

Nietzsche on Time and History

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# Nietzsche on Time and History

Edited by  
Manuel Dries

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If there is no goal in the whole of history of man's lot, then we must put one in: assuming, on the one hand, that we have need of a goal, and on the other that we've come to see through the illusion of an immanent goal and purpose. And the reason we have need of goals is that we have need of a will—which is the spine of us. 'Will' as the compensation of lost 'belief', i.e., for the idea that there is a divine will, one which has plans for us.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Nachlaß Summer 1886–Spring 1887, KSA 12, 6[9]

We are still growing continually, our sense of time and place, etc., is still developing.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Nachlaß April–June 1885, KSA 11, 34[124]  
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'Timeless' to be rejected. At a particular moment of a force, an absolute conditionality of the redistribution of all forces is given: it cannot stand still. 'Change' is part of the essence, and therefore so is temporality—which, however, just amounts to one more conceptual positing of the necessity of change.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Nachlaß May–July 1885, KSA 11, 35[55]

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The four excerpts of printed music of Wagner, Bizet, and Stravinsky in Jonathan R. Cohen's essay appear here with permission of Dover Publishing, Chester Music Limited (Music Sales) and Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG. Every effort has been made to trace and contact copyright holders. If there are any inadvertent omissions I apologize to those concerned and undertake to include suitable acknowledgements in future editions.

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## Abbreviations and Translations

Friedrich Nietzsche's published and unpublished writings (Nachlaß) are quoted according to the following abbreviations:

- A *The Anti-Christ*, cited by section number.
- AOM 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' (vol. 2, pt 1, of *Human, All Too Human*), cited by section number.
- BAW *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe. Werke*, ed. Hans Joachim Mette, 5 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1933–1940), cited by volume and page number.
- BAB *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefe*, ed. Hans Joachim Mette, 4 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1933–1940), cited by volume and page number.
- BGE *Beyond Good and Evil*, cited by section number.
- BT *The Birth of Tragedy*, cited by section number and KSA page number.
- CV 'Five Prologues to Five Unwritten Books', cited by number and KSA page number.
- CW *The Case of Wagner*, cited by section number.
- D *Daybreak*, cited by section number.
- EH *Ecce Homo*, cited by section heading and (when applicable) number.
- EI 'On the Future of Our Educational Institutions', cited by section number.
- GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*, cited by essay and section number.
- GS *The Gay Science*, cited by section number.
- HA *Human, All Too Human*, cited by volume and section number.
- CV 'Five Prefaces to Five Unwritten Books', cited by preface number and KSA page number.
- KGB *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975–), cited by volume and page number.
- KGW *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, established by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, ed. Wolfgang Müller-Lauter and Karl Pestalozzi (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–), cited by volume, part, and page number.

## XIV

- KSA *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967–), cited by volume and page number. The Nachlaß is cited by date, KSA volume, notebook section, and fragment number.
- KSB *Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe Briefe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986–), cited by volume and page number.
- NCW *Nietzsche contra Wagner*, cited by section heading.
- OTL ‘On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense’, cited by KSA page number.
- PTAG ‘Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks’, cited by section number.
- TI *Twilight of the Idols*, cited by section heading and number.
- UM *Untimely Meditations*, cited by part and section number, and (when applicable) KSA page number.
- Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, cited by part, section heading, and (when applicable) number.

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Note on Translations of Nietzsche’s Works

The contributors to this volume have used different translations of Nietzsche’s texts, often modified by the individual contributor. At the end of each essay the reader will find a list of the translations used. Where no such list has been provided the contributor has relied exclusively on his or her own translations. All translations from Nietzsche’s Nachlaß are usually by the individual contributors, although other translations have been consulted whenever possible, notably *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), and *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

# Nietzsche's Musical Conception of Time

*Jonathan R. Cohen*

## 1. Time in Music

My title is 'Nietzsche's Musical Conception of Time,' but in order to say something about that, I must first discuss Nietzsche's conception of musical time.

