'язок між мистецтвом і життям у творах Фрідріха Ніцше. Хоча тоpos Ніцше про «мистецтво жити» часто досліджували як етос самоформування, специфічний зв'язок із різними мистецтвами часто не помічався. І актор, і художник стають взірцями для наслідування, чії прийоми пропонуються як корисні стратегії. Вчені часто не помічають, що Ніцше виправляє свої попередні метафізичні ідеї, згідно з якими роль мистецтва – виправдання життя, і, навпаки, приміщує мистецтво посеред життя, а не поза ним. Хоча зазвичай актора сприймають як лицемірну постать, Ніцше не лише розвиває конкретну еволюційно-біологічну генеалогію митця, окреслюючи походження останнього з потреби приховування й акторської діяльності, але також підкреслює силу метаморфози та трансформації. Нарешті, Ніцше надає мистецтву нове значення, яке полягає в чомусь більшому, ніж просто створення мистецьких творів. Навченні техніками мистецтва та художників, люди можуть використовувати його силу, щоб прикрасити, підняти та переосмислити своє життя. Філософ сам отримує користь від прийомів трансформації, оскільки перспективне пізнання стає його провідником.

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