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Extemporalia

Music, Philology, and Nietzsche’s Misology

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Abstract: Nietzsche’s biographers have generally based his turn to philosophy on an abandonment of academic philology. The philosopher’s frequent declarations of suspicion toward verbal language—Nietzsche’s misology—appear, then, to confirm this decisive turn. However, if one instead regards the philosophical work as more continuous with the previous philological studies, one could consider Nietzsche’s untiring concern with writing, both with philology and philosophy, first as a renunciation and then as a rediscovery of his musical aspirations. After exploring Nietzsche’s early involvement with music, the following paper focuses on the young professor’s reflections on rhythm and meter, which seem to address his desire for a more musical philology and subsequently a more musically astute philosophy. Yet,
what precisely might a musical philology entail? What precisely does it mean to lend “a subtle and patient ear” to philosophy?

**Keywords**: Music; Philology; Nietzsche’s Misology; Rhythm and Meter;

There is a decidedly persistent mistrust of words across Nietzsche’s works—a deep suspicion of verbal language, an unforgiving harshness toward lexical conventions, a distaste for concepts, a repulsion to abstractions, at times a bare, unabashed hatred of words. Although he nowhere uses the term, Nietzsche appears to have suffered from chronic *misology*. In a note from 1887, we read: “The word diminishes and makes stupid; the word de-personalizes: the word makes what is uncommon common.”¹ Indeed, the use of words, the very practice of individual communication, readily becomes a mode of self-debasement:

> We no longer sufficiently value ourselves when we communicate. Our true experiences are not at all garrulous. They could not be communicated even if they wanted to be. This is because the right words for them do not exist. The things we have words for are also the things we have already left behind. There is a grain of contempt in all speech. Language, it seems, was invented only for average, mediocre, communicable things. People vulgarize themselves when they speak a language. – Excerpts from a morality for the deaf-mutes and other philosophers. (*Twilight of the Idols* § 26)²

Nietzsche’s fundamentally aristocratic sentiment never tires of expressing itself in cognitive terms: conventional (that is, vulgar or common) philosophy has no ears for the

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truth of experience. Its verbal volubility is but a testament to its failure to listen. It speaks but speaks nothing. Philosophy, thus conceived, is mute and deaf—vapid in its loquaciousness; and incapable of hitting upon the true by reason of the fact that it has forgotten how to hear.

 Accordingly, Nietzsche’s misology is generally linked to his passion for music. From the same note cited above, Nietzsche explains: “In relation to music all communication with *words* is shameless.”\(^3\) In his terse account of intellectual history, from the pages of *The Gay Science*, “wax in one’s ears” is listed as the precondition for all philosophizing that escaped the Siren appeal of existence—“A real philosopher no longer listened to life insofar as life is music; he denied the music of life” (§ 372).\(^4\) Philosophy is therefore akin to that Alexandrian impulse, outlined in *The Birth of Tragedy*: an impulse whose consistent neglect of music is established by what Nietzsche terms “Socratic rationalism.” It was this Alexandrianism that inaugurated the science of philology, Nietzsche’s chosen course of study—a choice that he regarded from the start as a renunciation of musical aspirations. In an early biographical sketch, written while Nietzsche was still a student in Leipzig, the decision to take up classical philology is explicitly based on a resolution to stifle hopes of becoming a composer:

Since my ninth year I was highly drawn to music; in those fortunate circumstances in which one does not yet recognize the limits of one’s talents and considers everything that one loves to be attainable, I had written down countless compositions and acquired a more than dilettantish knowledge of music theory. Only in the last period of my life at Pforta, in correctly understanding myself, did I give up all my artistic plans; and from that point on Philology entered into the gap that consequently opened up.\(^5\)

\(^3\) “*Im Verhältniß zur Musik ist alle Mittheilung durch Worte von schamloser Art.*” (KSA 12: 492; emphasis in text)


Music has the first word, but philology the last. The silencing of music has left a gaping wound that only the study of words could patch. But it is only a partial healing, one that would never entirely remedy what would never cease from festering. The fact that this bandaged philologist would later turn into a misologist seems to rest on a singular regret, namely that the discipline of classical philology required an abandonment of music. Nietzsche may arguably have come to hate words because a love of words—a philology—is a jealous love, a love that demands exclusive rights and complete attention. That is to say, Nietzsche eventually became a misologist because a love of words once compelled him to quit music.

For over a decade, say from 1860 to 1872, Nietzsche worked regularly on music, at first pursuing the strict contrapuntal forms of Johann Joseph Fux and Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, before boldly fleeing the *Gradus ad Parnassum* for the captivating chromaticism of the music of the future, which he ached to realize in a series of dances, Lieder, and fantasias. After meeting Wagner and befriending his conductor and rival, Hans von Bülow, Nietzsche mustered the courage to submit one of his more ambitious pieces for professional evaluation. The *Manfred-Meditation*, a piano composition for four hands, completed just months after the appearance of *The Birth of Tragedy*, was humbly dedicated and dispatched to Bülow. The severity of the musician’s response could hardly have been more devastating.