I will approach this topic by way of a passage in which Nietzsche criticizes Wagner. Nietzsche's psychological, political, and cultural criticisms of Wagner are fairly well-known, but his musicological criticisms are not. What I will do is examine closely one passage in which Nietzsche criticizes Wagner for musical reasons, and use that passage (and in particular one sentence in it) as a point of entry for Nietzsche's view of musical time.<sup>1</sup>

The passage appeared originally in 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' (1879) as section 134. It is reprinted in the anthology *Nietzsche contra Wagner* (1895) as part 1 of the section entitled 'Wagner as a Danger'; however, the later version is slightly shortened, in what I shall argue is a revealing way. Here is the original version, entire, in the Hollingdale translation:

How modern music is supposed to make the soul move.—The artistic objective pursued by modern music in what is now, in a strong but nonetheless obscure phrase, designated 'endless melody' can be made clear by imagining one is going into the sea, gradually relinquishing a firm tread on the bottom and finally surrendering unconditionally to the watery element: one is supposed to swim. Earlier music constrained one—with a delicate or solemn or fiery movement back and forth, faster and slower—to dance: in pursuit of

---

1 The musicological discussion in this essay is heavily indebted to Dr Steven Pane, a musicologist at my university with whom I've been studying nineteenth-century music the past few years in order to better understand Nietzsche's comments about music. I have repeatedly offered Dr Pane co-authorship of the articles which have resulted but he has so far always refused, saying that the only keyboard he wants anything to do with is the one with 88 keys.

which the needful preservation of orderly measure compelled the soul of the listener to a continual self-possession: it was upon the reflection of the cooler air produced by this self-possession and the warm breath of musical enthusiasm that the charm of this music rested. —Richard Wagner desired a different kind of movement of the soul: one related, as aforesaid, to swimming and floating. Perhaps this is the most essential of his innovations. The celebrated means he employs, appropriate to this desire and sprung from it—‘endless melody’—endeavours to break up all mathematical symmetry of tempo and force and sometimes even to mock it; and he is abundantly inventive in the production of effects which to the ear of earlier times sound like rhythmic paradoxes and blasphemies. What he fears is petrification, crystallization, the transition of music into the architectonic—and thus with a two-four rhythm he will juxtapose a three-four rhythm, often introduce bars in five-four and seven-four rhythm, immediately repeat a phrase but expanded to two or three times its original length. A complacent imitation of such an art as this can be a great danger to music: close beside such an over-ripeness of the feeling for rhythm there has always lain in wait the brutalization and decay of rhythm itself. This danger is especially great when such music leans more and more on a wholly naturalistic art of acting and language of gesture uninfluenced and uncontrolled by any higher plastic art: for such an art and language possesses in itself no limit or proportion, and is thus unable to communicate limit and proportion to that element that adheres to it, the all too feminine nature of music. (AOM 134)

‘Endless melody’ (sometimes ‘infinite melody’; the German is *unendliche Melodie*) is defined by contemporary musicologists as melody which ‘avoids, or bridges, caesuras and cadences’ (Sadie 1980, p.121). Caesuras are the rests that come at the end of completed musical phrases, and cadences are the harmonic resolutions at the ends of phrases by which the music returns to the tonic, or home key. Endless melody, then, is music which just keeps going, without resolving in the way in which we are accustomed. The result is (i) harmonically, a loss of a sense of home key and harmonic resolution to it, (ii) rhythmically, a loss of a sense of regular rhythm and the sense of resolution created when a phrase fills out its allotted measures, and (iii) structurally, a loss of distinction between aria and recitative: unlike traditional ‘number’ opera, in which choral parts, solos, and narrative sections are distinct, the music in classical Wagnerian operas flows along endlessly.

Thus, for example, *Tristan und Isolde*—considered the *locus classicus* for endless melody—has rests, but not caesuras; that is, the rests don’t represent resolutions (see, e.g., the Prelude, Fig. 1). For comparison, Bizet’s *Carmen*—an appropriate foil given Nietzsche’s deployment of it against Wagnerian opera in *The Case of Wagner* (1888)—features classic cadences, making it always easy to tell when the phrase is done (see, e.g., the Overture, Fig. 2).



The image shows two pages of a musical score for Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude, measures 1-19. The top page (numbered 7) is titled "Erster Aufzug." and "Richard Wagner." It contains the score for measures 1 through 19. The bottom page (numbered 8) continues the score from measure 19 through measure 38. The score includes parts for various instruments: 3 Flutes (in C), 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets (in A), English Horn (in F), 4 Horns (in B), 3 Bassoons, 3 Trombones (in A), 3 Trumpets (in F), 3 Horns, Percussion (Snare Drum, Bass Drum, Cymbals, Triangle, and Becken), Harp, Violin I and II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score features complex melodic lines with many ties and slurs. Dynamic markings include *Langsam und schwachend* and *Z. Nicht schloppend*. There are also performance instructions such as "R. Zögerlich sehr ruhig vorwärts" and "R. Zögerlich sehr ruhig vorwärts".