Your *Manfred-Meditation* is the most extreme kind of fantastic extravagance, the most unpleasant and anti-musical thing that I have seen put down on paper in a long time. [...] Once again—don’t take offense—You yourself have said your music is “horrible”—it is, indeed, more horrible than you believe, not harmful for the common good, but worse than that: harmful for you, who cannot kill your excess of leisure-time worse than in this kind of rape of Euterpe. (24 July 1872)⁶

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⁶ “Ihre Manfred-Meditation ist das Extremste von phantastischer Extravaganz, das Unerquicklichste und Antimusikalisichste was mir seit lange von Aufzeichnungen auf Notenpapier zu Gesicht gekommen ist. [...] Nochmals—nichts für ungut—Sie haben übrigens selbst Ihre Musik als „entsetzlich“ bezeichnet—sie ists in der That, entsetzlicher als Sie vermeinen, zwar nicht gemeinschädlich, aber schlimmer als das, schädlich für Sie selbst, der Sie sogar entwaregen Ueberrüß an Musse nicht schlechter todschlagen können, als in ähnlicher Weise Euterpe zu nothzüchtigen.” F. Nietzsche, *Briefwechsel: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*
For all intents and purposes, Nietzsche accepted this harsh judgment: he stepped away from the piano and instead took his seat at the writing desk. He would resign to the fact that words, not tones, were to be the tools of his trade. On many occasions he would lament that his publications had to be restricted to words, that as a writer he invariably would have to vulgarize himself: “It ought to have sung, this ‘new soul,” and not talked!” (Attempt at Self-Criticism § 3). Toward the end of his career, before drowning in a wordless benightedness, he confessed to his close friend, the composer Peter Gast: “For there is no doubt, that in the very depths of my being I would have liked to have been able to compose the music that you yourself compose—and that my own music (books included) was only done faute de mieux” (22 June 1887). It would seem that Nietzsche understood his condemnation to verbal language as a kind of penalty, sentenced to life for the rape of music’s muse.

The progress of Nietzsche’s writing career, concerning his work both in classical philology and philosophy, suggests however that he did discover a way to re-introduce music into his intellectual projects. Nietzsche’s inimitable style, his pronounced vitalism, may very well be described as one that proceeds with ears unplugged, a writing that does not disavow the musical but rather remains attuned to the sounds of life. As he began to prepare his first academic essays, he acknowledged what would be required: “Above all a few cheerful spirits in my style must again be unchained, I must learn to play them as though upon a keyboard, not only pieces learned by heart, rather free fantasies, as free as possible, but all the same always logical and beautiful.” (To Carl von Gersdorff, April 1867) Throughout his career it appears that, while misology is a consequence of excessive melomania, music may also serve as a means for rediscovering a fundamental love for words.

8 “[E]s ist nämlich kein Zweifel, daß ich in alleruntersten Grunde die Musik machen können möchte, die Sie machen—and daß ich meine eigene Musik (Bücher eingerechnet) immer nur gemacht habe faute de mieux” (KGB 3/5: 95)
9 “Vor allem müssen wieder einige munteren Geister in meinem Stile entfesselt werden, ich muß darauf wie auf einer Klaviatur spielen lernen, aber nicht nur eingelernte Stücke, sondern freie Phantasie, so frei wie möglich, aber doch immer logisch und schön.” (KGB 1/2: 209).
Persistently, Nietzsche celebrates his talents for writing and reading musically: “This is how I read thinkers and sing their melodies after them: I know that behind all those cold words there stirs a soul of desire, and I hear it singing, for my own soul sings when it is moved.”\(^\text{10}\) If this is misology, it is less a bare hatred for words in favor of music, and more a loving desire to hold on to words, to animate them with musical feeling. Nietzsche’s misology wants to correct the error of a language world without music. The point is not that philology and philosophy should be abandoned, but rather that they should become musicalized. “Has anyone noticed that music makes the spirit free? gives wings to thought? that you become more of a philosopher, the more you become a musician?” (\textit{The Case of Wagner} § 1; emphasis in text)\(^\text{11}\) Indeed, from his early rapture for the Dionysian to his late tears for Bizet’s \textit{Carmen}, Nietzsche turns to tones and rhythms, melodies and harmonies, dynamics and tempi, as a means for correcting reading and writing practices as logical as they are suffocating.