Figure 1. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude, measures 1–19 (New York: Dover Publications, 1973)

**Carmen.**  
N<sup>o</sup> 1. Einleitung

Allegro giocoso. *J*<sup>18</sup>  
G. Bizet.

Grande Flöte.  
Piccolo-Flöte.  
Hörnern.  
Klarinetten in A.  
Fagotte.  
in A.  
Hörner  
in E.  
Trompeten in A.  
Hörnern  
Fornamen.  
Pauken.  
Triangel.  
Grosse Tromme  
und Becken.  
Harfen.  
Allegro giocoso.  
Erste Violinen.  
Zweite Violinen.  
Violen.  
Violoncelli.  
Bässe.

4

Figure 2. Georges, Bizet, *Carmen*, Prelude, measures 1–16  
(New York: Dover Publications, 1989)

The contrast is clear: whereas traditional music features a finite rhythmic structure which repeats, a strong sense of home key, unmistakable cadence, etc., endless melody has none of these.<sup>2</sup> Clear too, I think, is Nietzsche's point that endless melody invokes in us the sensation of floating, while more traditional cadences are appropriate for dancing, even if they don't always make us want to get up and dance right then and there. Nietzsche's criticism of Wagner on this head is that Wagner's music leads us to an abandonment of ourselves. We give ourselves over to pure feeling, losing our sense of structure. While Nietzsche seems often to be promoting such a loss—'I am no man; I am dynamite' (EH 'Why I Am a Destiny' 1)—at least as often he in fact praises structure, and even argues that structure is necessary for a flourishing and creative life:

Every morality is, as opposed to *laissez aller*, a bit of tyranny against 'nature'; also against 'reason'; but this in itself is no objection, as long as we do not have some other morality which permits us to decree that every kind of tyranny and unreason is impermissible. What is essential and inestimable in every morality is that it constitutes a long compulsion ... one should recall the compulsion under which every language so far has achieved strength and freedom—the metrical compulsion of rhyme and rhythm ... What is essential 'in heaven and on earth' seems to be, to say it once more, that there should be obedience over a long period of time and in a single direction: given that, something always develops, and has developed, for whose sake it is worth while to live on earth; for example, virtue, art, music, dance, reason, spirituality—something transfiguring, subtle, mad, and divine. (BGE 188, trans. Kaufmann)

Nietzsche's praise of structure takes different forms at different times in his career; while this passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* (1885) evinces a certain monomania, *The Gay Science* (1882) displays an appreciation of multifarious structures. There Nietzsche praises what he calls 'brief habits', a habit that 'nourishes' one for a time but then is discarded and replaced with the next one. 'Enduring habits I hate,' he says, but 'Most intolerable, to be sure, and the terrible *par excellence* would be for me a life entirely devoid of habits, a life that would demand perpetual improvisation' (GS 295). This last phrase describes endless melody almost exactly.

---

2 The reader may want to pause at this point long enough to listen to recordings of the relevant pieces, in order to have the music in his/her ears. It only takes a minute for the point to become obvious. I have chosen to focus on the orchestral beginnings of both operas, since in both cases the beginning sets the tone for the rest. Since opera is ultimately vocal music, however, the reader may want to hear the contrast also in vocal passages from the two works; if so, I recommend the Transfiguration from *Tristan* (and see Fig. 3) and the act II 'Chanson' from *Carmen*.

At any rate, our issue here is not whether Nietzsche is right about the necessity of structure for life to flourish, nor about the justice of his criticism of Wagner. (For example, we might defend Wagner, at least within the context of *Tristan*, by pointing out that music which never resolves is perfectly appropriate for a story about unfulfilled love.) Rather, we will return to the issue of Nietzsche's conception of musical time by analysing the aspect of endless melody which Nietzsche criticizes in 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' 134, namely, rhythm.

This is already an idiosyncratic way for Nietzsche to approach the question, for it is not at all obvious that rhythm *is* the defining characteristic of endless melody. As just noted, current musicology defines endless melody in terms of lack of caesura and cadence, and consequently lack of resolution. However, the musicological analysis is ambivalent, since resolution has both a harmonic and a rhythmic component. And thus Bryan Magee, for example, can ignore rhythm entirely and account for the effect of *Tristan* on the listener solely in terms of harmonics:

The first chord of *Tristan* ... contains within itself not one but two dissonances, thus creating within the listener a double desire, agonizing in its intensity, for resolution. The chord to which it then moves resolves one of these dissonances but not the other, thus providing resolution-yet-not-resolution ... And this carries on throughout a whole evening. (Magee 2001, pp. 208–209)

For that matter, Wagner himself introduced the term 'endless melody' (in his essay 'Zukunftsmusik', written in 1860, at about the same time he was composing *Tristan*) in neither rhythmic nor harmonic terms. For him, the term 'melody' connotes music which is expressive and significant; the rest of what is included in a piece of music—harmonies, connecting passages, etc.—is formulaic and says nothing. So for Wagner, the point about endless melody is that it describes music which is always saying something and has no gratuitous padding. Thus he avoids cadences primarily because they are formulaic (Sadie 1980, p. 121).