What torture books written in German are for anyone who has a \textit{third} ear! How vexed one stands before the slowly revolving swamp of sounds that do not sound and rhythms that do not dance, called a “book” among Germans! Yet worse is the German who reads books! How lazily, how reluctantly, how badly he reads! […] That one must not be in doubt about the rhythmically decisive syllables, that one experiences the break with any excessively severe symmetry as deliberate and attractive, that one lends a subtle and patient ear to every \textit{staccato} and every \textit{rubato}, that one figures out the meaning in the sequence of vowels and diphthongs and how delicately and richly they can be colored and change colors as they follow each other—who among book-reading Germans has enough good will to acknowledge such duties and demands and to listen to that much art and purpose in language? In the end, one simply does not have “the ear for that” (\textit{Beyond Good and Evil} § 246; emphasis in text).\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{10}\) “so lese ich die Denker und ihre Melodien singe ich nach: ich weiß, hinter allen den kalten Worten bewegt sich eine begehrende Seele, ich höre sie singen, denn meine eigene Seele singt, wenn sie bewegt ist.” (A note from 1880, KSA 9: 320)


\(^{12}\) “Welche Marter sind deutsch geschriebene Bücher für Den, der das \textit{dritte} Ohr hat! Wie unwillig steht er neben dem langsam sich drehenden Sumpfe von Klängen ohne Klang, von Rhythmen ohne Tanz, welcher bei Deutschen ein „Buch“ genannt wird! Und gar der Deutsche, der Bücher \textit{liest} […] Dass man
As this passage demonstrates, Nietzsche’s misology cannot simply be construed as a flat hatred for words. Rather, it names the disposition of one who is too much in love with words, one who is sensitive to the subtleties of language, to the infinite variety of inflection—a philologist to the extreme.

Nietzsche’s exuberant itinerary, rehearsed by every biography, leading from classical philology to philosophy, compels a next step. If one hagiographical tradition stages Nietzsche’s turn to philosophy as an abandonment of philology, certainly another version—perhaps one that regarded the philosophical work as more continuous with the philological—could understand Nietzsche’s exclusive concern with writing, both with philology and philosophy, first as a renunciation and then as a rediscovery of his musical aspirations. What, then, might a musical philology or philosophy entail? What precisely does it mean to lend “a subtle and patient ear” to philosophy? Is his philology ultimately nothing more than a misology? Is it possible to judge whether Nietzsche’s engagement with words could fairly be understood as musical? Or does his unsparingly critical, almost violently forceful style merely perpetuate a rape of Euterpe? To address these questions, it would be helpful to begin with the dichotomy, evident across Nietzsche’s school and university years, between music and words.

Already while still a schoolboy behind the walls of high Pforta—from the halls that once housed the Schlegel brothers and the divine Novalis—eighteen-year-old Fritz betrayed his Romantic provenance when he confessed to his mother and sister: “Whenever I am allowed a minute to think what I want, then I seek words for a melody that I have and a melody for words that I have, and both together, what I have, are not in accord, even though they came from a single soul. But that is my fate!” (To Franziska über die rhythmisch entscheidenden Silben nicht im Zweifel sein darf, dass man die Brechung der allzustrengen Symmetrie als gewollt und als Reiz fühlt, dass man jedem staccato, jedem rubato ein feines geduldig Ohr hinhält, dass man den Sinn in der Folge der Vocale und Diphthongen räth, und wie zart und reich sie in ihrem Hintereinander sich färben und umfärben können: wer unter bucherlesenden Deutschen ist gutwillig genug, solchergestalt Pflichten und Forderungen anzuerkennen und auf so viel Kunst und Absicht in der Sprache hinzuhören? Man hat zuletzt eben das Ohr nicht dafür” (KSA 5: 189). English: Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966): 182.
The young man’s frustration is twofold: first, in typical romantic fashion, there is the pile of school books in which he must “wallow,” a daunting amount of material to be mastered, material that prevents him from having a thought of his own; and second, no less romantically, whenever he does manage to find time to think—if only for “a minute”—he is torn between two apparently antithetical poles, between the demands of music on the one hand, and the dictates of words on the other. One would seem to preclude the other. Two distinct pursuits tear apart the adolescent soul. However, it is noteworthy that, although the opposition is explicitly between word and music, this Zerrissenheit is judged entirely from the standpoint of the musical: the fact that words and music do not go together, that they are not true to each other, means first and foremost that they are not “in tune”—“beides zusammen … stimmt nicht.” The difference between the verbal and the musical is expressed by a musical metaphor.

Later, as a student of classical philology at Bonn, Nietzsche wrote to his friend, Carl von Gersdorff, of his plans to leave the side of his professor Otto Jahn, a formidable philologist who often enough published in the field of musicology. The Rhineland would be abandoned on the suggestion of his new mentor, Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl, who had been called to assume a chair in Saxony. Nietzsche perhaps associated the move with Beethoven’s own eastward travels, on the composer’s decision to leave his hometown in order to embark on the path toward eternal musical fame. In the letter, Nietzsche explains: “I am certainly not going to Leipzig only to practice philology, but rather what I essentially want is to further develop in music. In Bonn I simply have no opportunity for that.” (4 August 1865)

Soon, however, the time constraints imposed on the burgeoning classicist did not even leave a minute for music. The dutiful and industrious student immersed himself in Greek literature and managed to complete a number of scholarly articles, featuring work on Theognis of Megara and Diogenes

13 “Wenn ich minutenlang denken darf was ich will, da suche ich Worte zu einer Melodie die ich habe und eine Melodie zu Worten die ich habe, und beides zusammen, was ich habe, stimmt nicht, ob es gleich aus einer Seele kam. Aber das ist mein Looos!” (KGB 1/1: 253)
14 Especially noteworthy is Jahn’s study on the life and work of Mozart: W. A. Mozart, 4 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1856 - 59). See also Jahn’s Gesammelte Aufsätze über Musik (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1866), which includes essays on Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and Wagner.
15 “Ich gehe nun zwar nicht nach Leipzig, um dort nur Philologie zu treiben, sondern ich will mich wesentlich in der Musik ausbilden. Dazu habe ich in Bonn schlechterdings keine Gelegenheit.” (KGB 1/2: 75)
Laertius, which would soon be published in prominent journals, including the Rheinisches Museum für Philologie. In addition to notes on Aeschylus, Greek lyric, Homer, and Hesiod, there were ambitious plans to assemble a comprehensive history of Greek literature, not to mention his role as co-founder of and devoted participant in the students’ Philological Society. Nonetheless, Schumann’s music, together with Schopenhauer and long “solitary walks,” offered some respite from scholarship, as he explains to Gersdorff during the Easter holidays at home. Otherwise, back in Leipzig, there seems to have been little chance to resurrect. Instead, he turns to further projects, like the Theognis essay whose scholarly style was admittedly an abomination of style. Nietzsche recognizes that his philological approach is wanting: “Truly, I would not like to write so wooden and dry again, in accordance with the logical corset.” (6 April 1867)—a style as far from Schopenhauer’s fiery courage as it was from Schumann’s irrational fantasies.

Then, after years of deeper wallowing in ever higher piles of books, Nietzsche received the fateful call. Thanks to Frau Ritschl’s connections, it was arranged for him to meet that greatest of German tone-poets, that most exceptional hero of musical culture, Richard Wagner. In a long, ebullient report to fellow philologist Erwin Rohde, Nietzsche describes the exciting day (9 November 1868; KGB 1/2: 335–41). The daytime hours of waiting were filled, as usual, with classical studies and philosophy: he held a discussion with a younger colleague about “the Eleatics” and “God in philosophy”; he mentions another student, Ferdinand Wilhelm Ahrens, who had been collecting material on the “Development of the Concept of God in Aristotle”; and speaks of his associate Heinrich Romundt, who is working on a prize essay suggestively entitled “on the Will.” (338) Left alone, Nietzsche passed the remaining time reading a treatise on the notion of “eudokia.” Yet, he relates how he was periodically disturbed by the shrill ringing of a bell some distance away. Anticipation distracts him. Audition upsets his reading. He believes there is someone at his door, but no one is to be seen. Eventually, a delivery arrives: it is the suit ordered from the tailor for this special night, but since the order demands cash on delivery, the antsy philologist can only watch the package being taken from his hands. Thus, agitated and improperly dressed, Nietzsche

16 “Drei Dinge sind meine Erholungen, aber seltene Erholungen, mein Schopenhauer, Schumannsche Musik, endlich einsame Spaziergänge.” (7 April 1866; KGB 1/2: 121)

17 “Ich möchte wahrhaftig nicht wieder so hölzern und trocken, nach der logischen Schnürbrust schreiben” (KGB 1/2: 209)
finally walks to town, leaving behind his books and treatises, soon to find himself in the formidable presence of the maestro. Wagner holds court, playing passages from Die Meistersinger, before dinner and after. There is talk of Schopenhauer and the ineptness of German opera companies. Together, they poke fun at professors and academic philosophers. So “rare and stimulating” is the experience, so “joyous,” that Nietzsche, the following day, cannot get back “on the old track”—“im alten Gleise” (340).

A couple of weeks afterwards, this brief but overwhelming night of music caused the young man to view his colleagues in a rather skeptical light. Again to Rohde, he writes:

My dear friend, now where I can see again the teeming brood of philologists of our day up close; now where I must daily observe the whole of their mole-hill activity, their swollen cheek pouches, their blind eyes, their rejoicing over the captured worm and their indifference towards the true, indeed the urgent problems of life, and not only in the young brood but also in their venerable elders, I grow ever more clearly convinced that both of us, if we wish to remain true to our genius, will not be able to pursue our life task without causing much offense, and being constantly thwarted and crossed in our career. (20 November 1868)

The encounter with Wagner undoubtedly encouraged the young scholar to distinguish himself willfully from the academic crowd. In a sense, he had already embarked on a maverick trail a year before in selecting Democritus of Abdera, the fifth-century atomist, as the sustained object of his research. It was this project that set him on the path of a more robust philology, skeptical and anti-dogmatic to the core—a new philology, emboldened by Schopenhauer’s insights, the only sure ground of which was the uncertainty of all results. “Denn nur die Gewißheit ist schrecklich”—“For only certainty is terrifying,” he declared to Paul Deussen, after congratulating him on his choice to

leave the sure ground of theology for a mercurial marriage with philology (4 April 1867; KGB 1/2: 205). That could only mean that the “teeming brood of philologists” had already been abandoned for philological work heroic enough to breed uncertainty and risk security. The meeting with Wagner could only propel the young scholar along these lines, not simply because of the composer’s fervor for the German philosopher of the Will but also presumably because music had once again intervened and intervened as something altogether powerful: more than just a momentary pleasure or relaxation, Nietzsche discovered that he had ears among a profession that had grown predominantly deaf.