For Nietzsche, however, musical formulae, if successful, are to be cherished, representing as they do the fruit of many years of work by many hands on problems of musical composition. As noted above, Nietzsche finds traditions acceptable if they allow one to flourish, and some sort of structure is necessary if one is to flourish. So Nietzsche looks at the music itself and asks about its *effect*—does it allow one to flourish? In the case of endless melody, Nietzsche does not explore it harmonically, as critics such as Magee do, but rather turns the conversation to rhythm. In other words, even if the musicologists and Wagner himself disagree, Nietzsche *makes* endless melody be about rhythm, and thus by the same token about *time*.

The crux, then, of the criticism of endless melody in 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' 134 is this sentence in the middle of the passage:

What [Wagner] fears is petrification, crystallization, the transition of music into the architectonic—and thus with a two-four rhythm he will juxtapose a three-four rhythm, often introduce bars in five-four and seven-four rhythm, immediately repeat a phrase but expanded to two or three times its original length.

Rhythms are described here in terms of time signatures. A time signature consists of two numbers, the top one indicating the number of beats per measure, and the bottom one indicating the denominator of the fraction defining the musical note which counts as a single beat. Thus 2/4 time means two beats per measure, with a quarter note counting for a single beat; 6/8 mean six beats per measure, with an eighth note counting for a single beat; and so on. The image one gets from the sentence just quoted, then, is that endless melody consists of a jumble of incongruent time signatures which produces rhythmic chaos.

However, when we actually look at Wagner's scores we find nothing of the kind. The *Tristan* Prelude, for example, is in 6/8, while the Transfiguration is in 4/4—both perfectly traditional time signatures which hold sway in the score for a perfectly traditional length of time (Figs. 1 and 3). The image of a jumble of time signatures in fact describes some later composers such as Stravinsky. In *Les Noces*, an irregular jumble of 3/8 and 2/8 time signatures does indeed produce a sense of floating, which surely could not be danced to (see Fig. 4).<sup>3</sup> However, Wagner does *not* use a jumble of time signatures. And Nietzsche must have known this, since he was familiar with (at least) the piano score of *Tristan*.<sup>4</sup> So what is Nietzsche talking about in this sentence?

3 Again, the reader is encouraged to find and listen to the first minute of *Les Noces* (and again, that's all it will take to understand the point) before reading on. It should be noted that Stravinsky does sometimes write pieces featuring a jumble of time signatures which are nonetheless (at least titled as) dances, such as the 'Russian Dance' from *Petruschka*. As I will argue below, Nietzsche's point is not really about time signatures but rather about the rhythm of the piece as the listener experiences it, and the 'Russian Dance', which I think is indeed danceable in a way, proves his point quite nicely.

4 See EH 'Why I Am so Clever' 6, and Storr 1994, p. 215.

634  
Sopr., Alt., Tenor, Bass, Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon, Trumpet, Trombone, Violin, Viola, Cello, Double Bass

635  
Klar., Fl., Basskl., Horn, Fag., Viol., Vi., Cello, K.B.

Alimählich zurückhaltend.  
Alimählich zurückhaltend.  
Alimählich zurückhaltend.  
Sehr mäßig beginnend.  
Sehr mäßig beginnend.

Das Knecht, der dich in die Hand drückt, ist der Herr.  
Ich bin so müde, wie ein Schaf, das von der Hand des Hirten weicht.  
Ich bin so müde, wie ein Schaf, das von der Hand des Hirten weicht.  
Ich bin so müde, wie ein Schaf, das von der Hand des Hirten weicht.

Figure 3. Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Transfiguration, measures 1–8  
(New York: Dover Publications, 1973)

*A Serge de Diaghilew*

**СВАДЕБКА**  
ЧАСТЬ ПЕРВАЯ  
КАРТИНА ПЕРВАЯ  
„КОСА“

**LES NOCES**  
PREMIÈRE PARTIE  
PREMIER TABLEAU  
„LA TRESSE“

Igor Stravinsky  
1917

M. M. ♩ = 80

**Soprano Solo**

ff  
Ко - са - ль мо - я ко... Ко - са мо - я ко - сь - на ру - са - ал  
Tres - se, tres se, ma ma ma tresse à moi, tresse à moi

**I Piano**

*sempre ff*

**III Piano**

*sempre ff*

**II Piano**

*sempre ff*

**IV Piano**

*sempre ff*

**Пиатти**

baguette en bois  
*f*

**Хылофоне**

*f*

1 Завантсь - Rideau

♩ = 160

**st**

1) Ве - чорь те бя ко - сь - на ма - - - - - ты - шна  
2) Ma mère fa - vai le soir tres se soi - gneu  
3) Co - re брн - нымь ко - лот - ромь ма - - - - - ты - шна  
4) Tresse, elle fa - vai pei - gneu a vec un pei - gneu

**I. III**

**II. IV**

*mf sub.*  
*sf*  
*secco*

**Пиатти**

*2<sup>da</sup> Volta*  
Tacet

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J. W. C. 48

Figure 4. Igor Stravinsky, *Les Noces*, Part I, scene I, measures 1–18  
(London: J. & W. Chester Music Ltd., 1922)

Part of the difficulty is that Hollingdale's translation is wrong.<sup>5</sup> The original German for the sentence under examination is as follows:

[Wagner] fürchtet die Versteinering, die Krystallisation, den Übergang der Musik in das Architektonische,—und so stellt er dem zweictactigen Rhythmus einen dreictactigen entgegen, führt nicht selten den Fünf- und Siebentact ein, wiederholt die selbe Phrase sofort, aber mit einer Dehnung, dass sie doppelte und dreifache Zeitdauer bekommt.

The words *zweictactigen*, *dreictactigen*, *Fünf- und Siebentact* mean literally just 'two-beating, three-beating, five- and seven-beat'. So in fact all Nietzsche is doing is simply giving the numbers of beats in a measure. If these were the top numbers of time signatures, bottom numbers (indicating the length of note taking one beat) would be necessary, and since the most common bottom number is four, Hollingdale supplies 'four' each time. But Hollingdale has assumed Nietzsche means the two, three, five, and seven to indicate time signatures, whereas this is not necessarily so. In Hollingdale's version of the passage, the criticism of endless melody is that it consists of a jumble of time signatures, and, in the case of 5/4 and 7/4, unusual ones at that. But in fact Nietzsche is complaining about a jumble of clusters of beats: now two, now three, now five, now seven.

So the anachronistic confusion of Wagner with the later Stravinsky turns out to be a translator's error. However, correcting the error does not make the passage all that much clearer. Even retranslated, the problematic sentence still cries out for explication: where and how *does* Wagner combine two beats with three, and five with seven, in a piece in which the time signature remains constant?

At one time I had hoped to find a particular passage in *Tristan* which would manifest some explicit combination of two, three, five, and/or seven beats, but so far I have not been able to find one that does. Apparently, then, the reason Nietzsche lists two, three, five, and seven as the number of beats in Wagnerian endless melody is to expressly leave out four, six, and eight, the most common numbers used in time signatures, and the actual numbers in the time signatures for the Prelude and Transfiguration in *Tristan* (Figs. 1 and 3). But what is Nietzsche getting at?

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5 Criticizing the Hollingdale translation, as I am about to do, seems impertinent, if not sacrilegious, in the context of this conference of which Reg Hollingdale was a founder and guiding light. The last time I saw him was the last time this conference was held in Cambridge, four years ago, and he died less than a month afterwards. So I feel bound to express here my respect for his work—I *lived with* his translation of *Human, All Too Human* while writing my dissertation—and to temper my criticism with gratitude.



What he seems to be pointing to is the way Wagner's melodies don't reside comfortably within their measures—they 'overflow' their measures, as it were. Traditional composers situate their melodies nicely within musical measures, acknowledging the downbeat and accepting the natural caesura at the end of a phrase. Thus the Overture to *Carmen* features classic 'four-by-four' structure consisting of four measures of four beats each, and because the musical phrases sit comfortably within their measures, they also *sound like* four measures of four beats each (Fig. 2). Wagner, on the other hand, denies the listener the satisfaction given by the traditional structure. The opening phrase of the *Tristan* Prelude, though set in 6/8 time, in fact starts with five beats of rest leading up to one beat of music at the end of the first measure, then two full measures of six beats each, then four beats of music in a fourth measure before two beats of rest (see Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> This is what Nietzsche seems to be referring to when he says that Wagner puts two beats in a space where the measure makes one expect three or vice versa, or introduces a phrase of five or seven beats even though measures never (ordinarily) accommodate those numbers of beats. His point is that there is no match between the number of beats in the musical phrase and the number of beats in the underlying measures.