Even before meeting Wagner, his future surrogate father, Nietzsche had been searching for a way to bring the two pursuits of music and philology together. “Perhaps one day I shall find philological material that can be treated musically,” he announces to Sophie Ritschl, confessing that he is like the “sailor who feels less secure on land than upon a moving ship.” (2 July 1868)19 The remark follows his words of gratitude for a book that Frau Ritschl lent him—the Briefe über Musik an eine Freundin by the composer Ludwig Ehlert—a book that Nietzsche claims is “at bottom […] music, which by chance is written not in notes but in words.”20 It is clear that Nietzsche is writing his own “Brief an eine Freundin”: a verbal music that he promises, at the letter’s conclusion, to one day reformulate in tones. Nietzsche signs the letter as a “bad musician, etc.” presumably because he has yet to find the right “philological material” for musical treatment.

Eventually, upon receiving his post in Basel, Nietzsche plunged into an extensive study of ancient rhythm theory. The notes, including two incomplete essays, constituted the basis of his courses on Greek meter and rhythm, which Nietzsche held in the winter semester of 1870–71 and the following summer semester.21 In large part the material works through the extant writings of Aristoxenus of Tarentum and Aristides Quintilianus. What could better serve as philological material for musical treatment than the musical material of classical antiquity? The suitability of this topic for

19 “Vielleicht finde ich aber einmal einen philologischen Stoff, der sich musikalisch behandeln läßt”; “Seemann, der auf dem Lande sich unsicher fühlt als im bewegten Schiff.” (KGB 1/2: 299)
20 “im Grunde […] Musik, die zufällig nicht mit Noten, sondern mit Worten geschrieben ist.” (298) “at bottom […] music, which by chance is written not in notes but in words”
21 The material was recorded in four notebooks, comprising well over 200 pages of print in the Kritische Gesamtausgabe (KGW 2/3: 99 – 338).
Nietzsche’s aspirations goes well beyond the simple level of theme. Already as far back as 1864, while a still a student at Bonn, Nietzsche began to ponder problems of rhythmic form in archaic Greek lyric—work ultimately published in his paper on the Danae fragment of Simonides.\(^{22}\) The 1870–71 notebooks—however complex, disordered and fragmentary—do yield at least one specific line of thought, namely to argue, against the majority of scholarly opinion of the day, that the Greek conception of rhythm is altogether incommensurable with the modern sense.\(^{23}\) Nietzsche’s great contribution, which clearly anticipates today’s standard understanding of ancient prosody, is to insist that Greek poetry is composed primarily of a quantitive accent that bears no relation to modern European lyric, which instead exhibits a predominantly dynamic accent.\(^{24}\) The “life of time” or Zeitleben of the ancients stands in stark distinction to the “life of stressed accent” or Tonleben of modernity. To suggest any correlation, in Nietzsche’s view, would be to commit a gross anachronism.\(^{25}\) Modern scholars, beginning with Richard Bentley, have obfuscated this fundamental difference by unreflectively identifying the Greek πούς with “Takt”—a confusion that becomes the earmark for what Nietzsche dubs “Ictustheorie” (KGW 2/3: 269). It would appear that Nietzsche is simply rehearsing a gesture altogether conventional in the history of German Philhellenism, whereby the ancients and moderns stand in an oppositional and therefore potentially dialectical relation. But Nietzsche, in fact, goes further.

\(^{22}\) “Beiträge zur Kritik der griechischen Lyriker I: Der Danae Klage” (1868) in KGW 2/1: 59–74.

\(^{23}\) Nietzsche responds most directly (and polemically) to the work of Rudolf Westphal, especially his System der antiken Rhythmik (Breslau: Leuckart, 1865); and Griechische Rhythmik und Harmonik nebst der Geschichte der Drei Musischen Disciplinen, 2 vols. (2nd ed., Leipzig, 1867). See KGW 2/3: 199 and 241.