In addition (so the rest of the crucial sentence quoted above continues), when a phrase seems to repeat, Wagner deliberately extends it so that the second hearing's length does not match the first. Thus while the part played by the woodwinds in the Prelude's opening theme maintains its length (in measures 3–4, 7–8, and 11–12), the cello's part does not (compare measures 1–3 and 5–7 with 9–11—the theme starts earlier in measure 9 than it does in measures 1 and 5). In other words, despite the putative regularity of the 6/8 time signature *in the score*, in fact 'endless melody' *as played and heard* is entirely irregular. The internal rhythm of endless melody does not match the structure set up by the musical measures and thus overrides the listener's own internal sense of structure.

Thus when Nietzsche says Wagner combines differing numbers of beats and repeats the same phrase at different lengths, he is referring not to the time signature (which remains constant) but to the successive length of musical phrases which one would expect to be matched both to each other and to the downbeat. Wagner, Nietzsche asserts, deliberately mismatches

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6 It's true that this musical phrase totals seventeen beats (1 + 6 + 6 + 4), and that seventeen equals two plus three plus five plus seven, but I think that's only coincidence: (1) The seventeen aren't broken up into sets of two, three, five, and seven beats, (2) later phrases in *Tristan* contain more than seventeen beats (or fewer), and (3) Nietzsche does not list the four numbers together as a sum but rather in two pairs.

so as to detach the listeners from their secure anchors and set them adrift on a sea of endless melody. This Nietzsche objects to as making impossible the sort of keeping-one's-feet-on-the-ground which he regards as necessary for the dance of life.<sup>7</sup>

What does all this tell us about Nietzsche's view of musical time? One ordinarily thinks of musical time in terms of the time signature or of the tempo meted out by the conductor or the metronome. But this is to take the view of the musicians, whereas Nietzsche in this passage takes the perspective of *the listener*. In this way, Hollingdale's mistranslation is actually instructive. It is indeed natural to assume that when Nietzsche begins throwing around numbers, he must be talking about time signatures—those are the numbers of which music seems to be made. As we have just seen, however, the only way to make sense of 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' 134 is to understand it in terms of the music's effect on the listener. Whatever it looks like in the score, endless melody is played and heard in such a way as to provoke chaos in the listener.<sup>8</sup>

The only feature of musical time which matters, then, in Nietzsche's view, is the *perceived* rhythm of the musical phrases. The score and its time signature represent time 'in itself', as it were; to the listener, however, there is only time *as perceived*—i.e., the number and frequency of beats in the musical phrase itself as played and heard. In Wagner's music, not only are there irregular beats, by this standard—the two, three, five, and seven Nietzsche lists—but even then, these combinations recur in Wagner's music irregularly, so that the listener has no purchase, no structure. The melodic rhythm differs from the harmonic rhythm, and both differ from the underlying rhythm the musicians are counting out. The musicians are (presumably) counting out a stable six beats per measure, but to Nietzsche the beats heard by the listener are the only things that matter. They have an effect on the listener, not only during the time the music is actually being played but, Nietzsche clearly worries, afterwards as well. The jumble of rhythms cultivate a jumble in the soul. Thus musical time is a matter of the perception of, and the effect on, the listener. Its own intrinsic features—what's written in the score and what's counting in the musicians' heads—might as well not exist.

7 The metaphor of dance as being necessary for life can be found in the first volume of HA as section 278. And criticism of endless melody as incompatible with dance can be seen again—without the musicological details—in book II of GS (see especially sections 80, 84, and 86).

8 This marks Nietzsche's break from Wagner in yet another way—in his early period, as Wagner's ally, he took the point of view of the composer; now, as Wagner's enemy, he speaks solely as a listener.

## 2. Time as Music

When we turn to Nietzsche's view of time itself, it seems to me we can do no better than extrapolate from his view of musical time.