Over the course of the fourth notebook, Nietzsche sketches a “Philosophie des Rhythmus” (KGW 2/3: 309) that exhibits at least two tendencies. On the one hand, quite expectedly, the study attempts to trace a decline from an ancient sense for duration toward a deficient, modern sensibility, which understands all metrics in sole relation to stress accent. The implication of this genealogy is that, with the victory of the ictus, expressive language has lost its original vitality:

Gradually, the strong sense of time disintegrates in speech. Now the accent and the ictus enter; the word endures forcibly, as it were. The psychological life of the word now is concentrated in the accent syllable. At once the old barriers of the accent break, it moves backwards and forwards and now needs a new pillar to support the word—the ictus.26

The story that Nietzsche tells here is purely the story of decadence—a history of devitalization and compensatory measures of support: der neue Pfeiler. On the other hand, and contrary to Nietzsche’s own genealogical design, the notebook broaches the possibility that quantitative rhythm in fact conquered an even prior system of dynamic accent:

We gather that the Tonleben of the Latin and Greek language gradually overcomes the Zeitleben. Now, is the Zeitleben orginal? Once, the Tonleben was freer, then it was restricted and almost overcome by the Zeitleben, finally it is victorious once again.27

What emerges is a far more complex history, wherein duration and stress, Zeitleben and Tonleben, are locked in perpetual struggle: “A most ancient struggle between Zeit- and Tonleben (side by side): Victory of the Zeitleben over the Tonleben / Decline of the Zeitleben

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and victory of the *Tonleben.*”28 What this reflection suggests is that at the origin there is a fundamental conflict that frustrates any straightforward historical plot. This insight leads Nietzsche to regard both species of rhythm, despite their fundamental differences, to be idealizations of temporal unfolding, patterns of representation (“Vorstellung,” KGW 2/3: 309). In calling attention to this “most ancient struggle,” Nietzsche allows us to consider his own genealogical account of decadence as structurally analogous to the *Ictustheorie*: a hermeneutic pillar that stabilizes and thereby covers over a profound instability. Just as the stress accent historically caused “das starke Zeitgefühl” to disintegrate (zerfallen), so does Nietzsche’s own historical account obliterate the originary “Kampf zwischen Zeit- und Tonleben.”

It is this perpetual conflict between two distinct patterns of representation that causes, in Nietzsche’s speculation, the slight “irrationality” or alogia that marked ancient Greek vocal performance. The notion of alogia, discussed for example by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De comp. verb.* 17), seeks to account for the fact that in the rhapsodic recitation of dactylic hexameter the *longum* is of a shorter duration than the *biceps*. Aristoxenus assigns the durational value of the ἄλογος χρόνος as falling somewhere between that of a *breve* and that of a *longum*, a value that Westphal in turn gives to the anceps.29 In his study of Pindaric meter, August Boeckh employed Aristoxenus’ description to “remedy” the problem of assigning durational values to the syllables of a spondee, while maintaining the ratios of the iambic verse.30 However, for Nietzsche, who consistently emphasizes the ancient-modern distinction between quantitative and qualitative meter, alogia introduces a deviation that enlivens the measure, a dissonance that renders the rhythm highly precarious, oscillating between the dictates of time and stress: “Two measures are never mathematically precisely the same: the more the mind grasps that which is being represented, the more finely is the measure individualized, first according to its length (ἀγωγῇ), then according to its ictus (according to its

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declamation), and thirdly in the length of its particular parts.”\textsuperscript{31} Nietzsche draws a profound conclusion from Aristoxenus, taking the perception of \textit{alogia} as the moment when the verse exceeds the posited system of \textit{Zeitleben}. He attributes to Aristoxenus the insight that quantitative rhythm contains a transgression that “oversteps the legitimate or legitimizing limit”—an \textit{ektasis} that cannot be reckoned by modern rationalism: “All modern measures [are] rational, Aristoxenus also asserts the occurrence of an irrational [measure], as one part of the measure oversteps the legitimate limit by a small bit of time.”\textsuperscript{32} In other words, for Nietzsche, \textit{alogia} is an effect that opens the rhythmic system up to a dimension that exceeds the system.

Thus, the genealogical account (\textit{Tonleben} overcoming \textit{Zeitleben}) and the exposure of originary \textit{différance} (“Zuältest Kampf zwischen Zeit- und Tonleben”) can motivate the same project. Aristoxenus’ ancient sensibility could still hear \textit{alogia}, specifically how the ictus punctured phonetic duration; he had the ear to detect how a modern rhythmic system came to disrupt the ancient. As for modern sensibility, it is itself deaf; it eradicates the irrationality born of conflict by allowing duration to be subsumed by stress. For Nietzsche, the ultimate victory of the ictus is tantamount to having stuffed wax in the ears of modernity.