In the first volume of *Human, All Too Human* (1878), Nietzsche admits that there could be things-in-themselves, but denies that they could matter to us (HA I 9). And once one has shown that they do not matter to us, one has in effect 'refuted' them (HA I 21). This should apply, then, to time: the possible existence of time-in-itself, though undeniable, is irrelevant to us. But this is as much as to say that there *is* no time-in-itself for us—the only time that matters is time as we experience it. What this means is captured nicely by the musical criticism of endless melody in 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' 134: the time signature in the score ('time-in-itself') is irrelevant to us; all that matters is the music's rhythm as we experience it ('time for us'). The musical analysis of time serves both to concretize the abstract metaphysics and to provide one of its most telling illustrations.

Music continues to be a useful avenue for discussing time, both as metaphor and as foremost example, in the later works. In his later period, Nietzsche denies categorically the existence of things-in-themselves, and so time-in-itself is no longer acceptable even as a mere supposition.<sup>9</sup> Musically, the result is an entirely intuitive analysis of music's effect. *The Case of Wagner* (1888) is the newly written late text employing this method, but Nietzsche also repackaged several earlier passages about Wagner in *Nietzsche contra Wagner*. And when it came time to revise 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' 134 for this purpose, the sentence we have focused on in this essay was excised. The reason, I suggest, is that by then Nietzsche has moved beyond the half-hearted positivism of his middle period in which 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims' is situated to a full rejection of the thing-in-itself. The crucial sentence, however, envisages a contrast between an underlying 'real' musical time—the time recorded in the musical score—and musical time as perceived by the listener. The later Nietzsche rejects this distinction outright, and thus when 'Assorted Opinions and Maxims'

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9 Although most of the passages in which Nietzsche explicitly denies the existence of things-in-themselves are in the notebooks (many of them included by Nietzsche's sister in *The Will to Power*), the view can be seen clearly at such published loci as GM I 13, TI 'How the "Real World" Finally Became a Fable', and TI 'The Four Great Errors' 3.

134 is re-used in *Nietzsche contra Wagner* he wants to draw no attention to the existence of the musical score and so leaves out this sentence.<sup>10</sup>

In both versions, Nietzsche's criticism of endless melody employs a view of musical time which provides insight as to the nature of our experience of time as a whole. Time, that is, is far more important than just another instance of a supposed thing-in-itself. The implication of this passage, that certain experiences of time are deleterious, suggests that, for Nietzsche, we each have our own internal rate of living, our own tempo, derived, presumably, from our internal physiological rhythms—breathing rate, heart rate, metabolism, etc.<sup>11</sup> A structured tempo connotes a body functioning well; presumably this is the condition we must be in in order to flourish creatively. Our internal tempo can change, as the tempo of a piece of music changes from section to section, and then time itself is indeed different for us than it was. However, internal chaos, lack of consistent tempo, means nothing gets done.

Our experience of music, then, can help or harm us. It can help structure our internal rate of time—either directly or by providing a contrasting rhythm to serve as a beneficial tonic—or it can harm it. Nietzsche himself finds Wagner always harmful:

My objections to the music of Wagner are physiological objections ... My 'fact' is that I no longer breathe easily once this music begins to affect me; that my foot soon resents it and rebels; my foot feels the need for rhythm, dance, march; it demands of music first of all those delights which are found in good walking, striding, leaping, and dancing. But does not my stomach protest, too? my heart? my circulation? my intestines? Do I not become hoarse as I listen? (GS 368 = NCW 'Where I Offer Objections')

Nietzsche believes this music to be harmful because there is in it a deliberate undermining of temporal structure. And with no time-in-itself to fall back on, such undermining can be utterly destructive. It requires great strength to resist it and maintain one's own tempo. And thus *The Gay Science* 368 concludes with a Wagnerian responding to Nietzsche's criticism, 'Then you really are merely not healthy enough for our music?' In Nietzsche's shocked silence we hear the unspoken retort that it is the Wagnerian

10 It is also possible, of course, that he simply wanted to avoid requiring the reader of NCW to engage in the sort of involved interpretation to which that sentence has driven us in this essay. (Interestingly, the canard about the 'all too feminine' in music which closes the AOM version is left behind as well in NCW—one can only speculate why.)

11 For a similar view of the relation between musical and physiological rhythms, see Langer 1953, pp. 126–129, 328–330.

ans who are unhealthy, and that resisting this music is precisely a proof of health in Nietzsche's view.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Time as the Music of our Lives

Nietzsche is often categorized as an existentialist, or a proto-post-modernist, or something of the sort. But he seems to me best categorized (if categorization be necessary) as a post-Kantian. Most of his views can be explained as 'like Kant—but with a twist'. So it is, in my view, with time. I will close by briefly characterizing Kant's understanding of time and the twist Nietzsche applies to Kant's conception.

For Kant, time is a form of sensibility. That is, rather than being a feature of the external world, time is a feature of our minds. Our minds are constructed—the contemporary metaphor of hardwiring is convenient—so as to arrange sense experience in a sequential order. We experience events in the world as happening before, simultaneously, or after each other. We cannot say how they 'really' happen, since what they are in themselves is not accessible to us. All we can say is that we experience them as happening in a regular, sequential order, and that is reality for us.

Though this seems to be a radically subjectivist position, Kant insists that it does not deny the objectivity of time. Since the hardwiring of our minds is not subject to our wills, time is still out of our control, and thus confronts us as a brute fact. To be sure, since Kant says time is a feature of *our* minds, which might well be different from those of other rational creatures, he should probably have described time as intersubjective rather than objective. Still, time is the same for all of us, and functions equally for all of us as a brute fact we must adapt ourselves to, *just as if* it were a feature of the external world.

Kant's conception of time is parallel to his conception of space—space is a form of sensibility by which our minds organize sense experience into a three-dimensional world. In the case of space, it is somewhat easier to imagine how other beings might perceive the world differently. For example, if one covers an eye one loses the parallax effect of having two eyes, and one now sees the world two-dimensionally. One can thus get a sense of what the world might seem like to a creature that has no visual parallax

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12 This line too is missing from the NCW version—why? I suspect that by then Nietzsche had become nervous about another way to interpret his silence and lack of retort—perhaps his recurrent, debilitating illnesses actually gave the Wagnerian's gibe at him some credence.

(frogs, say), and also get some very vague sense of how there could come to be creatures that perceived in four dimensions. However, there is no similar way to conceive of how time might appear to creatures whose brains were hardwired differently from ours. In a way, this only proves Kant's point that for us the world simply *is* this way, i.e., that three-dimensional space and uni-directional time are indeed features of reality *for us*. But it does make it hard to understand the other side of Kant's position, that time is ideal.

Nietzsche, I think, can help here. On the one hand, by denying the existence of things-in-themselves, Nietzsche blocks the contrast between how time might be in itself and how we perceive time. That is, Kant must maintain that time is a hard and fast feature of reality, yet also say that there might well be other ways to perceive it. But what is the 'it' that other creatures are perceiving differently? While we might have an inkling of what that might mean in the case of space, in the case of time it's quite mysterious. For Nietzsche, however, time *is* our perception, and there's no time-in-itself that other creatures might have a different perception of, so the difficulty disappears.

But there is more: while Nietzsche follows Kant in asserting that it is our minds that structure reality, rather than reality impressing itself directly on our blank mental wax tablets, he makes one crucial adjustment. Kant assumes that our minds all function the same way, that we are hardwired in the way he describes. Nietzsche, however, asserts that our minds are all different. For Nietzsche, it is the individuality of perception that is crucial, not its intersubjectivity. While he does not deny that our perceptions can and do overlap—allowing us to live in some sort of concert with each other—he emphasizes our perspectival differences. He agrees that it is our minds which structure our reality, but sees the differences between our minds as sufficient to make our realities perspectival rather than intersubjective (and thus make it necessary to use 'realities' in the plural).

The result of Nietzsche's line of thought is that the best way to describe our perceptions of time is to resort to the realm and language of music.<sup>13</sup> Each musical piece sets its own tempo—that is, *it determines its own temporal reality*. There is no time-in-itself against which to compare these various tempos—they *establish* temporal reality for the world of that piece of music. We too live, think, and function at our own tempo—we

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13 It is surely instructive that, whereas Nietzsche was obsessed with music and wrote about it extensively throughout his career, Kant did not appreciate music very much, and his otherwise magisterial aesthetic theory does not work very well in the case of music (see Higgins 1991, pp. 55–67).

establish the reality of time *for us*. There is no absolute time to measure ourselves against, or by which to criticize our individuality. At the same time, we can compare our own inner tempo, and challenge it, with that of others. Thus the experience of music can be a tonic for us, giving our souls rest, or perhaps a new rhythm to live by. It is either beneficial or harmful depending on its complementarity or conflict with the music of our lives. Wagner's use of endless melody to destroy the listener's sense of time, then, constitutes the most pernicious form of his nihilism.<sup>14</sup>

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14 In this context, an old joke passed on to me by Dr Pane—'A Wagnerian opera starts at 8:00, three hours pass, you look at your watch, and it's 8:15'—takes on an uncanny double meaning.

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