Nietzsche places great stock in \textit{alogia}. He describes the πόδες \άλογοι as “the most striking element in rhythm,” a “delay [\textit{Verzögerung}]” that is “for us incomprehensible” (KGW 2/3: 114). The ever so slight—incalculable—shift in duration, somewhat akin to a musical \textit{ritardando} or \textit{rubato}, disturbs the rationality of the rhythm; it resists being gathered into a \textit{logos}. These scattered reflections on \textit{alogia} constitute some of the earliest examples of Nietzsche’s critical views. Indeed, at one point in the notebooks, he associates \textit{alogia} with “the Dionysian,” albeit briefly and tentatively. (KGW 2/3: 322). As James Porter has demonstrated, the destabilization of all idealized, assured images of meaning, taken as an effect of \textit{alogia}, feeds into Nietzsche’s later projects of dismantling the images of Antiquity and Modernity.\textsuperscript{33} Briefly put, one could suggest that Nietzsche’s subsequent musicalization of philology is

\textsuperscript{31} “Mathematisch genau sind nie zwei Takte gleich: je geistiger das Darzustellende erfaßt ist, um so feiner individualisirt sich der Takt, einmal seiner Dauer nach (ἀγωγῇ), dann seinen Icten nach (nach seiner Deklamation) und drittens in der Dauer seiner einzelnen Theile.” (KGW 2/3: 205)

\textsuperscript{32} “Alle modernen Takte [sind] rational, Aristox[enos] behauptet auch das Vorkommen irrationaler, indem das eine Taktheil das legitime Maaß um ein kleines Zeittheilchen überschreitet.” (KGW 2/3: 105)

nothing other than this: it exposes what has been scientifically established—systems of knowledge of every variety—to dimensions of excess. A musical sensibility is particularly capable of effectuating this exposure because music is the art of time par excellence. Irrationality or alogia is first and foremost a musical effect insofar as it occurs when a rational or logical system is perforated from within by an experience that the system cannot contain.

Alogia frustrates the subsuming force of logos; it resists the meaning produced by the speech’s gathering power (legein). Irrationality condemns the words—the logoi—to remain in time or even to remain time itself, that is, to suffer a radical temporality that can never be definitively redeemed by any transcendent system. What Nietzsche arguably discovers in his study of rhythm is the possibility of exploding all forms from within—from within, because the temporality that is necessary to mark a beginning, middle, and end, the time sequence that is the condition for gathering verbal elements into a form of meaning, is in fact the same temporality that prohibits that form to be permanently established or secured. The time of every logos enables and frustrates the passage into the ideal space of significance. The system of meaning is dependent on an experience of time that is always on the verge of undoing the system itself.

In revealing the excess of the system of meaning, alogia allows words—logoi—to resist subsumption or sublimation into a single logos of sense. The words thereby retreat from the spatial ground of ideal meaning; they fall beyond the stable image of appearance or moderation; and instead expose themselves excessively and exceedingly, ecstatically and even madly, to time itself. In The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche will explicitly come to call this alogical exposure the Dionysian impulse—a decidedly musical impulse that breaks apart the Apollonian forms of clarity, stability, and security:

Let us now imagine how the ecstatic sounds of the Dionysiac festival, with its ever more seductive, magical melodies, entered this artificially damned-up world founded on semblance and measure, how in these melodies all the unmeasurable excess in nature found expression in pleasure, suffering and knowledge, in a voice which rose in intensity to a penetrating shout; let us imagine how little the psalm-singing artist of Apollo and the ghostly sound

34 See the definition of logos given by the Eleatic Stranger in Plato’s Sophist (262a – d).
of his harp could mean in comparison with this daemonic popular song! The Muses of the arts of ‘semblance’ grew pale and wan when faced with an art which, in its intoxication, spoke the truth; the wisdom of Silenus called out ‘Woe, woe!’ to the serene Olympians. The individual, with all his limits and measure, became submerged here in the self-oblivion of the Dionysiac condition, and forgot the statutes of Apollo. Excess revealed itself as the truth; contradiction, bliss born of pain, spoke of itself from out of the heart of nature. Thus, whenever the Dionysiac broke through, the Apolline was suspended and annulled. (§ 4)\textsuperscript{35}

What I would like to suggest is that Nietzsche’s attention to Dionysian _alogia_ is coincident with his _misology_—not a hatred of words but rather a love of words that is excessive in every sense, a philology that will be musical, that will be open to a resounding breakthrough, that will not permit the temporality of _logoi_ to be occluded by the stable realm of appearance—“Denn nur die Gewißheit ist schrecklich!” Nietzsche the misologist loves words too much: he wants to keep them in their musical exuberance, exposed to the oblivion of the no longer and the incalculability of the not yet.

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Upon arriving in Basel to begin his professorship in classical philology, Nietzsche, laden with hundreds of pages of notes on theories of rhythm, _alogia_, and the Dionysian impulse, decided as the topic for his first Greek course a reading of Plato’s _Phaedo_. He writes to his former adviser and mentor, Friedrich Ritschl, that the lectures on Plato’s

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text have given him “occasion to infect my students with philosophy; by means of the unheard-of operation of improvisation I wake them up, quite rudely, from their grammatical slumber.” (10 May 1869). Although for future courses, Nietzsche will write out extensive notes for his lectures, he seems to insist on the extemporaneous nature of these sessions. There is but a single note among the pages of the Nachlaß: “Phaedo: Against philosophy.”

We can only speculate what the young, ambitious professor would have said concerning the memorable break in the Phaedo’s series of arguments, where Socrates offers a genealogy of the misologist:

Let us beware of becoming misologists, as others have become misanthropes. For … one cannot suffer a worse evil than to acquire a hatred for logoi. Misology and misanthropy arise in the same way. Misanthropy comes when a man without skill [ἄνευ τεχνῆς] has placed great trust in someone and believes him to be altogether truthful, sound and trustworthy; then, a short time afterwards he finds him to be wicked and unreliable, and then this happens in another case, when one has frequently had that experience, especially with those whom one believed to be one’s closest friends, then, in the end, after many such blows, one comes to hate all men and to believe that no one is sound in any way. (89d-e)

The misologist, therefore, seems to be an excessive philologist, the one who is perhaps too intimate with words, one who counts discourses as among his “closest friends.” According to Socrates’ illustration, the misologist is one who lacks the technē of logoi. Technē rests on epistemē—a knowledge that will ensure the unity and thereby the meaningfulness of the art, ordering all and creating human understanding. In the case of language, this skill consists in the ability to gather the components of a speech or logos in accordance to an ideal that would guide the linear discourse from the beginning to the end. But how precisely should we take Socrates’ warning against misology, against loving words too dearly?

36 “Gelegenheit meine Schüler mit Philosophie zu infizieren; durch die hier unerhörte Operation der Extemporalia wecke ich sie sehr unsanft aus ihrem grammatikalischen Schlummer” (KGB 2/1: 7).
What is perhaps most striking about Socrates’ description of the misologist is that it seems to concur with his own self-portrait as offered in the Apology, as a man whose walks through the agora are punctuated by great trust in another’s wisdom and invariable disappointment. For his self-defense, Socrates asserts that he distrusts beautiful speeches, like those of his accusers, insofar as they conceal a kind of identity beneath their outer form (Apology 17b–c). Socrates is concerned more with semiotics than semantics: not what is meant by words but rather how words construct meaning. This concern marks Socrates’ own misology—his distrust of the speeches he loves too dearly—a distrust that reveals how logoi are perversely capable of allowing the unwise to be perceived as wise, both to others and to themselves.

One could say that Socrates’ work is to unwork linguistic forms by way of a musical performance—or, to borrow from Nietzsche’s lexicon—by way of a musical interpretation: an interpretation that qualifies that which is composed. Returning to the Phaedo, we read Socrates’ stunning confession concerning a dream that has recurred throughout his life and that visited him on this very eve of his execution: “Socrates, make music and work at it” (60e). As he explains, he had always interpreted the Muses’ command as an encouragement to do what he always did, namely philosophize: “because philosophy was the greatest kind of music and I was practicing it” (61a). Now, at the end of his life, he realizes that perhaps he was not approaching music in the proper way. For Nietzsche, Socrates’ admission constitutes a crucial moment in the life of the philosopher:

The words spoken by the figure who appeared to Socrates in dream are the only hint of any scruples in him about the limits of logical nature; perhaps, he must have told himself, things which I do not understand are not automatically unreasonable. Perhaps there is a kingdom of wisdom from which the logician is banished? Perhaps art may even be a necessary correlative and supplement of science? (The Birth of Tragedy § 14)"
Nietzsche’s gloss suggests that on this day, the day of Socrates’ execution, the lover of knowledge turned his distrust (his latent misology?) back upon himself. The result was music, however ephemeral. Because of this wound, because of this exposure to the evil of misology, Socrates may well be the candidate, according to Nietzsche’s estimation, for a rebirth of music—not Socrates the theoretical man but rather Socrates the musician. Some fourteen years later, Nietzsche will come to realize that Socrates had always stood more for the solution than the problem: “O Socrates, Socrates, was that perhaps your secret? O, mysterious ironist, was this perhaps your—irony?” (Attempt at Self-Criticism § 1)38

For Nietzsche, music, philology, and misology are all of a piece. He believes he has the ears to hear what is no longer here; and can thereby employ this “unheard-of operation” to arouse those who have been lulled to sleep. Towards the end of his writing career, long after resigning his teaching post, he will continue to strive for the same effect. Here, for example, is a “Musician’s consolation speech” that he presents to his readers:

> Your life does not reach men’s ears; your life is silent for them, and all the subtleties of its melody, all tender resolutions about following or going ahead remain hidden from them. True, you do not approach on a broad highway with regimental music, but that does not give these good people any right to say that your way of life lacks music. Let those who have ears hear! (The Gay Science § 234)39

Thus speaks the thinker with the third ear; thus the philosopher summons the musician; thus the Antichrist alogically cites the Redeemer—qui habet aures audiendi audiat!

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*Extemporalia*  
**Music, Philology, and Nietzsche's Misology**  

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